



**Opening Statement of Rep. Burgess Owens (R-UT), Chairman
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
Hearing: “FAFSA Fail: Examining the Impacts on Students, Families, and Schools”
April 10, 2024**

(As prepared for delivery)

Welcome to today’s hearing titled “FAFSA Fail: Examining the Impacts on Students, Families, and Schools.”

When it comes time for students across America to apply for college, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a critical tool. For many, FAFSA is their only access to postsecondary education. It opens doors and provides financial assistance to individuals seeking to pursue their academic ambitions, regardless of their background.

In 2020, legislators and policymakers sought to make the process even more accessible by passing the *FAFSA Simplification Act*. With the financial burden of college growing each year, it was incredibly important that reform eased the FAFSA process on families.

The new law streamlined the long, complex application process. In some cases, students could see the number of questions on the form shrink to 18 out of a possible 103 on the previous FAFSA.

However, as we’ve learned over the past three years, the Biden administration’s greatest success is its failure at everything it attempts to do. Today, the Committee is posed with a familiar challenge: oversight.

Despite our efforts, the Department of Education’s (ED) FAFSA rollout was mired in delays and dysfunction. Without accountability, Department of Education’s botched implementation threatens to damage students, families, and institutions.

First off, the *FAFSA Simplification Act* has been federal law since day one of the Biden administration. Yet that didn't stop his Department of Education from punting five months from an official launch date of July 2023 to a "soft launch" in December 2023. Five months!

When the Department of Education did roll out the new FAFSA, students were met with sporadic glitches, never-ending queues, and a myriad of technical issues. Some students could not complete the form at all.

For those who managed to complete the form, the transmission of key numbers to schools was slow. Without timely data, schools cannot forecast budgets or prepare financial aid packages. Compounding the issue, the Department of Education has made multiple data errors, rendering hundreds of thousands of records inaccurate and unusable for schools. Unfortunately, this may only be the tip of the iceberg; new errors are seemingly revealed every week, and there may even be a new one by the time this hearing is over.

These failures will not just impact taxpayers, who always pay the cost for bureaucratic dysfunction. Institutions could see an estimated 20 percent drop in enrollment this fall. Low-income students who require access to aid are going to be the hardest hit. And these delays don't even account for next year's FAFSA, which almost certainly will not be ready by this October.

It is unfathomable to me that the Office of Federal Student Aid received over two billion dollars last year. So, in essence the American taxpayer has paid two billion to give their children a year or more of chaos and anxiety. FAFSA was created in 1992 with the HEA Reauthorization Act. We've had 32 years of a functioning system that served hundreds of millions of students and thousands of institutions. Within three years, Biden's Department of Education has managed to bring the Education industry a possible game-changing crisis.

So, what is Biden's answer to this debacle? He's asking that an additional \$625 million be added to the Office of Federal Student Aid's budget. We're left to conclude that instead of doing the job it is tasked to do, which was helping over 18 million students or potential students apply for FAFSA, this administration opted to

waste months of time and energy on its reelection strategy - an unconstitutional student loan forgiveness scheme.

Our Conference's answer to this? Not a dollar more until we figure this out.

Students, schools, and institutions deserve answers, and it is our responsibility as Congress to hold the executive branch accountable. I look forward to working together with members on the Committee to learn from this botched rollout and to ensure a smooth, clear, and honest FAFSA process moving forward.