

MEMORANDUM**TO: ASAHP****FROM: Kristen Truong****DATE: April 11, 2024****RE: House Appropriations Committee, Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Subcommittee, Budget Hearing on “Fiscal Year 2025 Request for the Department of Education”**

April 10, 2024, 10:00 AM, 2358-C Rayburn

[\[HEARING LINK\]](#)**Overview:**

The House Appropriations Committee, Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Subcommittee, held a budget hearing on “Fiscal Year 2025 Request for the Department of Education” with Education Secretary Miguel Cardona testifying.

Starting with Subcommittee Chair Aderholt’s opening statement and continuing through the hearing, Republicans raised concerns about proposed Title IX changes affecting women's sports, budgetary allocations for new programs, cuts to Charter School grants, FAFSA rollout, student loan forgiveness policies, and challenges to free speech on college campuses. Specifically with student loan forgiveness, they asked about the Department forgiving college loans but what about those enrolled in career and technical education programs? On the other side of the aisle, Democrats praised Secretary Cardona’s commitment to students and highlighted the progress made in addressing learning loss, cancelling student loan debt, and streamlining the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF). Reps. Pocan and Hoyer, although supportive of ensuring higher education is affordable, expressed concerns about increasing Pell and how the program can be sustainable for the future.

Additional topics discussed were the influence of China on college campuses, oversight of for-profit institutions, Office of Civil Rights, and mental health.

Opening Statements**Subcommittee Chair Robert Aderholt (R-AL-04) Opening Statement** [\[Full Statement\]](#)**Full Committee Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT-03) Opening Statement** [\[Full Statement\]](#)**Witness Testimony****The Honorable Miguel Cardona, Secretary, Department of Education** [\[Full Testimony\]](#)**Q&A Summary****Rep. Subcommittee Chair Robert Aderholt (R-AL-04)**

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Q&A

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Thank you, Mr. Secretary. And again, we appreciate your testimony. And -- and I appreciate your words about, you know, coming here and talking about the budget. But I do want to -- there are a few issues I think we need to talk about because of your department that I do want to bring up. And as I'd mentioned in my opening statement, I'm -- I am concerned, and I know many people are, about the proposed novel -- Title IX regulation, which in my opinion would do grave harm to the safety and the success of young girls and women across this country.

Particularly I'm worried about how this could impact girls in elementary school, for whom these school years are crucial for physical and mental development and building confidence. Under these proposed rules as you've laid out, the elementary age students would generally be able to participate on school sports teams consistent with their gender identity.

And that would mean that a sixth grade boy who simply identifies as a girl could play on the same basketball team as a young -- as young girls. My question, would -- when can we expect the department to finalize the Title IX rule?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you, Chair Aderholt, for the question. We know this is a very important issue and an important question that many have opined on. We've received over 150,000 comments, and we are working vigorously to move forward on that rule. We know it's important, and we are working hard on that.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Is there things that the Department is doing to ensure that a final rule would protect vulnerable young biological girls?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

As I said before, you know, the safety of all students is critically important to all of us. And it's important that we work quickly on these rules, and we're working as quickly as we can. I would ask, sir, that you consider the \$22 million budget increase that we have for the Office for Civil Rights to help us facilitate the work of not only writing regulation, but also investigating.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Also, I mentioned in my opening statement that many of us are concerned about the pervasive cancel culture at our institutions of higher education and the chilling effect that it has had on campus free speech. According to the Foundation of Individual Rights and Expressions' study that I'd mentioned, students are self-censoring in the classroom and in conversations with other students.

Speakers have been disinvited or angrily shouted down at events, and professors have lost their positions or suffered reputational harm for expressing their views. It's also apparent that students are not getting a consistently clear message from campus administrators regarding free speech protections. Do you think the status quo is acceptable, given how critical free speech and free inquiry is concerning higher education?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you. I agree with you that higher education institutions should be places where free speech is -- is allowed. I also agree that we have to make sure we're making our campuses as safe as possible for students and that we take concerns about safety very seriously. I recently had conversations with students at Towson University and Bowie State talking about safety on campus, talking about making sure that they're heard.

So, I do take that very seriously. At the Department of Education, we've worked really hard to ensure that there's more guidance on this. And we've worked closely with university leaders to help them with resources and tools to ensure free speech and -- and an environment where people can communicate their thoughts while also maintaining safety, which is of utmost important.

I've spoken to parents who also felt, you know, uneasy about their children being on campus given some of the challenges we've been hearing about on campus. But we're committed to working with you and others to make sure campuses are places of free speech, but also that they have the tools needed to protect students.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Can you talk about any particular things that the department is doing to ensure this protection of free speech as it relates to colleges and universities --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Sure.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

That, of course, receive federal funding? I -- I know you mentioned you're trying to understand that. But are there some specific steps that -- that y'all are looking at or that you have taken?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you. Thank you. Yes, if you go to Ed.gov, you'll see a link right there to some of the materials, the guidance that we've put forward. And in those materials, you'll see very specific strategies that we've shared with colleges. We've had numerous webinars with college leaders, folks on campus, to make sure that they're understanding how to balance promoting free speech and allowing for free speech, but also keeping safe environments.

So, happy to follow up more on that. We're working with, you know, leaders from different sectors on this as well. So, this is something that I'm really proud of the work we're doing, and I welcome an opportunity to share more with you.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Well, just please know that this cancel culture mentality is -- is a real issue out there, and I think it is something that needs to be addressed, especially when universities are receiving federal dollars. And will -- hope that you can be helpful in trying to make sure that students don't have to self-censor in the classroom and also in conversation with other students, and also make sure that speakers not are not disinvited --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Right.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Or angrily shouted down when they're -- come and express their views. With that, let me turn to Ms. DeLauro.

FULL COMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER ROSA DELAURO (D-CT-03):

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Secretary, we're on the same page that chronic absenteeism from school is a profound crisis for our kids. Rates have increased from 15 percent pre-pandemic to 26 percent in 2023. And in our nation's highest poverty schools, rates have increased from 19 percent to an alarming 32 percent in 2023. Something has shifted in our schools, with causes and explanations that are -- that are complex and -- and sociological.

And I'm not trying to plumb all those --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Right.

FULL COMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER ROSA DELAURO (D-CT-03):

All those reasons. But at all levels of government, we have a responsibility to reverse this unacceptable trend. Present -- presently, two-thirds of states use chronic absenteeism as an official indicator for statewide improvement plans under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. On the federal level, your department is responsible for monitoring states' evidence-based responses to the indicators in their plans.

How satisfied are you with how states are implementing their chronic absenteeism plans? What would you like to start seeing from states in your department's next round of monitoring?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you for that question. I share -- as -- as a lifelong educator, I share that concern. Chronic absenteeism, you know, you're not learning if you're not in the classroom with your -- with your peers. So, that is an issue that was exacerbated after the pandemic for various reasons. And in our budget, we have proposals that will help address that.

We've been very focused on ensuring that states are also what we call raising the bar or really doubling down efforts on that, and we're seeing some good progress. But to answer your question, we have a technical assistance center that we're focusing on chronic absenteeism. So, technical assistance, what's working, you know, what's happen -- what are the best strategies across the country, the technical centers are helping with that.

I wrote to every state education chief and asked them to take additional steps to address chronic absenteeism. We are monitoring the data more at the Department of Education regularly. We are working specifically with states where progress is being -- is not making as much progress as other states, and we're going to continue to do that.

We're working closely with the White House as well to bring in educators and leaders who are having success with this so that we can highlight best practices in our budget. We believe, you know, the increase for full service community schools will -- will make a big difference. I was recently in Pennsylvania speaking to parents in a parent center, and they were learning about how they could be equipped with tools to help other parents reduce chronic absenteeism.

So, you know, this is an area, as you said earlier, we have to focus on and we all have a role to play. At the Department of Education, increasing accountability, targeting support, and making sure we're listening to the best practices and sharing those are some of the strategies we're taking.

FULL COMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER ROSA DELAURO (D-CT-03):

Thank you. And if there's any way in which you can share some of that information that's coming through with what the programs and plans are, that would be helpful to -- to the committee, I think. Thank you. Thank you. Let -- let me move to another issue. Last year the department -- your department took action against Grand Canyon University, a predatory for-profit college, over the school's failure to accurately disclose its cost to students, driving up the true cost for those students, requiring them to pay for continuation courses before they would graduate.

Scam courses added about \$10,000 or more to the cost of education for these kids. The students settled a class action lawsuit against Walden University, another scam for-profit, targeted women and black students with false advertising, misrepresenting how long it would take to complete their degrees. This is -- far from being a few rotten apples in the bunch, predatory for-profit colleges have engaged in a range of deceptions designed to increase enrollment, student costs, to drive more revenue for owners and shareholders.

Beyond these individual actions, how are you and your agency committing to increased oversight of these institutions? And are there any way in which we can shut these -- excuse me, can we shut these folks down?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Um-hmm. Thank you for that. If I could contextualize this for a second, in 2021 when I was named secretary, the president made it very clear to me that we have a broken higher education system and we have to fix it, that the system that we had separated the haves and the have-nots, and there were a lot of practices there that prevented students from accessing higher education or finishing higher education.

So, with that frame that there's a broken system, you know, we did multiple strategies: borrower defense, which I'll get to in a second; debt discharge; increasing Pell; holding colleges more accountable, holding higher education institutions more accountable. And there's borrower defense, going after those predatory schools that are preying on first generation students.

You know, you have a -- a shiny brochure and a great commercial, but the -- the product is not worth the paper it's written on. We have students graduating \$60,000, \$70,000 in debt only eligible for jobs making under \$30,000. That to me is unacceptable. We've provided \$22 billion in -- in debt discharge for more than 1.3 million borrowers in that.

We increased enforcement of our FSA's -- through our office of FSA to go after these folks and really crack down on these behaviors. We've levied the largest fine in ed history against a school that lied to students about the cost and -- and what it cost to get a degree. And we've terminated a school from the -- the Title IV program as well.

So, we are cracking down on them not only to shut them down, but to send a message across the country that you cannot prey on our students and -- and expect to be successful.

