

Opening Statement of the Honorable Robert Aderholt
Budget Hearing with the Secretary of Education, Miguel Cardona
April 18, 2023

Good morning, Mr. Secretary. I want to welcome you again to our Subcommittee, and I look forward to your testimony today.

I'd like to start by expressing my disbelief with the new rule your Department just proposed which would establish that schools violate Title Nine when they categorically ban biological male students from participating in women's sports teams. Forcing schools to allow biological teen males into girls' locker rooms is one of the greatest overreaches of the federal government I have ever seen.

Not only does this undermine decades of work in giving girls the same opportunities to compete in women's sports – the original intent of Title Nine - it creates potentially unsafe situations.

Your proposal robs girls of the chance at fair competition. Gender identity can be changed, according to my friends on the Left. But let's be clear: basic biology cannot be changed. The simple fact is that biological males and females are different, and biological males will have the natural advantage in size, speed, and strength even when they take suppressive hormones.

As biological men continue to dominate women's competitions, someone must stand up and say enough is enough. And the fact that your Department is proposing a rule that says

those who do so are in violation of the very rule that gave women's sports an equal footing in the first place leaves me and millions of Americans extremely concerned.

Turning now to your budget proposal, I fear the proposed 13 percent increase for the Department of Education will leave the next generation unprepared academically for competing in the 21st century and saddled with the highest national debt our nation has ever seen. A more responsible approach for your budget is called for, especially as painfully high inflation continues to strain American families' budgets.

The latest test scores put out by your department showed significant declines in math and reading scores, and minority students have fallen behind more than anyone else.

Closing most public schools for nearly two years during the pandemic was perhaps one of the greatest public policy blunders of our lifetimes, and the effects of this mistake will be suffered by our Nation for the next generation. Closing public schools at the behest of teachers unions has contributed to widespread learning loss, unprecedented youth mental health crises and increased marginalization of students with disabilities.

But I am also concerned about a broader trend we are seeing in the K-through-12 education space, and that is a shift in focus away from teaching our kids to read, write, add, and subtract, and instead towards indoctrinating children with divisive ideology and achieving equity in areas outside of academic achievement.

Kids should learn *how* to think, not *what* to think,] in our public schools. It is not the federal government's role to take over the role of parents and insert an administration's political agendas. Sadly, the data show that increased topline funding for the Department of

Education continues to yield worse results for our kids in public schools. Something is not right, and we cannot continue the status quo.

I'd also like to touch today on another area of extreme executive overreach, and that is the President's decision to conduct blanket federal student loan forgiveness, as well as repeatedly extend the pause on student loan repayment and interest accrual. Not only is this inflationary, but there are also people making hundreds of thousands of dollars a year who aren't being asked to repay their student loans. I think this is blatantly unfair to the millions of Americans who never went to college and do not have student loan debt. It's unfair to those who chose a less expensive school or worked during school in order to avoid student loans, or who sacrificed in order to pay off their debts.

Mr. Secretary, you and I share an interest in seeing students who go to college complete their studies and earn a degree. There may be agreement that the loan repayment system needs to be fixed, but adding another repayment program in the way the Department has proposed is troubling.

Even the liberal Brookings Institution has stated that your proposals would largely turn federal loans into grants. Mr. Secretary, we do have grant programs that this committee funds, but the purpose of loans is not to provide grants by another name, especially in ways that are untargeted. For instance, it is higher income borrowers who will reap the windfall of loan forgiveness benefits as part of your income-driven repayment plan.

I am a long-time supporter of Pell grants and the TRIO program. Pell grants and participation in TRIO help first generation college students chart a course to a better future into the middle class. We need to continue to help these students not only enroll, but also graduate

and find good paying jobs. Unfortunately, high inflation is eating away at the salaries of these recent graduates and making it more difficult for them to establish themselves in their careers. I know we will be addressing these topics, and many others, in our hearing today.

I want to thank you, Mr. Secretary, for coming before us today. I turn now to my colleague Ms. DeLauro for her opening statement.