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May 11, 2023

**RE:** Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies: “A Review of the President’s Fiscal Year 2024 Funding Request and Budget Justification for the Department of Education”

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### Witness Panel

- **Miguel Cardona**, Secretary, Department of Education, [Testimony](#)

### Overview

On Thursday, May 11, 2023, the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies: “A Review of the President’s Fiscal Year 2024 Funding Request and Budget Justification for the Department of Education.” Chair Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Ranking Member Shelley Capito (R-WV) presided. Members asked a range of questions regarding how the increase in the education budget will address mental health concerns, literacy, and an increase of support programs throughout all learning institutions in the United States. Please see the full details of the hearing [here](#).

### Opening Statements

#### **Chair Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)**

- Nondefense investments support the learning and investments of students across the country
- Bill passed by Republicans forces deep cuts to education and training programs
- This bill would take away \$17.5 billion from educational opportunities
- The bill would also take away funds from programs that support minority students
- Maintaining education is critical to making the United States competitive on the international world stage
- The budget proposes an increase of \$2.2 billion for federal educational programs
- Many students face a mental health crisis, so this budget could assist in increasing mental health services in schools

#### **Ranking Member Shelley Capito (R-WV)**

- Pandemic-related school closures have set the country’s education back by two decades
- There was a 5-point decline in testing history for the first time
- The new proposed budget is almost a carbon copy of the FY 2023 budget, which was recently rejected and proposed unrealistic spending
- This budget is about a 13% increase from FY 2023 budget
- The administration has undertaken an effort for widespread student loan forgiveness without providing a legal basis
- Little faith that an increase in the education budget will actually be used in educational systems
- Instead, support grant programs that best meet the demands of local schools

### Witness Testimony

#### **Miguel Cardona**

- The budget makes it possible to expand high-quality pre-school across America
- Students with disabilities are also able to be included more holistically in the learning process

- Title I Critical Funding allows for additional individualized support and funds across the country and are better prepared to succeed
- The budget investment of over \$3 billion to develop and retain a strong educational workforce
- The budget investment would allow for more mental health providers within schools
- \$200 million investment in rebuilding high schools
- The budget also invests in career and technology education which is something our country currently lacks
- The budget will also assist in making college accessible to all students

### Question and Answer

- **Chair Baldwin** talked about how the Republicans passed a bill that would be detrimental to the education system from preschool to college. Baldwin asked Cardona if there was anything he would like to add about how the cut is bad for the schools.
  - Cardona said that the budget is important for students to recover from the learning loss of the pandemic. It would also limit the number of teachers available to support students.
  - Baldwin asked Cardona to expand on his request for the Career Connected High School Program and how it will leverage resources provided through the core Perkins One Title State Program. Cardona said the \$200 million for grants is intended to evolve high schools to make sure they are connected to pathways into careers
  - Baldwin asked what are the ways that schools have used their Perkin's funding. Cardona said that schools use these funds to develop a curriculum that allows students to work in the technical field after leaving the K-12 system. Systematizing the work is the most important thing that these funds would assist within schools.
- **Ranking Member Capito** asked if repayment would start no later than September 1<sup>st</sup> regardless of how the Supreme Court may rule on the loan forgiveness
  - Cardona said they are committed to resuming payments
  - Capito asked if the services were communicating with borrowers about the upcoming return. Cardona said that the Supreme Court will rule in favor of the targeted debt relief, and they plan on making sure it is a smooth reentry for payment.
  - Capito asked if they are communicating with them now about those facts. Cardona said they have communicated with them.
  - Capito asked if they are aware of the dates. Cardona said they are aware.
  - Capito asked what the assurances are that the Department of Education will stay with the core operations if they are given an increase in budget spending. Cardona said FSA has been focused on fixing a broken system, including public service loan forgiveness. The work is critical for these services to be administered.
  - Capito asked if the money in this budget is being used to forgive a loan. Cardona said no – that the funding is used to implement programs such as FASFA.
  - Capito asked when that would happen. Cardona said it would be this year, and they are expected more than 600,000 to have access to higher education.
- **Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI)** asked what steps are being taken to address the poor conditions of schools throughout the states
  - Cardona said two grants are being worked on to support healthy and equitable schools.
  - Reed asked what efforts will be made to increase literacy in the U.S. Cardona said there is a plan for students to get access to quality education.

