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**Opening Statement of Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Chairwoman  
Committee on Education and the Workforce Hearing:  
“Examining the Policies and Priorities of the Department of Education”  
May 16, 2023**

(As prepared for delivery)

On my first day as Chairwoman of the Committee on Education and the Workforce this Congress, I made a promise to officials in the Biden administration: think about investing in a parking space on Capitol Hill—you will be here often.

That’s because I see congressional oversight as a primary duty of the Committee. Secretary Cardona, I am pleased you are the first administration official to make your statutorily mandated, half mile pilgrimage to the Committee this Congress. Candidly, Mr. Secretary, I wish we could have you appear before us more often.

In lieu of your presence, I have directed no less than 11 oversight letters to the Department of Education since the 118th Congress began.

My first letter notified you of the Department’s obligation to provide timely and complete responses to Committee oversight requests. Mr. Secretary, I wish this hearing was an endorsement of your Department’s cooperation with our requests, so we could then proceed in good faith to the FY 2024 budget request. Instead, your Department has engaged in disingenuous and misleading actions while being minimally responsive to congressional oversight.

Article 1 vests the power of the purse in the Congress. James Madison wrote in Federalist 58 that, “This power over the purse may, in fact, be regarded as the most complete and effectual weapon with which any constitution can arm the immediate representatives of the people, for obtaining a redress of every grievance, and for carrying into effect every just and salutary measure.”

Therefore, before turning to the budget proposal for which you are here to advocate, I’d like to lay out the concerns from this Committee – of the people’s elected representatives – to which you are derelict in responding.

Mr. Secretary, the Department has repeatedly attempted to circumvent the constitutional authority of Congress by **legislating** the president's student debt scheme through executive fiat.

Six times, the Department extended its pause on student loan payments. Each time, American families scrambled to prepare for the restart of loan payments while education bureaucrats left them in the dark until the 11th hour. The American taxpayer has paid \$175 billion for the repayment moratorium. It must end.

Then, Mr. Secretary, your Department proposed a radical alteration to the Income-Driven Repayment program. This backdoor attempt to drive through the president's free college agenda will cost the American people at least \$230 billion over the next decade.

Finally, Mr. Secretary, on top of that the Department is attempting to provide nearly two-thirds of the benefit to those in the top-half of the income spectrum. Not only has blanket cancellation been rejected by the courts, renounced by nearly all economists, and even balked at by former Obama officials, it defies logic. Student debt cancellation, as written, is a regressive policy that benefits the top half of earners disproportionately and forces degreeless blue-collar workers to pay for PhDs.

The three policies comprising the president's student debt scheme would cost the American taxpayers upwards of \$1 trillion. Meanwhile, the federal government is \$32 trillion in debt, so each borrowed dollar comes out of workers' paychecks through the inflationary tax.

I wrote February 10th, 27th, and April 25th regarding these issues and have yet to receive a satisfactory answer.

Furthermore, Mr. Secretary, your Department acts as one of the main proponents of this administration's culture war on the American people. Your job is to administer **faithfully** the laws enacted by Congress, not misuse those laws to indoctrinate, yet the Department has radically rewritten Title IX so that "sex" is defined as an ideological construction rather than a biological reality. Under your Department's regime, self-identification is deemed sufficient for a man to be a legal "woman" and therefore compete in women's sports. And one could self-identify as a man on one day and a woman the very next day. What a reductive, surface-level view of

womanhood. Frankly, I've yet to hear you define what a woman is, yet you propose sweeping rules to redefine women as a class?

Mr. Secretary, I wish I could say the pervasive progressive ideology championed by your Department has stayed in university lecture halls where students are mature enough to debate the concepts, but it has trickled down to K-12 schooling. Your Department recently announced it would give priority to history and civics grants for school programs that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Also, and not coincidentally, recent NAEP data revealed that under your watch history scores for eighth graders have hit record lows – the worst since the assessment began in 1994.

Our country was built on the guiding principles of liberty and natural rights, yet left-wing history teachings tear down our founding by ignoring the good for the bad and ascribing collective guilt to whole populations for the actions of their ancestors. Aside from dumbing down a whole generation, this radical new history is aimed at subverting our national story as an imperfect people collectively bound by higher ideals.

Finally, Mr. Secretary, let us not forget the COVID-19 pandemic. By prolonging school closures at the behest of teachers' unions, your Department made the single greatest education policy failure in our nation's history. You let students lose 20 years of progress in core curricula like math, reading, and history. It didn't take a scientific study to tell you that remote learning would crush K-12 progress; all it took was listening to parents.

If COVID proved one thing, it's that writing a blank check for education is not the answer. We effectively turned the Department into a bank during the pandemic, sending \$190 billion out the door to K-12 schools. We know how that turned out. Those funds have been used to push the administration's **ideological agenda**, such as subsidizing "LGBTQ+ cultural competencies" in California. Your Department refused to conduct proper oversight over COVID relief funds, so on April 3rd, my Committee stepped in and requested documents and accountability. We have yet to receive a satisfactory response.

That is the thrust of your Department's actions this past year. Now, let me quickly turn to the FY 2024 budget proposal. Ironically, this administration is trying to justify a \$10.8 billion increase in discretionary spending for the Department of Education from the FY 2023 level.

Earlier, I called the half mile drive to Capitol Hill a pilgrimage because I feel that is exactly how administration officials view it. This building is foreign to them. Officials shy from oversight and accountability instead of treating it as their sacred duty to answer elected representatives.

We want answers. We want answers for parents left in the dark, children put a generation behind, women athletes being discriminated against, and the American taxpayer left with the bill.

That should be the starting point for any budget discussion.