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Is Education Department overreach
harming America's college students?

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Higher Ed Harassment

Is Education Department overreach harming America's college students?

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Career colleges targeted by ‘biased’ Biden bureaucracy with loss of student aid

By VALERIE RICHARDSON

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Biden administration has taken action to cut off federal aid to 35 postsecondary schools in the last three years, but don't expect to see Harvard or Columbia on that list.

Newly disclosed data shows that the nation's for-profit schools have landed in the cross hairs of the Department of Education's Office of Enforcement within Federal Student Aid, the agency that was reestablished shortly after President Biden took office.

Of the 35 institutions facing the loss of student aid, 23 are for-profit colleges with specialties such as cosmetology, information technology and medical administration, according to the list of actions on the StudentAid.gov/enforcement hub launched last month.

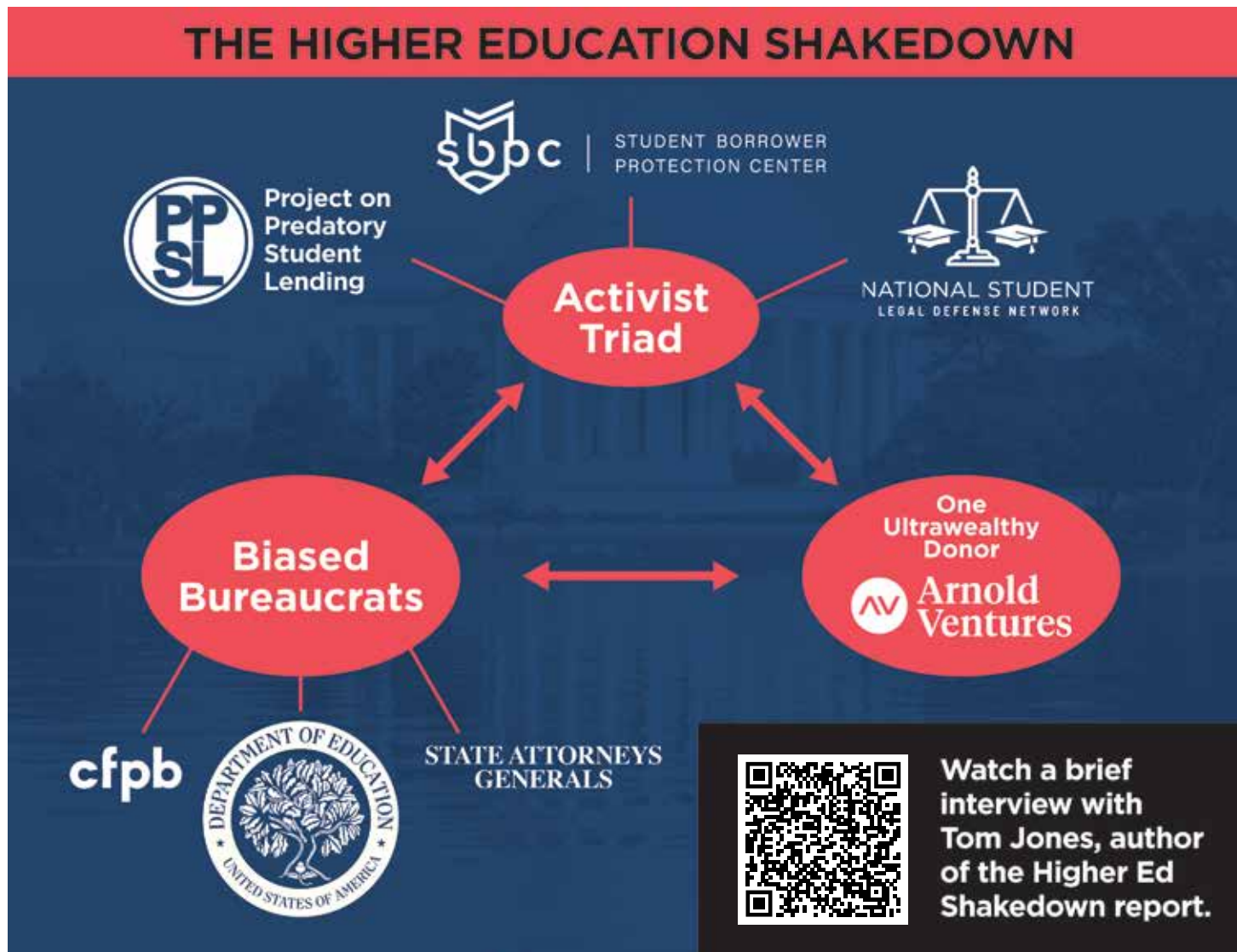
Five of the remaining schools are international programs in Europe and Australia, meaning that only seven U.S. public universities and private nonprofit colleges are facing what for American schools is a virtual death sentence.