FULL COMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER ROSA DELAURO (D-CT-03):

Thank you very much. And I want to thank the chair for the indulgence with time. Thank you. Thank you.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Yeah. Dr. Harris?

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Thank you very much. Mr. Secretary, thanks for being here.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you.

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Let me ask -- let me follow up a little bit on this Title IX discussion. Would you agree that Title IX was necessary to help establish women's sports, because women can't fairly be expected to compete on biological male teams?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Yeah, especially after last week, I'm really proud of what I saw in women's sports. And --

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Now --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I --

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Please, no -- no filibustering.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Yeah.

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Do you agree that that's why we have Title IX?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

And -- yes, and I'm --

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

OK. For input on the rule, are you seeking input from HHS?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Say that again, please?

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Are you seeking input from HHS in this rule?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

We work closely with all departments when we're making --

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

You are. OK. So, are you aware of what Secretary Becerra testified in front of this committee three weeks ago, when he was talking about women's health and women's health research said, quote, "Women's feet are

different from men. Their arches are different, but yet they have to wear, for professional athletic activity, shoes that were designed for men." Would you agree that women are physically different than men?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

So, I see where you're going with this, and I'm here to talk about --

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

No, no. Would you agree -- just would you agree that women are physically different? Would you agree with Secretary Becerra that there is evidence that women are physically different from men?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

So, Dr. Harris, I -- I know where you're going with this. I would love to talk about how we can work together to support the students in your district --

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Do you -- Mr. Secretary, do you agree that women are physically -- biological women are different from biological men physically?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I think I --

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

This is a simple question for an educator.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Yeah. I think --

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

You're not gonna answer. OK, let's go on to the next topic. I believe that your proposed Title IX rule could obviously roll back the protections of Title IX, and it's an affront to women in this country. It's an absolute affront that you're even considering a change to that rule given the secretary of HHS's testimony in front of this committee three weeks ago.

Now, let's move on. Charter school grants, in your -- in your reason for decreasing it, one of the reasons is so that you wouldn't -- you'd prohibit program funds going to schools operated by for-profit entities. So, if a for-profit entity demonstrates that it can educate a child better than the failing Baltimore City public school system, for instance, where 5 percent of students are actually proficient at something when they're done, you don't think the federal government should support a for-profit entity that -- that has evidence that they can deliver a better product?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I recently visited a charter school that provided an outstanding education. And throughout the course of my career, even before secretary of Education, I have supported high performing charter schools. And --

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

So, if they're high performing and they're for-profit, what your budget request suggests is that you are unwilling to have the department support them --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I am --

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

A for-profit, highly performing charter school.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I am

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Am I reading this wrong? Because it says prohibit program funds to charter school operated by for-profit entities. Am I reading that right? I mean, unlike Baltimore City School, children actually have reading proficiency. Is this correct? Is this what your department wrote?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Sir, I think, you know, to -- to respond to that comment, if you support our budget, we can provide enough title one dollars to districts to help all students read, which is why I'm here today.

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

You want to prohibit them for -- for-profit entities even if they're highly performing. Is that correct?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I'm a big believer in public charter schools and no, sir, I do not believe public dollars should go to private institutions.

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Even highly performing? See, the problem in my district is I may not have a public school entity that actually can set up a highly-performing charter school, but a for profit entity might be able to move in there. So you're going to -- the districts that really don't have the infrastructure to set these up, they're the ones you're going to punish.

Interesting, OK. Last thing I want to talk about is student nutrition and you're an educator, you're aware and I'm going to ask the -- to enter this in a record. A study entitled, "A four-day, Western-style dietary intervention causes reduction in hippocampal dependent learning and memory and interoceptive sensitivity." Carefully done study out of Australia suggested a diet high in added sugar and saturated fat actually interferes with learning and memory.

Now given the science behind this and I will share this with your office to review, don't you think it's about time that we actually limit the government paying for sugary beverages on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program so that we can actually help students learn better given the science behind it?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you. Thank you for that and I look forward to -- to receiving that. Doctor Harris, I look forward to working with you on the things that we have common ground including helping those schools in your districts that you say are not helping students. And nutrition, I agree with you, we have to make sure our students are healthy. So I look forward to working with you in the future. Thank you.

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. I yield back.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Mr. Pocan?

REP. MARK POCAN (D-WI-02):

Thank -- thank you, Mr. Chairman. Sorry about that making a mess here. Uh, thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here. Um, Congress established the Pell Grant as the main investment in college affordability for low and middle income students. But today, the Pell Grant has the lowest purchasing power in more than its 50-year history.

We've seen rising pressure on Pell funding in recent years due to increases in the maximum reward, more people returning to college and more students becoming eligible. Recent analysis from the Committee for a

Responsible Federal Budget found that without significantly increased funding, smaller awards, tighter eligibility or some combination of the above, the Pell reserves could be exhausted by 2026, possibly sooner.

Can you just discuss the resources that will be required to double the maximum Pell Grant by 2029 and maintain the Pell Grant solvency without cutting award size, rolling back recent expansions like the year-round Pell or narrowing grant eligibility?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you. Um, Pell really is a -- a lifeline for so many in our country. Um, there are students who -- whose reliance on Pell will determine whether or not they have access to chasing their dream and filling out their potential. Um, and I believe, Congressman Pocan, that we are not meeting our country's potential because we have a system that's broken.

As I said before, uh, increasing Pell, supporting Pell is a big part of that. It really is when we talk about leveling the playing field and making sure that education is a great equalizer, the Pell Grant is a a large -- a huge lever for that. Um, in 1979 it covered 80 percent of the cost of attending a four-year college.

Let that sink in, 80 percent was covered by Pell. Today, that number is about 31 percent. So number one is not keeping up, but the president's increase would bring it up to 8145, \$8,145, which is an increase of \$750 per student per year. Um, to me, increases are going to be needed in order to ensure solvency.

So that is a -- that is an ask that we have. Um, I can tell you it's -- it's more every year, it's more and more important. And while we're going to work on accountability and improving the return on investment in higher education because that's part of the broken system, we recognize that without supporting Pell, the increase in Pell, we're basically just exacerbating gaps in our country that exist now.

REP. MARK POCAN (D-WI-02):

Well, thank you and as a Pell recipient myself, uh, you know, I would probably have been able to go to a public even university much less some other universities without that help. So I'm glad that we're doing the effort to double Pell Grants. So thank you for that. And also, um, just because of time, thanks for the new initiatives that you all are proposing the president announced in my district on Monday, again to help people who are repaying loans, I think, uh, you know, having people automatically fall into some of the programs rather than having to apply is extremely efficient and going after those predatory colleges that took advantage of people. Um, your fiscal year '25 budget requests a \$22 million increase for the Office of Civil Rights to better respond to rising discrimination complaints. In your testimony, you highlighted anti-Semitism and anti-Arab discrimination as key areas of concern and I agree. I also want to make sure we're paying close attention to the rising threats to the LGBTQI+ students and prioritizing their rights and protections as well.

A recent Wall Street -- uh, I'm sorry, recent Washington Post analysis found that in states with anti-LGBTQ laws, the number of hate crimes targeting those students in K-12 schools has more than quadrupled. While advocates report that calls to the LGBTQ youth crisis hotlines have exploded. Will you commit to ensuring that your efforts to address discrimination schools will also prioritize rising threats to LGBTQI+ students? And do you believe the additional funds you've requested for OCR will be sufficient to meet this growing need?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you for that question. And I wholeheartedly agree with you that there's been an increase in, uh, threats and um, uh, exclusionary behaviors for students who are LGBTQ. And I need those students to hear directly from me that they should come as they are and they should feel as welcome as the next student in their school.

They should feel a sense of belonging, a sense of being a part of something bigger than them in order for them to reach their potential. Again, all means all we need to stand up for the students who are being marginalized. Look, we're asking for a \$22 million increase and this will go directly -- 90 percent of this will go directly towards investigations.

And let me tell you, since 2009, our complaints to the office for Civil Rights have tripled while we've lost 58 people due to budgets. So that tells you the issue that we're dealing with here. Um, all students deserve dignity and respect and the office for Civil Rights is ready. The budget proposal that we have here will really help us move forward, not only with our students who are LGBTQ, but also the rise in anti-Semitism and the rise in anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment that we're seeing as well.

REP. MARK POCAN (D-WI-02):

Well, and thank you for that and just you know, as rising rhetoric even in the halls of Congress on this issue, I think the reality I just want people to remember is kids are getting not just beat up and threatened, but suicides are rising among youth and it's just really important. We all keep that in mind when we talk about these issues.

Thank you and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Ms. Letlow.

REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA-05):

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here with us today. Um, would you agree that FAFSA is one of the most important documents that a student fills out when trying to determine their college path?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Absolutely. As a parent, I can tell you I've experienced the old system and the new system and, um, I do believe FAFSA is a very important document.

REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA-05):

Right. And that leads me to my second question. As a parent, you mentioned your son and daughter. As you're planning uh for your child, you're um very curious about which financial aid -- what financial aid will be available for your child. So you would think it would be important for parents as well. OK.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Absolutely.

REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA-05):

Uh, as a former higher education administrator myself, I know how important it is that we receive that FAFSA data in a timely manner. So you would also agree that for higher education administrators as they're planning how many sections they're going to have, how many professors are needed for each section that that also would be very important for them as well.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Absolutely, I talked to financial aid administrators daily. I spoke to one person yesterday and I understand the situation that they're in and -- and we're working with them to make sure we can support them more.

REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA-05):

So as you know where I'm going with this, it's no secret that the rollout of the new FAFSA has been an absolute disaster, multiple delays, technical issues, long processing times and now incorrect data supplied to university. So my question begins with this. At what point did you realize they were going to be some real problems getting the FAFSA rolled out on time?

And when did you know the department was not going to meet the traditional FAFSA deadlines?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you. Look, I -- I understand the challenges that our students, our families, our universities, financial aid administrators -- administrators are facing. There's nothing more important right now at the Department of

Education. We're working on this around the clock because we want to make sure our students have information that they need to make informed decisions.

