

Opening Statement of Rep. Burgess Owens (R-UT)

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development Hearing
“Who Gets the Scholarship? How the Global Shift in College Sports Affects Americans”
September 16, 2026

(As prepared for delivery)

College athletics provide important opportunities for young people to get an education and start on a path to success in life.

But those opportunities are limited.

Each year, NCAA Division I and II schools award more than \$4 billion in athletic scholarships to more than 180,000 student-athletes. Only about 2 percent of high school athletes receive an athletic scholarship. At the same time, international participation in college athletics has grown substantially—from fewer than 9,000 in 2001 to roughly 25,000 today.

That matters because scholarships and roster spots are finite. American families devote years of time and money in youth and high school sports so their kids can compete at the college level. Too often, the spot goes to an older international athlete instead.

The pressure to win in today’s college sports environment has led more coaches to recruit older international athletes instead of American high school graduates. Although recent NCAA eligibility

changes may put downward pressure on the participation of older international students, they are unlikely to meaningfully reduce the growth in international recruiting.

The trend is particularly high in certain Division I sports. In tennis, more than 60 percent of the players are international. International participation in hockey is about 40 percent, and in men's soccer it is over a third. In basketball, international participation has more than doubled in the last decade. In the 2025 NCAA Men's and Women's Tournaments, international student-athletes made up 15 percent of all participants.

This is not limited to the highest levels of college sports. In 2022, the Alabama State men's tennis team won the HBCU tournament championship with a roster composed entirely of international student-athletes. Last year, Division II Flagler College won a national tennis title with an all-international roster. In Division II men's soccer, more than half of the players in last year's national championship field were international.

This trend also weakens the development of U.S. Olympic talent. U.S. colleges provide athletes access to elite coaching, competition, and training facilities. At the 2024 Paris Olympics, 65 percent of the U.S. Olympic team were current, former, or incoming NCAA student-athletes. However, of the 1,000 NCAA Olympians in Paris, only 385 competed for Team USA—the other 63 percent competed for foreign nations.

Women's sports show a similar pattern. At the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, women who had competed at U.S. colleges represented at least 75 countries. Title IX of *Education Amendments of 1972* has

greatly expanded athletic opportunities for women in the United States. Congress did not intend for those opportunities to be filled by international athletes or for athletic departments to comply by recruiting international players. U.S. colleges are significantly contributing to the Olympic success of other countries while taking scholarship opportunities away from American athletes.

That is the reality in front of us. International recruiting has surged. American kids are losing roster spots. And the college system that helps develop Team USA is also developing everyone else's team.

Our college sports culture has become a mess. We are turning away from the priorities of the past, such as patriotism, providing opportunities for our kids to build character, and preparing the next generations to stand on our shoulders.

We have a system that works to the detriment of our children and to the benefit of institutions and those who run them. This is another example of how we've turned college sports into an industry based on greed, self-centeredness, and a toxic mindset of "whatever it takes."