The disclosures buttressed what the agency's critics have long suggested — that the Office of Enforcement might as well be named the Office of For-Profit Enforcement.

"I think this proves what we've been saying all along: that the Office of Enforcement has a singular biased focus," Thomas Jones, president of the American Accountability Foundation, told The Washington Times.

"Apparently the Biden-Harris Administration thinks the greatest problem in America's higher education is at the Ogle School of Hair Skin and Nails," Mr. Jones said in an email, "not the fact for example that the AVERAGE student loan debt at Cornell is \$41,124 and by their own reporting only 67% of the students in the college of arts and science have a job after graduation."

The administration's for-profit crackdown comes with the elite universities wrestling with rising antisemitism on campus, prompting the department's Office for Civil Rights to launch a flurry of Title VI investigations,



which should in theory jeopardize their access to federal student aid.

Adam Kissel, former deputy assistant education secretary in the Trump administration, said there's little chance of that happening.

"Nobody on the nonprofit side ever loses their federal funding. Title IX violation? You don't lose it. Title VI violation? You don't lose it. Free-speech violation? You're not going to lose it," Mr. Kissel said. "Only for these for-profit colleges do you actually lose it."

Overall, 87 enforcement actions were taken against 85 colleges. The most common penalty was fines levied for various infractions. The split between for-profit schools and nonprofit schools for all offenses was roughly even.

"As the data provided indicates, FSA has taken actions against a variety of types of

schools, including public, private non-profit and for-profit schools," the department said.

What the data also shows is that for-profit schools are more likely to be penalized than their nonprofit brethren, given that for-profit schools are outnumbered by their nonprofit brethren — including public four-year universities, community colleges and private colleges — in terms of numbers of institutions and enrollment.

Department figures show 3,646 nonprofit colleges operating versus 2,270 for-profit institutions in the 2020-21 academic year, the last year for which figures are available.

In terms of enrollment, for-profit schools aren't even close. In 2021, 14.6 million students were enrolled in nonprofit institutions versus 0.8 million in the for-profit sector, which includes tiny beauty and barber schools with fewer than 100 students.

The department said the office has been charged with investigating schools "that are suspected of wrongdoing and take action to hold schools accountable when it finds evidence of wrongdoing."

"We believe that holding schools accountable and protecting students and taxpayers is a nonpartisan issue," the department said.

Schools may be deemed ineligible for Title IV student financial aid for a number of reasons, including fiduciary mismanagement, loss of accreditation and making "misleading representations" to students, as shown in the Office of Enforcement's letters to the institutions.

One performing-arts school in Texas had its application for recertification denied after it moved and was unable to obtain a fire-inspection certificate at its new location.

The department's enforcement mechanisms include a tip line and undercover "secret shoppers," a unit unveiled last year that seeks to "crack down on institutions that lure students with lies."

Kristen Donoghue, the FSA's chief enforcement officer, told Inside HigherEd that the office will "always go where the facts take us and take action where we think it's appropriate."

As critics point out, the crackdown also comes with the FAS under fire for botching the Free Application for Federal Student Aid rollout, blowing the deadline to deliver financial-aid paperwork to students for the second year in a row.

FSA Chief Operating Officer Richard Cordray resigned in June amid the fallout, capping a fiasco that Mr. Jones linked to the office's focus on political priorities.