And let me tell you, uh, Congresswoman, 30 years ago when I was 17 and I tried to -- was going to fill out the FAFSA, I knew the burden that it would put on my parents, and it was too much. I never filled it out. We -- we need to move forward to a better system, but we need to do it in a way that gives the students the information in a timely way.

REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA-05):

Sure, so it's my understanding that the FSA has around 1,400 career staff known as FTEs. I read on your website that the office oversees or handles the federal student loan programs including the FAFSA, Student Loan Repayment and Student Loan Forgiveness. Is that correct, 1,400?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Um, I can verify that with you, but I -- that sounds about right.

REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA-05):

Sure. Great. Of those 1,400 employees, how many focus on FAFSA implementation and how many of those FTEs have been focusing on the \$144 billion of student loan forgiveness which your department has rolled out over several tranches?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

So I can get more information, more specific information to you because you're asking very specific the number of employees. But I can tell you, uh, the FSA office is responsible for also bringing 28 million people back into repayment. We changed contracts to make the process better for students, so we're moving contracts, uh, for us to oversee those programs in addition to FAFSA. So it's not that they're -- I would -- I don't want you to think that there's not doing FAFSA because they're working on something else.

FAFSA has been a priority since day one when we got into these positions and it will continue to be a priority until we deliver for these students.

REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA-05):

It's my understanding that it's been an absolute nightmare. I hear from university administrators all the time. This isn't a partisan issue. This is something that is affecting higher education as a whole. It's affecting parents, students. And at a time when I hear from my constituents, industry leaders that we are facing one of the worst workforce shortages in history that we shouldn't be creating a deterrent for our students to go into higher education.

So that we can answer that workforce shortage that we have. And so I'm concerned that you didn't pull employees away from working on loan repayment for people who have already gone to college. At what point did you start prioritizing those people who have already finished their college degree for making sure that we can get a steady workforce, getting -- prioritizing students to go into college?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

As I said earlier, you know, it's not either or we've been working on FAFSA since since we got here to the department. And I agree with you. Part of this is this system is over 40 years old and it needs overhaul. We expect over 650,000 more students to be eligible for federal aid, which is great for our workforce, great for our country.

We expect 1.7 million more students to get top aid, OK? A total of 7.1 million students getting aid with this new system. And because it's 20 minutes, we expect the completion rates in this country to -- to go up. We've been satisfied we've normalized 60 percent completion rates, 70 percent. We have to do better for -- for our students and this better FAFSA will get us there.

But I do empathize with the challenges and the frustrations that folks are feeling. We need to do better and we're going to get better. And I urge students who are listening to go to studentaid.gov, fill that out. You fill it out today by Friday, this information will be in the schools.

REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA-05):

I'm happy to hear that I hope this debacle never happens again. I hope that you will have a plan in place. The American people want to see you focused on getting students into the classroom, not repaying loans for people who have already been there. Thank you. I yield back.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Ms. Frankel.

REP. LOIS FRANKEL (D-FL-22):

Thank you. First of all, I want to just welcome those who are advocating for literacy and justice. Thank you very much for being here. So I heard a just a quick response to a remark by one of my esteemed colleagues about what is an affront to the women of this country. Respectfully, I do not believe it's the size of the feet of boys and girls.

I didn't quite understand that, but I will tell you what is an affront and the affront is the Republican banning and restricting abortion all over this country. That is what the affront is and for a forced pregnancy on a 12 year old or a 15 year old, I respectfully suggest will greatly interfere with their education and their future.

But I will move on, Mr. Secretary. Um, I want to ask you, I'm going to -- I want to talk some good news first and did everybody watch the women's NCAA basketball finals? Hooray to the women athletes. Had over 18 million viewers watching, 4 million more than the men -- sorry, sorry about that. Uh, the most viewers for any basketball ever on ESPN, including the NBA. And it's -- it's predicted that this year, women's sports revenues will pass \$1 billion.

So that that is really the good news, but there's some not so good news which is that the NCAA continued to offer more athletic opportunities to men than to women in a very, very large way. So I am wondering what if anything your department is doing to make sure female athletes including athletes of color which also seem to be getting the short end of the stick received the same investment as the male athletes.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you for that. And I -- I -- I did reflect on the NCAA tournament and the amazing work of, you know, so many of those teams as a byproduct of the Title IX fight that has been happening in this country for many, many years. But as you pointed out, there's still so much to go. We're still -- we still shouldn't be satisfied. The contracts for viewership that the women got was much less than the men, yet the results, as you pointed out, were far greater. And I think that's a sign of where we're going, but we have a lot of work to do. We are working really hard in the Office for Civil Rights to move forward with the Title IX regulations.

As you know, this is an important topic to so many people across the country. We received over 240,000 comments that we review carefully in order to make the decision. And we're committed to ensuring that the Title IX regulations are -- are fair, responsive, and effective. And while I can't speak specifically to the content of that because it's still not final, I will tell you that we recognize that, while we've made some progress in this country, we still have a ways to go.

REP. LOIS FRANKEL (D-FL-22):

Thank you for that. I -- you know, I would appreciate -- maybe if you have a plan of action on this specific issue, I would love to see it. I think a lot of people would be interested in that. And I -- my colleague here, Mr. Pocan, raised the issue of anti-Semitism on the college campuses as well as other discrimination.

And we know that -- something like 75 percent increase in anti-Semitism on the college campus, this is very alarming, very unacceptable. Students can't learn if they don't feel safe.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Um-hmm.

REP. LOIS FRANKEL (D-FL-22):

And I know that you're taking some actions, and I would like to know how your budget request affects your work. And what's the shortfall in terms of enforcement? Is it the dollars?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Right. Well, yes, I mean, as I said before, we're down 58 people despite having three times as many cases since two -- 2009, and we're talking investigators, right? So, the -- the budget proposal will bring on 86 new staff members, 90 percent of whom will -- would work on investigations. But let me just contextualize.

Since October 7th, we've -- we have 134 open cases, and that was updated this morning. It was 128 last week. 134 open cases under shared --

REP. LOIS FRANKEL (D-FL-22):

And excuse me. Open cases where? Are these on college campuses? They're --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Under shared ancestry.

REP. LOIS FRANKEL (D-FL-22):

Shared -- oh, shared ancestry.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Yeah. Right. So, that -- that goes to show what -- the -- the volume. We have opened many more since the -- from the last administration. I think they opened 27. So, it -- it goes to show the -- the demand that there is for investigations. Last year, we were not able to increase funding for OCR. And we're concerned that, if we don't have funding this year, getting to those investigations -- and they're thorough investigations.

Oftentimes we'll investigate one thing and something else will come up during that investigation. So, it's critical that we have funding for the Office for Civil Rights to make sure that our investigations are thorough and quick.

REP. LOIS FRANKEL (D-FL-22):

Thank you. I yield back.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Mr. Moolenaar?

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here today.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

I want to follow up on Representative Letlow's questions with the concern that -- you know, this problem with FAFSA. I'm wondering if resources were diverted from the department's people who could have been implementing FAFSA working on the -- you know, the cancellation of \$144 billion in federal student loans, do you -- can you tell me how many people were working on the canceling student loans and -- and -- and what resources were used in that process?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Sure. So, the way -- the way it works at the Department of Education is we have the Office of the Under Secretary that is working on helping develop policies to provide debt relief to millions of Americans who are really at risk of default or having issues. So, that -- that's the process where we develop -- whether it's through rulemaking or through different proposals.

The implementation of those when it comes to the student accounts goes through the federal student aid offices. So, it's not that we're taking employees from the federal student aid office to sit at OUS to work on policies. That's not how it works. There are, let's say, 28 million people that have to go back into repayment. They have to go into repayment either way. If they have debt discharge, there are changes to their accounts that lead to the debt discharge. So, there is no strategy where we're taking folks from one building and saying go to this building to work on this strategy that we have to fix the program.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

But I would assume implementing, you know, \$144 billion in debt -- you know, canceling that debt would require resources and focus that would take people maybe who could have been working on FAFSA and improving that situation. Do you not see that, or --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Well, I think -- you know, operationalizing our policies falls under FSA regardless of what the policies are. So, I think I'd rather communicate it that way, that we're working really hard on fixing a broken system, which means providing a lifeline to millions of Americans who right now are underwater and need help.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

OK.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

So --

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Can I --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

The FSA is the -- the body that's implementing the -- the decisions that were being made in other places.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

OK. I -- have you heard -- you know, in my district, I hear from parents who paid for their children's education and feel that it's unjust to -- to say, OK, some people are having their loans forgiven, but they had to pay everything. People who went into the skilled trades who didn't take out student debt and made that decision, and they're saying now I have to subsidize people who chose to take on student debt going to college.

I hear from students who, you know, work part time or took time, you know, in their career and then went back to school, they aren't getting their student loans. Do you see the fundamental injustice in how this administration has, you know, picked winners and losers in this process?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you for that question, Congressman. And -- and I have met with people across the country who have shared different perspectives and listened to them thoroughly. I think my response to that is that that messaging makes sense if we're protecting the status quo. We have a very broken higher education system.

So many -- and as a former principal, school principal who's spoken to students who said I can't go to college, that's too expensive for me at 11 years old. This kid, who was one of the smartest kids in my school, in front of his father normalizing we're not -- I'm not going to college.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Well --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

We have to fix the system, sir.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

But what you're doing is subsidizing a broken system --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

So, you can --

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Right?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Make the same --

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

And you're -- you're creating incentives for people not to do what -- the families that saved, what -- the people who made decisions, going into the skilled trades, you're incentivizing people to not pay back student loans and at the same time penalizing and forcing people who did to subsidize those who didn't.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Sir, thank you for -- for sharing that perspective. I don't see it that way. I would feel that the people that received loans -- PPP loans were given support when they needed it most to get back on their feet. We have over a million people defaulting on loans so we have a responsibility to fix it. And I agree with you wholeheartedly on the career and technical education tracks.

