



**Opening Statement of Rep. Burgess Owens (R-UT), Chairman
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
Hearing: “GAO Uncovers Biden-Harris FAFSA Failures”
September 24, 2024**

(As prepared for delivery)

Thank you all for being here today, but, frankly, I wish this hearing had not been necessary. Once again, the Committee is addressing the ongoing failure of the Biden-Harris administration’s attempt to implement the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA.

The road to today’s hearing has been a long and bumpy one. For years, completing the FAFSA was a challenge. The form was deemed too complex and confusing, so Congress passed the *FAFSA Simplification Act* in 2020. The Biden-Harris administration had plenty of time and what should have been a clear goal: to make the FAFSA process easier and more efficient.

The idea was simple: reduce the number of questions, streamline the process, and make it easier for families to determine their financial aid eligibility. The law was set to take full effect in 2023, but here we are, late into 2024, and the situation is far from resolved.

Implemented over 30 years ago and once considered the doorway to postsecondary education, FAFSA has become a headache and nightmare for millions of students and their parents thanks to this administration. Since day one, the Biden-Harris administration had the time and financial resources to get this right, yet the Department of Education failed to deliver and instead knowingly released a failed FAFSA. It prioritized the reallocation of valuable time and resources to push a radical political agenda: the unconstitutional student loan forgiveness scheme. Instead of focusing on implementing the simplified FAFSA, the Biden-Harris administration justified cutting FAFSA support staff and leaving three-quarters of calls unanswered

for months. For panicked parents and students who waited for hours for someone not to pick up your phone call, now you know why. The FAFSA rollout mired in delays, errors, frustration and, for some of our most vulnerable students, the loss of dreams for higher education.

The impact of the Biden-Harris administration failure is devastating. Over 430,000 fewer students submitted a FAFSA last year, leaving them and countless others unsure if they could afford postsecondary education. Like every other Biden-Harris policy it was the low-income students who were hit the hardest. Some community colleges are now dealing with significant declines in enrollment, and institutions across the country are struggling to finalize financial aid packages due to the Department's incompetence.

The Committee, bipartisan lawmakers, and the public have all demanded answers. And yet the Department has been largely unresponsive to requests for information, even going so far as to stonewall a non-partisan Government Accountability Office's (GAO) investigation into the FAFSA failures. It has taken a subpoena from this body for the Department to finally respond to the GAO's request. This lack of accountability is unacceptable, as students and taxpayers ultimately pay the price.

This Committee refuses to sit idle while the Department mismanages the futures of millions of prospective students. Thanks to Republicans on the front lines, who have made this a priority, the GAO has released preliminary findings from its investigation. We will discuss those findings at length today, some of which are horrific and inexplicable.

The Biden-Harris administration has left millions of students and families scrambling in the dark. Unbelievably, the administration's response to its failures has been to demand an additional \$400 million to do what it's already been given time and financial resources to address. By the way, that's \$900 for every student who couldn't complete its broken FAFSA. This administration has a lot of explaining to do to regain the trust of American families before the next FAFSA hopefully is released with full and accurate functionality in December.

This Committee will continue to work to deliver transparency and accountability to American families throughout this process. At the end of the day, this really is not

about a form. It's about keeping a promise to our students and taxpayers. A promise that if you work hard and you work honestly, you can get an education and make it in this country.

No administration has the right to stand in the way of that promise.