» see **TARGETED** | C6

Religious freedom should be protected, not threatened, by the government



By U.S. Rep. Tim Walberg

When it comes to religious discrimination on college campuses, the federal government should be vigorously defending religious freedoms, not encouraging crackdowns. Sadly, the Biden-Harris administration has chosen to pursue the latter. For many Christian colleges, these policies are not just bureaucratic or technical changes; they represent a direct attack on their foundational beliefs and values. Christian colleges and Christian groups on other campuses have been faced with a web of government edicts that threaten their future and the educational opportunities for thousands of students.

While the Department of Education has used many avenues to pursue an unfair and unconstitutional student loan debt transfer scheme, they've also used it as an opportunity to potentially punish institutions that hold values that do not cleanly align with progressive beliefs. By altering institution eligibility criteria for federal student aid, the Biden-Harris administration risks placing Christian colleges at a significant disadvantage. If these institutions cannot meet the new requirements or face increased scrutiny, the downstream effect is likely that students may find it more difficult to afford their education at these faith-based institutions.

The Biden-Harris Department of Education's shifting stance on accreditation may also pose a significant threat to Christian colleges because of the department's guidance to require institutions to receive prior approval before changing accreditors. Religious institutions could receive increased scrutiny if they want to develop a new partnership with an accreditor, potentially impacting their accreditation status and,



New directives could pressure colleges to limit or alter how they support religious groups and student organizations that express faith-based views, undermining the foundational principle of academic freedom and the right to religious expression.

consequently, their ability to operate effectively and provide quality education.

The department has also applied rules and judgments in an uneven and unfair manner, seemingly to target schools that hold values they disagree with. In multiple cases across the country, we've seen a pattern develop where certain institutions are treated in a manner inconsistent compared to other institutions, and due process is thwarted. They've used findings from program reviews and other technical means as tools to crack down on these schools while diverging from precedent. Another tool used has been to

levy unprecedented and disparate fines against Christian colleges. Ironically, many of the schools the Biden-Harris administration seems to view more favorably are the same schools with the most egregious track records when it comes to issues like antisemitism.

Unlike the Trump administration, which took measures to protect student liberties on campus through the "Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities" executive order, we've seen a significant departure in the policies pursued by the Biden-Harris administration. New directives could pressure

colleges to limit or alter how they support religious groups and student organizations that express faith-based views, undermining the foundational principle of academic freedom and the right to religious expression.

Additionally, religious groups on campuses face threats from some campus administrators. At the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs, administrators denied official registration to Ratio Christi, a Christian organization that allowed non-Christians membership. Without registered status, the group was forced to operate with decreased funding, limited meeting space, and more. The administrators made this decision because Ratio Christi maintained that group leadership for a Christian organization, such as themselves, should be Christian. For most, this seems like common sense, but school administrators sought to force the group to allow non-Christians to become leaders.

Other administrators seeking to enact similar policies will be empowered to do so because the Biden-Harris Department has proposed to roll back protections for religious student organizations. This is why I have introduced the Equal Campus Access Act with Sens. James Lankford (R-Okla.) and Tim Scott (R-S.C.). Our legislation would safeguard the rights of religious groups by ensuring they are not penalized or discriminated against for adhering to their religious beliefs. This has been the longstanding and accepted standard by our federal government, but it's become clear that religious groups and institutions are being threatened. We must not stand idly by. We must defend religious freedom and maintain ideological diversity.

These institutions and groups are dedicated to providing education that aligns with their deeply held beliefs, and they should not be forced to abandon their values. Religious institutions and groups should have the right to operate freely according to their convictions. Likewise, students should not have to decide between their education and their deeply held religious beliefs. America's educational diversity — and the fundamental right to religious freedom — depends on it.

Rep. Tim Walberg, the Dean of Michigan's House delegation, is currently serving his eighth term in Congress as the representative of southern Michigan. Based on his record of legislative accomplishment, Tim holds the designation as Michigan's most conservative member of Congress, according to the American Conservative Union's lifetime rankings.

Secretary Cardona's political bias is an attack on college choice



By Gerard Scimeca

It isn't hard to find examples of government incompetence, especially from the Department of Education (DoEd). Their ongoing fumbling of the rollout of the new Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), as one example, is a reminder that government just doesn't work properly for average people. And now, the New York Times is reporting FAFSA will be delayed yet again, again jeopardizing student's access to federal grants, work-study programs, and loans.