We are doing more in this administration to create pathways to trades, to make sure that all the great work of the Invest in America provisions, that we meet the moment. So, I agree with you on that. And I -- I don't see it as unfair. I see it as we're fixing something that's broken. We have better repayment plans now so we don't have to be in the business of forgiving loans in the future.

But we have an inequity that we're -- we're leveling now to get to a future that has greater accountability, higher Pell dollars, and making sure that people can pay off their loans.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Well, I just want you to know I'm hearing from parents, I'm hearing from students, I'm hearing from people who went on different tracks, that they feel like it's fundamentally unfair. And -- and I just want you to have that message. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Thank you, Mr. Moolenaar. Ms. Watson Coleman?

REP. BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN (D-NJ-12):

Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Secretary, I've been doing a lot of work around mental health issues, from the very young all the way up to me. [Laughter] And I stir -- I stand firmly with the president on doubling the number --

REP. LOIS FRANKEL (D-FL-22):

[Off mic] dollars. [Laughter]

REP. BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN (D-NJ-12):

Number of mental health professionals in our schools. Can you please explain to this committee how the \$216 million for school safety national activities and the new \$25 million investment in the fund for the improvement of post-secondary education helps us reach that goal?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Um-hmm. Well, we've seen, you know, even prior to the -- prior to the pandemic as an educator, I would categorize our mental health supports in schools as an emergency room model. We waited for the trauma to happen. We -- we waited for the student to have an outburst and then we approached it. And unfortunately, in many places in our country, it became discipline.

It's -- it's insufficient. We are seeking to transform how we view accessing mental health in our K-12 -- pre K-12 schools in our higher education institutions. Those dollars are intended to develop proactive programming to meet the needs of learners so they can be successful in a way that's supportive. You know, students are six times more likely to receive mental health supports if it's offered in a school compared to if it wasn't offered in the school and they had to get it in the community.

So, in addition to those dollars that you're talking about, we're also proposing full service community schools that connect with community partners and bring them into the schools. Look, we have to fundamentally change how we approach mental health supports in our schools. I believe this is one of the most purple issues that we have, and it's an opportunity for us not to go back to what it was before the pandemic.

Those dollars that you made reference to will do that in higher education, because what I'm seeing, Congresswoman, is that the schools -- the higher education institutions that focused on mental health when reopening schools did a better job reopening quickly and more safely and kept their students greater.

Higher education institutions recognized that importance, and they're moving that forward in that. So, those dollars are intended to support their efforts.

REP. BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN (D-NJ-12):

I'm glad to hear that. What kind of guidance are you all actually giving to make sure that these funds reach the underserved communities?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Yeah. So, we -- you know, in 2021 the department issued guidance on mental health in schools, and it was shocking to me to learn that that was the first time mental health guidance was provided from the Department of Education, knowing that, you know, today we're in a youth mental health crisis. So, since then, there have been numerous other guidance documents, technical assistance, webinars working specifically with higher education institutions talking about how to support -- for many institutions, they're developing smaller programs to -- to provide mental health supports.

So, we're working with them, sharing best practices on our website. We have resources. We have a department whose focus is to make sure that universities have that support. And we're going to continue to do that. We recognize that this is an opportunity that we have to really shift the narrative around accessing mental health supports.

As we reduce the stigma that has been so prevalent in the mental health space, we -- we have a responsibility to do better for our students, and we're taking every advantage to work with them at the ground level.

REP. BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN (D-NJ-12):

Particularly in the underserved --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Absolutely.

REP. BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN (D-NJ-12):

Communities. Let me -- I just want to -- to add a comment. I want to thank you, I want to thank the president for working around as much as he can to provide as much student debt relief as he can. I don't think anybody desires to take a loan out if he or she has the financial capacity to pay for what it is that's before him or her.

And so, I know that this has been a very hard road -- row to hoe, I should say, given what our colleagues on the other side of the aisle and what our unfortunate wrongheaded courts have been doing. And so, I just want to say that you got a fan in me on this issue. I think this is vitally important to our communities that represent the need.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you.

REP. BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN (D-NJ-12):

And there's so much more to do. Thank you. I yield back.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Mr. Ciscomani?

REP. JUAN CISCOMANI (R-AZ-06):

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Secretary, for -- Cardona for coming before us today to talk about the budget. You know, I've got several questions, but I want to start off with the charter school program. And on that, in -- in my district alone, almost 17,000 students attend charter schools, and over half of those students are minority students.

And the majority of those minority students are Hispanic. Now, I understand you will -- you talked about increasing Title I funding, but this program still needs -- is still very much needed in my community. My -- my own kids attended charter schools for the first five years of their schooling, the -- the older three.

I have six, so I have a lot to experience here. But -- but given the popularity of the program, why does your budget propose a \$40 million cut to the CSP?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you, Congressman, uh, I agree that um, you know, I've seen examples of charter schools that do exceptional work. Public charter schools and I visited E.L. Haynes recently, a fantastic school. To be very frank with you, the demand hasn't -- hasn't kept up. And I just want to remind folks, the charter school, even with the proposed \$40 million cut there, the charter school grant, competitive grant is still the largest pre-K 12 grant that we have at the Department of Education.

Um, the demand has really diminished. So in keeping with the Fiscal Responsibility Act, um that's -- that's a concern that we.

REP. JUAN CISCOMANI (R-AZ-06):

Let me -- let me jump in here because you know when you look at the -- you talk about the size of the budget, less than 1 percent of K through 12 -- of the K through 12 federal spending is on charter schools. So that's a -- that's a very low number based on the demand that I see in my district. Now you talk about you know the demand.

So let me say this respectfully for, you know, from the meetings that I have with educators, with -- with parents of of uh kids that my kids go to have went to school with. It's evident to me that the slow spending is not due to the lack of interest in applying, but rather the burdensome regulations your department has put on this program.

Uh, I've heard that from many people. Like I said, educators, teachers, those that are trying to start charter schools, the regulations and the -- in the -- in the -- the just the burdensome uh toll of of people trying to start these schools is incredible. So, um, charter, school leaders have told me that the wait times and the red tape that exists when applying for the programs make uh many give up on the application process entirely.

And I've seen that happen with people that I personally know. So rather than suggesting a cut in the program, I would suggest you meet with charter school leaders about the current difficulties they're facing when applying to this program. You mentioned you visited a school recently from what I saw in the reports, I think you've visited a couple of them.

Uh, but there are a lot of great examples out there in my state included. I would uh personally invite you to come to Arizona and I can show you some of the best charter schools that you'll see in the -- in the country that do this work that are high performing that are -- that are working for our students.

And let me tell you something, and mostly all of them, there is a waiting list. So I respectfully disagree with the fact that there isn't a demand. There's actually more demand that there's even being able to be met with and uh, in the majority of the charter schools, at least in my district, are in the K-8 section.

There are very few high schools, so students after they go through a charter school life experience, then they're left with very little options at the end in high school. That's at least the story in my district. So um, I want to push back on that a little bit and say the demand is there, the demand is there.

But when you make it as hard as the department has made it for the charter schools to actually be uh, erected and work and function for our kids. Again, let me say in my district, the vast majority of these kids being minority students and in the majority of that group are Hispanics like my kids, uh example, that's a problem.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I appreciate your passion. I could -- I could --

REP. JUAN CISCOMANI (R-AZ-06):

-- I'm very passionate -- And -- and I welcome. I welcome an opportunity to visit with you in Arizona. I think any time we can show bipartisan effort on supporting students, I welcome that. Uh, I will tell you with this grant that I'm speaking to specifically and I'm going to ask my team to follow up with you on sharing the demand.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

With regard to the -- the notion of um making it difficult. Look, we've increased accountability across the board, all schools. We should not be satisfied in this country with the -- where our students are. We have to raise the bar and that means across the board we're increasing accountability because that's what our students deserve.

REP. JUAN CISCOMANI (R-AZ-06):

Well, we need it. Let me just -- because I'm out of time here, we need to increase accountability. Of course, we need to -- we need to make sure that parents have the choice for their kids education and that is what I'm very passionate about. It's choice choice and education that parents should have. My -- my family moved to this country when I was 11 years old.

We immigrated here. The top reason why we came here was a better job for my parents and a better education for my -- for -- for the kids, that was -- that was us. That's what we need to be protecting. That's what we need to be fighting for. I admire your story in your background and where you came from, where you are today.

We got to work together like you said in a bipartisan basis to make sure that all students, regardless of their background can have a real shot at the American dream and that comes through education. So I reiterate my invitation to you to visit Arizona. I look forward to working with you and welcoming you there.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you.

REP. JUAN CISCOMANI (R-AZ-06):

I yield back, sir. Thank you.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Ms. Lee?

REP. BARBARA LEE (D-CA-12):

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member. And thank you, Mr. Secretary. Um, Mr. Secretary, I have been working very closely with HHS Secretary, uh, Secretary Becerra and USDA Secretary Vilsack to address food and nutrition -- nutrition insecurity. The president's budget provides over \$15 billion to allow more states and schools to leverage participation in the community eligibility program and provide healthy and free school meals to an additional 9 million children.

Thank you very much. Uh, can you provide me with just a bit more in terms of the details of the coordination efforts between the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Agriculture, uh, regarding food and nutrition insecurity in schools. I'm really pleased that the coordination is there, but I want to see how seamless this coordination will be.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you and let me just drill it down a little bit if I could. I come from a district that has that benefit, right, the community benefit and I remember prior to this happening, we had so many different issues where, you know, students were getting different meals because they didn't pay for their lunch or the paperwork wasn't filled in. You know, in a district that has 75, 80 percent of the students eligible for free or reduced lunch.

So what it did to remove the stigma, sometimes we don't talk about that here, what it did to remove the stigma, make sure students had a healthy meal and were able to function like every other student, what a significant difference that made when that happened. And I happened to be a school principal when that happened.

So thank you for -- for that support and for the work on that. Look, we recognize we cannot work in silos at the Department of Education. When we talk about Medicaid reimbursement to get mental health dollars, HHS and Department of Education have to work together. School meals, Tom Vilsack and I have had conversations. Um, our departments have to work together when we're talking about career opportunities in the trades and in technical education, DOL, Energy, Commerce, Transportation. We're -- we're connected at the hip. We meet regularly as part of our -- our structure at the Department of Education to make sure that you know Larry is spending time with his counterpart at the other agency if we're working on grants together.