- Reed asked how the 22% cut would affect students' education holistically. Cardona said cuts for teachers for students with disabilities, cuts for teachers for students with disabilities, and cuts in mental health support would all occur.
- **Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA)** said that investing in the education of America's youth is the only way the nation can thrive and grow. She said she was committed to making sure they are moving forward in a strong way. Murray asked how the department will prioritize how disproportionately harmed students will be helped through this budget.
  - Cardona said focusing on increasing targeted tutoring programs and engaging summer programs is what allows students who are struggling to increase their education. Supporting these programs through lifting up communities who are doing well in these practices.
  - Murray asked how to deal with the homelessness issue with students. Cardona said the American Rescue Plan provided support and liaisons to work with community partners to address basic needs for students so they are ready to learn.
- **Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS)** asked how the department and Congress can assist in broadening the reach of career and technical education programs in K-12 and community colleges.
  - Cardona said it is important to make sure these opportunities are connected to the schools to give students early exposure to the careers that are open to them, especially in rural communities.
  - Hyde-Smith asked what the programs are doing to support students. Cardona said students engage in state-wide jobs where they do not have to leave their home state.
  - Hyde-Smith asked how to incentivize industry groups in their investment in workforce training initiatives to train students for these technical jobs. Cardona said the Rural Strategy and Action Team is tasked with preparing students in that way.
  - Hyde-Smith asked what the department will do to support charter school funding. Cardona said the same level of funding has been continued. They will continue to support charter schools, and the budget only focuses on other schools.
- **Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)** asked Cardona to talk about what the department is doing to provide clarity to school districts to ensure flexibility to complete projects that have been started.
  - Cardona said they are working with districts to make sure the projects are completed and remain in communication with them to use the funding to finish projects that are most helpful for students.
  - Shaheen asked if states have been given guidance about what is allowable and if the information is getting passed down to the districts. Cardona said the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education communicates regularly with state chiefs.
  - Shaheen asked if the Department of Education has a list of all the school districts in the country. Cardona said that they do, but the state superintendent's group is where the information is going.
  - Shaheen asked what the department is doing to combat the mental health crisis and substance misuse. Cardona said they are ensuring that the administrators and teachers are educated to support their students.
- **Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI)** asked if he had Cardona's commitment to supporting robust education for native Hawaiians Community Program
  - Cardona said yes.
  - Schatz asked if the department had the responsibility to deliver education to the Native Hawaiian community. Cardona said yes.
  - Schatz asked if he had Cardona's commitment to making sure that all of the people in the department understand that the native Hawaii's education needs to be supported.

Cardona said it will be very clear, and their actions have made it clear that they must support all naïve students.

- Schatz asked how the department is working with existing education providers to ensure that incarcerated students receive a smooth transition into the education system. Cardona said they have expanded programming and continuing this new program.
- Schatz asked if implementing armed guards in schools was a feasible option within the budget to improve school safety. Cardona said it would cost \$36 billion and would take from current efforts in learning to read and result in education staff being reduced.
- Schatz asked what Cardona's thoughts were on book bans. Cardona said it is alarming and that education should not be politicized or limited.
- **Sen. John Boozman (R-AR)** asked how the administration will use the budget to address the nationwide teacher shortage and how specifically how will the administration ensure that rural areas are not left behind when addressing these shortages.
  - Cardona said that the department is asking for dollars to support professional development as well as investing in recruitment programs to increase the number of teachers.
  - Boozman asked if the mental health of student-athletes was being addressed in any way and if the department has a special program to support student-athletes. Cardona said the budget asks for \$150 million to support mental health in higher education.
- **Chair Baldwin (D-WI)** asked how the department is using funds and authorities and how the department is coordinating with the Department of Health and Human Services, which has funding to increase student-based access to mental health services.
  - Cardona said mental health resources are not based on school personnel. The greater community has to be involved in supporting students with mental health. Also, supporting programs that are connected to the community is important in giving students the ability to have access to mental health resources. President charged them with using Medicaid to address mental health, and a shared model is critical.
- **Sen. Katie Britt (R-AL)** asked if Cardona agreed with the statement that a car and a house should be paid off because it is the expectation.
  - Cardona said he agreed with the statement.
  - Britt said she believed that the same logic should apply to student loans and asked Cardona for his perspective on that. Cardona said repayment is starting, but the HEROS Act provides the opportunity to provide a waiver for those impacted significantly by the pandemic.
  - Britt asked if the department was considering certain loan forgiveness measures or any similar measures after the pause expires. Cardona said the repayment restart is going to be done right. The targeted debt relief will address the concerns of some borrowers. Providing support for them is important.
- **Ranking Member Capito (R-WV)** said that the clarity with loan forgiveness is not clear. She also said the negative trends in test scores should be addressed by the department. Capito asked what the reasoning is for short-term PEL.
  - Cardona said short-term PEL reasoning is to make schools flexible and make sure there is accountability and quality.