And we're thinking about it from the perspective of the consumer, right? They don't need the Department of Education over here with rules, Transportation over here with rules. So we work really closely to make sure we're thinking about the user experience and the user in that case might be a school district.

It might be a state office um, so it's just kind of how we're designed to, to work together and the president expects it.

REP. BARBARA LEE (D-CA-12):

Good, good, good. You know, we talk about intersectionality quite a bit and I think that this is a good example of of what other agencies can do for us, uh, for our young people and -- and adults in general. Also, I want to thank you for working to address uh and to eliminate the teacher shortage, especially um, encouraged to see the president's budget.

Uh, that includes more than \$650 million to support a diverse and well-prepared pipeline of educators, um and an increase in \$15 million for the Hawkins Centers of Excellent Program. Although teacher shortages remain disproportionately impacting students in underserved communities, it's important to retain quality educators, especially those that represent the community and continues, you know, this continues to be really challenging for many communities.

And so what are the plans to ensure that teacher diversity is um, institutionalized, uh, and that teacher diversity is representative of communities that they serve and uh well, especially, you know, in underserved communities. But we have to be intentional about that.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

And we can't keep doing what we've done or we're not going to ever catch up. So thank you for that. You know, I always say our -- our profession should be as beautifully diverse as our country and right now it's not. And if we're not intentional, then we're not going to make improvements there, um, so we're taking a lot of steps.

The Augusta Hawkins grant, you mentioned it, I was at Bowie State recently and I saw a program that had 50 men of color going into the teaching profession being mentored by former superintendents that are being -- they're giving their time to help these young men become teachers. And so that was a recipient of the Augusta Hawkins Grant.

We're asking --

REP. BARBARA LEE (D-CA-12):

Mr. Secretary, let me just mention, I was a staffer and an intern for Congressman Ron Dellums and had a chance to get to know Congressman Gus Hawkins very well. He'd be very happy about this.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

It was just one of those things I just felt fantastic because I know that community is going to be better. We're also working on, uh, so there's specific grants to that. Um, we -- we are really shifting how we're thinking about this. We are at the doorstep of another crisis if we don't think about educator shortages.

So -- and I'm proud to see that California is one of those states that has an apprenticeship for teaching. The days of free student teaching should be in a rearview mirror. No other profession does that. And while teachers get paid on average 24 percent less than people with other similar degrees, we need to make sure that we're creating a pipeline for teachers to get into the program.

And then this is why, you know, when some people talk about student debt relief as something negative, we are fixing a bipartisan bill in 2007, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program to provide debt relief to educators because they chose teaching not to become rich to help their community and we're proud of the work that we're doing.

I spoke to a teacher of color Monday in New York City who took out a loan for \$30,000 and we know educators of color typically have to take out loans for the whole whole amount. Um, \$30,000 loan about 10 or 12 years ago, the interest is brought up to \$60,000, So this teacher benefited from debt relief and is benefiting from the plans that the president has announced.

So for me this is how we also help maintain teachers of color in our profession. We have to make sure that we're increasing salary, creating good working conditions, being intentional about recruiting and creating pathways and apprenticeships. I believe we have good strategies. We just have to fund them and support them across the country.

REP. BARBARA LEE (D-CA-12):

Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr Chair. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Mr. Fleischmann?

REP. CHUCK FLEISCHMANN (R-TN-03):

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Um, good morning, Secretary Cardona, thank you for being before us today. Uh, Mr. Secretary has been brought to my attention that the department is attempting to significantly alter a program that allows college students to receive their educational materials at below market rates and before the first day of class.

Additionally, since 2016, data from College Board has demonstrated prices for educational materials for college students has decreased by over 40 percent, which indicates to me that these affordable access programs are working. My understanding is that the department will force these programs to operate in an opt-in manner which will likely decrease the effectiveness of the programs.

So my question, sir, has the department conducted any studies to determine if these programs are sustainable under a proposed opt-in method and if the current benefits to students would be preserved in an opt-in system? If not, would you commit to doing so before promulgating these regulations? And I thank you.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you, Congressman, for -- for raising that and for sharing your perspective on that. We have spoken to many college leaders, um, and heard different perspectives on that. We've heard from families as well. And I know we're in that rulemaking process, which prevents me to go any deeper in that. But I will go back to my team and -- and see if there's any studies, as you mentioned, that we've referenced and I'll have my team follow up with you on that important issue.

Thank you.

REP. CHUCK FLEISCHMANN (R-TN-03):

Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Mr. Chairman, I'll yield back.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Mr. Hoyer.

REP. STENY HOYER (D-MD-05):

I don't know that anybody wants to hear me, but I'll turn on the mic. Um, Thank you. Let me first say, I'm sorry, I apologize for being late. I had a speech to give that, just conflicted with this. And I was the one that had to give the speech, so I wasn't here. Um, first of all, let me say that very much appreciate your taking this responsibility on. At the federal level, it's somewhat controversial.

But in my view and I tell people every place in -- in that I go the most important people in any society are its teachers. If we -- if we don't educate the young, we won't have the kind of society that we want. So I think this is a primary investment for all levels of government, federal, state and local.

While the primary is local, the state has a significant impact in terms of funding and the federal, uh, a less direct but a significant role. I was very pleased to see that you've put money in for full-service community schools, uh and particularly early childhood uh schools. As you may know -- oh, and by the way, congratulations for visiting Bowie State University, which is in my district, as you probably know.

And it's a wonderful institution, badly underfunded. And prior to the middle 60s and when we had redistricting and the state Senate became more representative is when we started to invest in Bowie State University and now it's an outstanding institution. But back to the full-service schools, I think that early childhood education is absolutely critical in terms of this education continuum.

Um, we have some people wearing literacy and justice for all shirts here. Uh, my wife, Judy Hoyer, was a reading expert, but she was also a first grade teacher in and she was the administrator of early childhood education in Prince George's County, one of the largest school systems in the country. And she started an early childhood school. I'm going to take you to a Judy center. I don't think you've been to a Judy center, but I want to take you to, but it will fall within the category of this new program.

I didn't talk to anybody about this program. I didn't know about this program until I read my book today and I'm glad to see that's done. Um, because it is tough to get people who are not just passionate about being an educator. My wife wanted to be an educator and she told her mother that at age seven and she went to Towson State which was then a teacher's college.

This is all to say that, uh, we need investment in this area. And as we need investment, we need accountability. I mentioned this, uh, when Secretary Becerra was here because it's in Health and Human

Services. I think Head Start ought to be in Department of Education. But the expertise in '65 when Head Start was started was that it was not an educational program because kids confronted with education too much pressure on them at that young age.

Well, we know that's -- that was incorrect. In fact, out of the womb children are sponges and ready to learn. So I want to congratulate you on, on pursuing this program and urge you to, as we pursue this program, pursue accountability to make sure that it is working for kids. Uh, I mentioned that with respect to Head Start to, uh, uh, secretary of HHS, Mr. Becerra.

Um, I've just asked the staff to give me, I want the statistics and this goes to one of the questions that was asked on -- on Pell Grants. Um, I'm a big supporter of Pell Grants. I've been on this committee since 1983, But I also have a concern about every time we increase Pell grants, college expenses go up one and a half times as much.

I don't know how we can deal with that, uh, but I think we do need to deal with it. And so I would urge you to do that. That's not a question, but I also want to -- Ms. Frankel, I understand asked the question about anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is a cancer on the international global community now increasing at a faster rate than at any time since World War II. Uh and we need to be very vigilant, particularly on college campuses.

Uh young people need to be educated, Mr. Secretary, on the background of the millennia of discrimination and hate directed at the Jewish community millennia. I got two seconds left, so I haven't asked you a question. But I do want to raise those two issues -- three issues in particular that I would ask you to direct you and your staff to focus on and I'll follow up on all three.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Thank you, Mr. Hoyer. Uh, Mr. Clyde.

REP. ANDREW CLYDE (R-GA-09):

Thank you, Chairman Aderholt, for holding this hearing today. In recent years, we have seen a drastic increase in radical gender ideology being promoted and pushed by government bureaucrats and educators through school curriculums. Pseudo scientists are attempting to redefine gender to include an individual's feelings rather than focus on their biological sex at birth.

And our nation's top executive branch officials cannot clearly define what a woman is. So, Mr. Secretary, I'm sure you remember that in our last hearing last year, I gave you an opportunity to answer that question and I'll give you a second chance. Can you define what a woman is?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

And I respond, uh, Congressman Clyde, the way I did that -- Clyde, the way I did last year. I'm here to talk about the budget and how to support the students in your district.

REP. ANDREW CLYDE (R-GA-09):

Well, I think it's very important that you determine that you know how to define a woman. As Ms. Frankel mentioned over there. She wanted to be sure that men -- that women had their fair share of funding. If you can't define what a woman is, how in the world can you determine that they get their fair share of funding?

If you cannot -- if you cannot understand and clearly define what a woman is, how can you make rules that protect women's rights? You can't. So I would ask you to please respect this committee and the US Congress by answering my question.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I respect, uh, your role. I respect this committee, and I said I'm here to talk about the budget. And if you have a question about the budget, I'd be happy to respond.

REP. ANDREW CLYDE (R-GA-09):

I'm asking you a question and you're refusing to answer.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I'd be happy to respond to questions about the budget, which is why I'm here.

REP. ANDREW CLYDE (R-GA-09):

Um, you're here to answer whatever questions I want to ask of you and this question directly correlates to the budget.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

We are asking for a \$22 million increase for the office for Civil Rights, so that we can --

REP. ANDREW CLYDE (R-GA-09):

-- That's not my question. My question is can you define a woman?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

As I said earlier, all right, I'm not interested in.

REP. ANDREW CLYDE (R-GA-09):

-- OK. So you're not interested in respecting the question of a member of Congress. All right, your answer is cagey, evasive and reveals to me that your inability -- you have an inability to serve and protect the interests of young women, especially women athletes in this country. Female athletes are having their safety and rights violated by biological males competing in women's sports.

And as a result, our nation's women and young girls are suffering the consequences. Yet despite the grave need for protections to cover female athletes, the Department of Education is moving to eradicate these protections by redefining gender in clear contradiction to biology through its proposed Title IX rulemaking. Mr. Secretary, I hope you realize this proposed rule unilaterally forces schools to allow biological males to participate in women's athletics, thereby threatening to withhold -- by threatening to withhold federal assistance from schools across the nation, assistance that is currently used to benefit all students I might add.

So do you think a woman's safety is in jeopardy by allowing biological males who claim to be women to compete in women's sports?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

All students should feel welcome and connected to our schools and the protection of students is something we take very seriously. We are, as you know, in a rulemaking process for Title IX. I can't get into specifics on what our proposal will be. I can tell you that we have had hundreds of thousands of comments that we take very seriously comments that have different perspectives, which is why it's really important that we listen and reread all those comments before we respond with a rule.

REP. ANDREW CLYDE (R-GA-09):

OK, um, but you haven't answered my question. Do you think women's safety is in jeopardy by allowing biological males who claim to be women to compete in women's sports?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I believe all students should be safe in school and should be protected and all students should be welcome in our schools. Again, I see that --

REP. ANDREW CLYDE (R-GA-09):

-- OK. So you're not going to answer my question. You know, I'll tell you something. I'm very thankful, but -- no, you're not answering my question. You're filibustering. I'm very thankful that the NAIA, the National Association

of Intercollegiate Athletics, has decided to only allow biological female student athletes to participate in female sports.

The NAIA understands. They understand the safety issue here. They understand that it protects women's achievements. They understand the hard work of women needs to be honored and the NAIA understands that they need to prevent the stealing of future honor and accomplishments from women by allowing biological men to take those honors, honors that that and hard work that women have worked years and years and years to accomplish and yet it's not happening.

So do you think that biological males who claim to be women should be allowed to use women's locker rooms?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

We're in the Title IX -- Title IX regulations process and you know sir that I cannot speak premature to the rules being put --

REP. ANDREW CLYDE (R-GA-09):

-- I'm asking your opinion. I'm not asking --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

-- As an educator and as a father, I want to make sure all students in schools feel welcomed, seen and protected if that I can answer that. As a lifelong educator, that's something that I've fought for and that's what I'm fighting for as secretary of Education.

REP. ANDREW CLYDE (R-GA-09):

I yield back.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Mr. Edwards?

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Doctor Cardona, thanks for being with us this afternoon. Let's -- let's begin with this. How many public schools, let's say, K through 12, have you visited in the last 12 months, Just roughly?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Um, in the last 12 months?

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

Public -- public K-through-12 school?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I couldn't give you an exact number, but I would say dozens. I would say dozens at least.

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

What about charter schools that serve K through 12 students? How many?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I can tell you, I recently visited one. I -- some of the other schools that I visited might have been charters. I couldn't tell you off the top of my head. Yeah.

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

Thank thank you for that honest answer. I'd like to continue the conversation, my friend, Mr. Ciscomani began a while ago on charter schools because your -- your response really piqued my interest in, in, in a number of ways. What -- what are your views, what are your opinions of charter schools and the role that they play in preparing folks for -- young people for life and uh working careers today?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Sure, thank you for the opportunity to respond to that. Uh, you know, not only in this role but in previous roles, uh, as a -- as an education leader, I've always valued parents' ability to choose where they want their children to attend, whether it's a public, local, public school, a technical school, a charter school or even a private school.

I myself is chose to go to a technical high school. I didn't go to my neighborhood school. So I'm a believer in choice, student choice and in parent choice. I'm a believer in, um, public charter schools being an option for families who choose to not attend the local school or send their children to a school that might have a specific focus whether that's, you know, STEM or a different area that is of interest to students, similar to magnet schools.

So I've always been fine with that. What I'm not in favor of is public education dollars being used to fund private tuitions for schools that are often non-inclusive as much as the community needs it. So that's what I'm really concerned about. And that's what I'm not in favor of.

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

And so um, you -- you had said, well, we recognize there's been a proposed \$40 million cut to -- to the charter school program. And during a Department of Education briefing on the president's budget, your staff stated that the cut was due to a lack of interest.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

That's right.

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

Can you help me better understand the basis in that statement? Are there any -- any -- any surveys, any data that you're pointing to that says there's a lack of interest because -- and the reason I asked that is because I'm not sensing that from my district. In fact, folks in my district seem to be more interested in more choices for educating their children.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Sure, thank you and I'd be happy to have my staff follow up with yours to give you the specifics. But I will tell you that the demand has been decreasing for this competitive grant. I can't say that in some pockets of our country there's a -- there's not a greater demand for charter schools. That's not what I'm saying here.

What I'm saying is for this grant, \$400 million grant, there's less uh demand for it. Um, we anticipate that we're going to still be able to make the same number of awards as previous years. And what I've learned from my staff when looking into this is that oftentimes we're frontloading.

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

And so you've -- you've answered my question, I'm sorry, we're -- we're -- we're -- I'm going to run out of time, but there's more I'd like to to -- to do here. So there's not been as many request as what I hear. Have you gone as deep to find out why there have not been as many requests?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Again, I can have more information sent to you from staff who do work with grantees and who get feedback from grantees um because that's a critical part of what we do when we're putting out grants.

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

So let me -- let me just take my last minute to -- to share a couple thoughts I see. I hear there's a greater demand for charter schools for a number of reasons. And I'd suggest, and I'm anxious to see the data that you're going to provide to -- to this committee, there may be a lot of other reasons that there's not a request for as many grants.

One is 107-page application, which I think speaks to Mr. Cameron's point about uh regulation and the -- and -- and the difficulty. I also suggest that maybe there are income requirements that are preventing people for applying for grants. In some cases, I know they've been too low. And in some cases, I know that they've been too high.

One of the reasons that I know that folks do not apply for charter schools, uh, are that they cannot receive grants of substantial form to send their children to a charter school. Maybe -- maybe a particular grant that they can receive in a state would -- would offer a small amount, but they can't afford the greater amount. And, uh, I'll just summarize by saying the folks in my district very strongly believe in charter schools and the niche that they provide and that they had rather have choices for their education for a sundry of reasons. So thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Thank you. Mr. Edwards. Um, Mr. Secretary, you're very popular. So we're going to go on a few more questions. Um, what we'll do, we'll do a second round, but we'll do it limited to three minutes because I know some members have a few follow-up questions. I want to go forward and -- and so I'll kick off the first question. Um, last summer, of course, you remember the Supreme Court struck down the -- the president's one-time student loan cancellation program and after more than a three-year pause, borrowers started a loan repayment back last fall. Uh, can you tell us what is the share of borrowers now repaying their student loans?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I do recall having that information reported to me soon after we got back, and I think the number -- I want to say in the 60 percent compared to what it was before. It was maybe 10 or 15 points below, but I don't want to misspeak. So, what I'll do, Chairman, is have that information sent to you today.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

So, how does that compare to the -- before the pause?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Um-hmm. Well, we were dealing with over a million defaults before, and we saw progress ramping up. We -- we did implement many programs, sir, to help borrowers who were struggling to make repayment, the Fresh Start program. So, there were a lot of new things that we put in place to help borrowers who were struggling to get back on. So, I can have that information -- have my team reach out to you with that.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

OK, you can follow up with them, yeah. And as I mentioned, the department has touted that the Biden administration has found ways to cancel \$144 billion in student loans. The department is also pursuing debt cancellation through a negotiated rulemaking process that has created a one year "transition period," during which borrowers won't face consequences like negative credit reporting if they don't make the repayments.

It seems like a lot of mixed messages so -- that are being sent. What exactly is the department communicating to borrowers about paying back their loans?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Yeah. Thank you for that. And, you know, that -- that one year period where we weren't sending information to crediting agencies, we heard from many, many borrowers who were struggling to make that first payment and get back on after having about three years of a pause, so we wanted to make sure that we get them back on their feet so they're successful.

So, we limit the number of defaults, because that's never good for them or the local economy. So, I think in terms of mixed messaging, we wanted to make sure that they come on smoothly. For many of these folks, this was the first time they were ever going to make a payment because it was paused after they graduated. So, you know, we feel that the steps that we took to ease them back on, communicate more effectively, communicate more regularly, find those folks who we didn't hear from, we put a lot of work -- FSA did a lot of

work to try to make that process as smooth as possible so we could reduce the number of defaults that are -- that our borrowers are facing.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Well, wouldn't you think that the department's repeated promises of debt cancellation affect a borrower's interest in repaying their loans as well as the decision of current students about how much to borrow?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

No, that's -- that's a fair question. And -- and to be very frank, part of our communication was you have to restart payments, and these are some things that we're doing to fix a broken system. You may be a part of that. You may not. But it doesn't negate the need to go back to repayment. We were very careful with our messaging to prevent what you're referring to.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Thank you.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Ms. DeLauro?

FULL COMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER ROSA DELAURO (D-CT-03):

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me just see if I can get in two questions, one on learning loss. The committee, we did -- the Democrats worked with the president and with you, \$130 billion to K through 12 schools in the American Rescue Plan, 20 percent to deal with learning loss. Recovering from the pandemic, it was -- has been a struggle.

Recovery is underway. Between -- spring of 2022, 2023 students nationwide recovered one-third of their learning loss in math, one-quarter of their losses in reading. We need to continue on. But the strategy is ensuring states and districts focus like a laser on evidence-based responses to learning loss. One question. Can you describe how your department is driving this important work across the country dealing with learning loss? In terms of the public service loan forgiveness program, we know that, prior to the Biden administration, the program was broken. 7,000 borrowers have ever received forgiveness. This deals with teacher shortage. The question is, there have been improvements made. \$62.5 billion in student debt has been canceled for 871,000 borrowers. The improvements to the PSLF have been essential in helping us to retain top notch public service. How is your department streamlining the experience for borrowers participating in PSLF?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you. So, look, we are -- we should be just as concerned about our literacy rates, our math rates as we were, you know, when the pandemic hit.

FULL COMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER ROSA DELAURO (D-CT-03):

Right. Right.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

We are seeing recovery with the American Rescue Plan. We've seen -- we recovered a third of the pandemic era learning loss in math, a quarter in reading. Math twice as much growth last year, reading five times as much growth. I'm not proud of where we are, but I just want to paint the picture that the American Rescue Plan dollars focused money on achievement gaps is critical.

The gains for black students from '22 to '23 were greater than any year since 2009, OK? We need to continue to invest in -- in the strategies that work. And we're going to continue pushing Title I. That's why we're pushing that. Moving to PSLF, look, the president announced Monday we're talking about teachers, nurses, veterans, police officers, firefighters, who are choosing to go into public service.

And talk about barriers, we need to remove barriers. My mentality is we should be going to them, telling them you worked for ten years, you've paid your loans for ten years, you're -- you're done. These are public servants that choose to make the community better, so we're trying to streamline the process that way.

But as you noted, \$62 billion in debt relief. It went from 7,000 people in the four years in the last administration to over 840,000 in three years with us. We're committed to fixing a broken system. PSLF is a good example of that.

FULL COMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER ROSA DELAURO (D-CT-03):

Look forward to working with you offline on what the progress is on learning loss, because I think that's information that's --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Absolutely.

FULL COMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER ROSA DELAURO (D-CT-03):

Easy to get out, and how successful the PSLF program has been.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Absolutely.

FULL COMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER ROSA DELAURO (D-CT-03):

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Dr. Harris?

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Thank you very much. Two -- just two quick things. First of all, just to follow up on the Title IX, you know, the NAI just announced its policy, that it's not going to allow males to participate in female sports, biological males to participate in female sports. And they're numerous. I mean, they -- I think there are over 200 NAI -- NAI colleges.

Your Title IX rule doesn't in any way threaten their ability to cooperate with federal funding, would it?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

So, thank you for that question. Congressman Clyde mentioned that earlier as well. You know, as I said before, I'm not sure if I said it when you were asking questions, but we are in the regulation process, which we have, just for athletics alone, over 150,000 comments that we're going to review carefully before we come up with a proposed rule.

So, for me to be speaking about the -- on what impact it would have on the recent rule you made reference to -

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Yeah.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Would be premature.

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

But -- but you're telling me the department -- I mean, that's within the range of consideration, to basically educationally defunding at the federal level institutions that don't -- that wouldn't cooperate with your mandate

to allow men to participate in women's sports? I mean, that's within the range of something you're considering, or off the -- that's off the table?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Is your question that whether the -- the announcement that you made reference to this week --

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Yes.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Would impact how our Title IX regulations would roll out?

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

No. Would that -- could that potentially threaten their ability to participate in -- in federal education funding --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Oh.

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Such as student loans, Pell grants, things like that?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I see what you're saying. So, again, as I said earlier, you know, we are committed to moving quickly on our Title IX regulation. And for me to comment on a regulation that's still in process, when we have the process -- you know, we have to go through that. For me to talk about it before it's out would be premature, and I wouldn't want to do a disservice to the -- the thorough work that we have to do to read through the comments and -- and consider them before making a decision.

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Sure. I would -- I would just hope that the administration doesn't defund hundreds of colleges because they think that biological men shouldn't participate in sports with biological women. I mean, I'd just hope that. But that's -- I'm only one of 150,000 comments, I guess. Serious subject. Many universities, including the University of Maryland, is considering a BDS sanction policy.

Is the department willing to stand up for our allies in Israel and limit educational funding to those universities that implement BDS sanctions?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

You know, we're -- we take -- we take anti-Semitism, anti-Arab, anti-Muslim comments very seriously. We take what's happening on our college campuses very seriously, which is why, since October 7th, we've done more than any other administration not only to provide open investigations of -- of these issues or investigations from the Office for Civil Rights, but we've done a lot to make resources available to college leaders, to families, ensuring that freedom of speech and safety can coexist on college campuses.

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Do you consider BDS policies to be anti-Semitic?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Without looking at a BDS policy in front of me, I don't want to make a comment on something that I haven't reviewed. And I think --

REP. ANDY HARRIS (R-MD-01):

Thank you very much. I yield back.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Ms. Frankel?

REP. LOIS FRANKEL (D-FL-22):

Thank you. Well, with all due respect to my colleagues' concern about the men in the women's sports, which I think is probably not a really big issue in this country, but here's something that you should be concerned about, which is the -- the rights and girls -- of women and girls to have reproductive freedom.

I said it again. I'm going to say it again. Since the overturning of Roe v Wade, one-third of women in this country of reproductive age have lost access to legal abortion. That's about 25 million women. So, I would respectfully suggest, if you really care about girls and women, care about their access to be fully in charge of their health care and their future.

Now, with that said, I do have a question, Mr. Secretary, and this is about book banning. According to the American Library Association, in 2023 a record 4,200 different books were targeted for bans in schools and libraries nationwide, with Florida and Texas leaving leading the nation. I live in Florida.

This dangerous censorship is overwhelmingly targeting LGBTQ+ content and books about black history. In Florida, believe it or not, we've banned books about Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and even a book about two male penguins raising a chick together. How -- how is your department handling this? Are you sending out guidance?

What -- what actions are you taking to make sure that diverse material remains available to students?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you, Congresswoman Frankel. You know, the topic of -- of book banning has really been -- we've seen an increase in that tremendously. The number of -- of titles targeted by and -- for censorship in public libraries increased by 92 percent over the last year, 92 percent. School libraries, it increased 11 percent, and 47 percent of those titles are books about LGBTQI or BIPOC individuals.

So, that -- that shares kind of the perspective of which books are being, you know, targeted. We recognize how important this is and how -- while we don't at the Department of Education dictate curriculum, we do feel that we needed to make sure that we have materials and supports available. So, the Office for Civil Rights will continue to support the public, but also our school communities in understanding the rights.

We -- we hold trainings for schools, for libraries, and for educational stakeholders on, you know, laws and how to -- how to address situations when they're needing help when it comes to book -- book banning.

REP. LOIS FRANKEL (D-FL-22):

Thank you very much. Yield back.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

[Off mic]

REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA-05):

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Secretary, in the two years prior to my time in office, Congress provided almost \$200 billion through the CARES Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplement Appropriations Act, and the American Rescue Plan for K through 12. Those dollars were -- were to be used to improve online learning capability, to sanitize schools with special equipment, to purchase PPE, and to address learning loss caused by school closures.

Do you believe that this funding provided for K through 12 schools was appropriately spent?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Yes, I do.

REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA-05):

OK. While some of that funding may have been appropriately spent, we saw misuse of funds too, providing new synthetic turf for football stadiums, baseball field drainage improvements, and brand new weight rooms. Secretary, it's been between three to four years since these three bills passed, and the funds are set to expire in September.

Have the schools spent all of their funding to date?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you, Congresswoman. I was a -- I was a commissioner of education in Connecticut during those years, and I recall the important efforts that were taken to provide PPEs and to ensure maintenance of air handling systems that, to be very frank with you, for decades have been, you know, deferred maintenance -- had deferred maintenance.

So, I do know those dollars were used to safely reopen our schools quickly. I know in Connecticut, for example, we -- we focused on that, and we relied on those dollars. We know that 99.6 percent of CARES ESSER has been used, CRRSA ESSER 99 percent. 68 percent of the current \$130 billion of the American Rescue Plan dollars have been used, with the drawdown date coming up soon.

And then, while you didn't ask that, I would want to share also we have homeless children and youth dollars provided by Congress, and 44 percent of those dollars have been drawn down. And we're working closely with states to continue to draw them down.

REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA-05):

I just -- I want to get to my point. I looked on your website this morning, Louisiana still has only spent 70 percent of the total that they were awarded during the pandemic. That's concerning to me because, in your budget, you proposed a new \$8 billion mandatory program labeled the Academic Acceleration and Achievement Grants.

The justification for this specifically labels this new program as a way for the nation's school to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, and specifically addresses learning loss due to COVID. Why should we appropriate more money for this program, this mandatory program, when we haven't already spent the money that was given during the pandemic for learning loss specifically?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you. And -- and I say this respectfully, but there are many students in Louisiana and other states that are reading well below the -- the level. So, those dollars are critically important to sustain efforts of tutoring, summer school programming. And 70 percent in Louisiana is about average. I said the country's average is 68 percent ESSER drawdown.

But if you talk to any school principal, administrator, superintendent, board member, they'll tell you, because I've been speaking to them, those dollars are being used and they expect them to be drawn down. They're for social workers, reading teachers, additional afterschool programs. So, they are obligated dollars.

They just haven't been drawn down because the work hasn't been performed. But they're also telling you in Louisiana and other places that they're concerned that when this ARP dollar sunsets, the needs of the students are still great. So, I encourage you to support the budget, and -- and the \$8 billion for tutoring, for additional reading support, and summer programming.

REP. JULIA LETLOW (R-LA-05):

Thank you. I've gone over my time. But I would just expect us to be a good steward of taxpayer dollars. I don't believe in appropriating more funds when we haven't already spent the funds that we are -- already sent. Thank you. I yield back.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

[Off mic]

REP. BARBARA LEE (D-CA-12):

Thank you very much. Mr. Secretary, I am really delighted to see that the president's budget request includes \$21.3 million in funding for strengthening HBCUs master's program, which supports STEM and tech education among black graduate students. The department's focus on supporting emerging STEM and tech black graduate students is extremely important, and we know that there's still a lot of work to be done.

I'm excited that I'm introducing once again the Computer Science for All Act with Representatives Fleischmann and DeIBene. This has been a bipartisan bill since President Obama actually announced Computer Science for All, and we've been working together to invest in preparing our young people for the STEM jobs of the future by providing the training and learning opportunities, especially in low income and in underserved communities. So, I wanted to just find out, in terms of your administration, what are you doing, short of our legislation passing, to enhance access to STEM and tech education and workforce outreach efforts to underserved communities, especially K through 12 students who are low income and students of color?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you. Thank you for that question and for your work on this, because it is -- it is critical. It's critical not only to level the playing field, make sure all students have access to good STEM programming, but quite frankly, if we're going to meet the moment with CHiPs and Science Act, with the, you know, energy provisions under the Inflation Reduction Act, and -- and even some of the infrastructure work that's happening, STEM has to be a bigger part of our K-12 programming and our higher ed programs.

So, you know, going specifically to HBCUs, you know, we're asking for an increase of \$35 million to bring it up to \$431 million for HBCUs. What I heard from HBCU leaders is, look, we are ready to -- to go for these contracts. We are ready to give our students the same opportunities that students in other universities have. However, due to decades of underinvestment in HBCUs, we don't have the infrastructure so we have to make sure that we have the STEM labs. We have the -- the -- the -- you know, the -- the same facilities that'll give our students those -- access to those -- those programs. So, we're putting dollars in minority science and teach -- engineering improvement programs.

There's \$60 million there, FIPSE, again, a lot of it targeting towards minority serving institutions to level them up, make sure that they have the same opportunity. In K-12, we are trying to -- what I call evolving our high schools, evolving in the sense that our K-12 institutions need to be better aligned to the opportunities that our student's going to have after graduation.

A lot of these STEM careers are available with -- you don't need to have a four year degree. You could have a two year degree. You could have a credential. I'm -- I'm visiting schools where students are graduating with an associate's degree in high school before their high school degree. So, we need to push that through our innovation dollars, through our STEM dollars, but make sure that these STEM career pathways or these STEM classes are connected to the opportunities that exist for these students.

REP. BARBARA LEE (D-CA-12):

Thank -- thank you very much. And this is one of our bipartisan bills --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Yes. Good.

REP. BARBARA LEE (D-CA-12):

Incidentally, that we've been working on for years.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Good.

REP. BARBARA LEE (D-CA-12):

Thank you.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Mr. Moolenaar?

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Secretary, just to follow up on some of the STEM related questions at universities, the National Security Presidential Memorandum 33 outlines research security requirements for US government supported R&D programs at universities across the country. If a university fails to comply with this guidance, the secretary of Education can suspend or deny federal financial aid to the university.

Are you familiar with this guidance and the authority you've been given?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I'm -- are you referring to Section 117?

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Yeah, that's -- that's -- well, that's part of the Higher Education Act. This is actually the President's National Security Presidential Memorandum 33.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Okay. Yes, I'm sure my team is on that. I can get more information on it. I don't have specifics on it now, but I'd be happy to follow up with you.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Have you used the -- this authority?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Happy to have my team follow up on you. We take those issues very seriously. And we know that accountability of -- the expectations are part of the work that we do at the Department of Education.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Can you tell me what steps you're taking to ensure that universities are complying with this guidance?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Happy to follow up with you with more specifics.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Would you -- do you plan to suspend federal financial aid when universities fail to comply?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

We will follow the law as written by Congress to make sure that we're upholding the expectations of compliance.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Are you sharing PRC related information obtained through section 117, as you mentioned, with the FBI and other agencies? The Department of Education recently found that numerous large and well-resourced institutions have aggressively pursued and accepted significant amounts of money from the People's Republic of China while failing to comply with the transparency requirements of Section 117 of the Higher Education Act? Are you sharing that information?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Yes.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Okay. The public version of the department's Section 117 report dated October 2020 is redacted. Will you commit to providing the members of this subcommittee with a classified briefing to discuss this and other classified information conduct -- connected with the Section 117 investigations?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Are you referring to a report that was redacted in the last administration?

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Yes.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Okay. I can have my team reach back out to yours about that.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Do you have someone in particular on your team who's reviewing the information obtained through the department's Section 117 investigations?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I certainly do, and I can have that information shared with you. Let me -- let me tell you, Congressman, that we've reported 38,900 foreign gifts worth \$21.4 billion. We take this very seriously. And I think it's really important that the American people know which gifts are coming to which universities.

We've been more transparent than any other administration. And we work closely with FBI's National Counterintelligence Task Force sharing information regularly to ensure not only transparency but that, where investigations need to happen, the -- the correct authorities are involved.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

Will you commit to providing the members of this subcommittee with a classified briefing on this?

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

I will have my team get back to you on whether or not that is going to be possible. But for me, transparency is really important and sharing with you is very important.

REP. JOHN MOOLENAAR (R-MI-02):

I have to say Mr. Secretary, I appreciate the spirit in which you say these things. But I am disappointed in the response you've given, because I -- it doesn't appear to me that you do take this as seriously, or you don't take the subcommittee as seriously, to offer information to us today. So, I am disappointed with that.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Sorry you feel that way. Thank you.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Mr. Edwards?

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

Thank you again, Mr. Chair. Mr. Secretary, one of the things that I continually hear from folks in my district and from all around America is that Washington seems to have forgotten so much of the working class. And I see no better example of that than the student debt relief program that's being suggested right now, where folks with dirt and grease under their fingernails are being asked to pay for folks' college education that wear a crest on their sport coat.

I'm going to give you a chance right now in the time that I have left to explain to that working class why this proposed program, this debt relief program is -- is fair and not turning its back, our back, on those folks that have calluses on their hands and really have built this country.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you for sharing your sentiment. I'll say this. If you look at the four million people we've helped and the 30 million that the president proposed, those are the working class. Those are exactly the folks that you're talking about. When we're talking about increasing Pell Grants, it's those we're talking about.

Unlike multimillionaires that have tax breaks, we are fighting for working class people. We are pushing for dollars --

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

Mr. -- Mr. Secretary, I'm -- I'm talking about the folks that are plunging toilets every day and -- and -- and cutting pipes and laying bricks that didn't have an opportunity to go to college, and now we're asking them to pay for the education of the folks that you're trying to describe there. That's two -- that's -- those are different classes.

So, tell -- tell the bricklayers and pipefitters out there right now, you have the floor for a minute and three seconds, why they should feel good about paying for these student debt relief programs.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

We are not only increasing opportunities for those pipefitters to have opportunities to -- to get more credentials, to get more pay, and some of the legislation that was passed, some of it in bipartisan fashion are going to increase the opportunities for -- for those folks that you're talking about. But those folks also have children that are going to school.

And those -- many of those folks have children who are saying I can't go to college because I can't afford it because it's gotten out of control. We are fixing a broken system. This debt relief work that we're doing shouldn't happen forever because now we have the SAVE program so the children of those bricklayers, those who are building our country, those people that deserve an opportunity to be thought about as well, their children are going to have access that they wouldn't have had before the Biden administration.

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

But Mr. -- Mr. Secretary, however, the -- the -- the parents of those childrens that are -- those children that are laying bricks and -- and -- and fitting pipes --

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Um-hmm.

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

Have already made their -- their decision. They're into their career and they're being asked to pay for a different class of folks' education. I -- I -- I find that just tremendously unfair. And I'll be anxious to go back and -- and play your comments over to the folks back at home and see if you've convinced them about that.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Happy to work with you to --

REP. CHUCK EDWARDS (R-NC-11):

Thank you.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Support those folks.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Ms. DeLauro, I think you've got some closing -- a closing comment.

FULL COMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER ROSA DELAURO (D-CT-03):

Yes.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Okay.

Closing Statements

FULL COMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER ROSA DELAURO (D-CT-03):

Secretary Cardona, I took very seriously some things that you said in your opening statement, and I will quote. Tell me if this is accurate. We must defend public education, not defund public education. I believe that this is our charge as federal public servants, to protect and to strengthen the federal programs that serve as the cornerstone of public education.

And quite frankly, I've watched with dismay both in the last budget deliberations and just listening today, and I'm -- I'm sure that this will continue, where some of my Republican colleagues view that there is a need for us to defund public education and look to protecting private institutions. Now, what is the charge of public education?

Who does public education serve? As I understand it, nearly 50 million students in public schools, over 3.6 public school teachers. And yet, in the last budget, there was an attempt to cut 80 percent of -- of teachers, almost 224,000 teachers, to jettison them, public school teachers. This is -- the charge of a public education is for the 25 million students who are supported by Title I services for high need populations.

So, we have an enormous responsibility to deliver for the students in a system that should be our country's great equalizer, to help those bricklayers, to help their kids, to help the pipefitters, to help the first generation of kids like you and myself to be able to get to school. We need to lift up and we need to be supporting public education, combat chronic absenteeism, address learning loss, as you're doing, dealing with students who have mental health needs, help them to recover, and we must support the basic needs of students in college to deliver on the vital goals of Claiborne Pell, a man to the manor born, as affluent as anyone in our history, who viewed public education for the sons and daughters of working families as something that the federal government should be deeply involved in so that we have an educated citizenry.

So, it is -- and it's a real concern of mine of what is happening. And I won't point to the many ways in which in the last budget discussion we were eroding public education. That's not what you are doing. That is not what President Biden is doing. You take this responsibility very seriously. And I will just say for one that I stand ready to support your work, to support the continued investment in public education as a necessity for the strength, the future strength, whether it is our national security, our domestic security.

Wherever else we're going, if we do not have a strong public education system, we are doomed as a nation. I thank you for your service. I thank the president, and I thank you for your -- both of your commitments to making sure that the vast majority of these people -- people in this country have the opportunity not just to succeed but to thrive through education.

Many thanks, Mr. Secretary, for being here.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Thank you, Ms. DeLauro. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. And Mr. Kean [Ph] thank you for being here as well. You got off easy today. So -- but it is good to have both of you here, and we look forward to working with you. Thank you for taking a lot of these comments and questions that our members brought to you seriously.

And they -- I think they reflect what they hear back in their districts. It's not, I don't think, something that they just -- or any of our questions are something we just came up with out of the blue. It -- it's things that we hear back home, and I hope that you can take that message back to the department with you.

And uh, we look forward to your follow up on some of these issues that we're -- as we move forward. So, with that, again, thank you both, and we look forward to working with you as we continue on through the budget process.

HONORABLE MIGUEL CARDONA:

Thank you.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-AL-04):

Dismissed.