Incompetence, however, is far from the worst attribute of the Biden-Harris DoEd. For four years they have waged a savage ideological attack against non-traditional and career-oriented colleges, using their power over the student loan process to bring these schools to heel. If not reversed, the effect on college choice and our nation's work force will be devastating.

My organization dove into the administration's bias in our newest report, titled "Cardona Bias." We discovered the Department of Education uses three tactics to target career colleges while pushing the Biden-Harris free-college agenda.

Recent selective enforcement actions reveal how a biased Student Financial Aid Office of Enforcement exists almost exclusively to prosecute unconventional schools while the administration pursues an extreme "settle-and-sue" strategy to carry out unchecked student loan bailouts.

The Biden-Harris administration has routinely used the DoED to advance its political bias against career colleges – schools that offer flexible schedules and are popular among working parents, veterans, and minorities.

The Wall Street Journal dubbed Generation Z the "Toolbelt Generation," and rightly so. An unmistakable trend



The Biden-Harris administration has routinely used the DoED to advance its political bias against career colleges – schools that offer flexible schedules and are popular among working parents, veterans, and minorities.

has taken hold in higher education with more students turning their backs on the traditional four-year diploma and toward colleges that provide skilled training for in-demand, high-paid jobs. Last year, enrollment in vocational schools rose 16%, with students studying construction trades up 23% over the past five years. At the same time, Gallup found Americans' confidence in higher education has fallen to 36%, a sharp decline from just a few years ago.

Now, add the Biden-Harris administration's failed education policies that not only limit choice for all students, but heavily coddle traditional four-year institutions stocked with far-left professors and administrators.

Rather than focus on their federally mandated job and ensure young Americans can afford or reasonably finance a place on campus, the DoED has doubled down on its assault against career colleges – using harassment, litigation, and illegal loan forgiveness to advance their left-wing agenda of punishing and shuttering higher education options that don't align with their woke ideology.

Let's flash back to 2023 when the North District of California approved one of the first student loan bailouts with *Sweet v. Cardona*, essentially granting executive agencies the equivalent power as legislators. Biden's DoED

immediately maneuvered to cancel billions in student loans through this "sue-and-settle" agreement while handing down an assumption of guilt to more than 150 schools – with career colleges disproportionately affected.

Legal scholars are ringing alarm bells on the Biden-Harris crusade against career colleges. In an amicus brief filed with the Supreme Court for the Ninth Circuit, twenty state attorneys general argued that the "executive branch does not have unlimited policymaking power, nor an unlimited bank account to forgive student loan debt."

A few months later the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the Biden-Harris \$400 billion plan to cancel student loans for millions of Americans. While the massive student loan bailout agenda waits on appeals, the Department has moved onto other methods. A recent report from the American

Accountability Foundation (AAF) revealed how one office in the Department of Education – The Student Financial Aid Office of Enforcement – exists almost exclusively to prosecute career colleges and universities.

It's simple how these folks operate: identify a career college, presume their guilt, and run them out of business with just the stroke of a pen.

According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), of the thirteen colleges against which the enforcement office brought penalties, ten were non-traditional schools. The most common penalty imposed ended a college's access to federal student aid programs – a death sentence. And they're expanding their operations to target Christian schools, slapping a historic \$37.7 million dollar fine on Grand Canyon University earlier this year.

It's time for Congress to demand answers from this administration and end these dangerous tactics by defunding the enforcement office, stepping up oversight at the DoED, and fixing FAFSA. If left unchecked, the Department of Education will continue to wield unchecked executive authority at the peril of students across our nation.

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Gerard Scimeca is Chairman of Consumer Action for a Strong Economy.

Education Dept., hoping to avoid another disaster, to test FAFSA form in fall

By Tom Howell Jr.
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Biden administration faces a huge test this fall as high school seniors and their families wait to see if the college financial aid form is functional or a debacle like last year's form, which was supposed to offer a simplified process but only delivered misery.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, will not be widely available until December, meaning the Department of Education will miss the traditional start date of October for a second year in a row.

Instead, the department plans to beta-test the FAFSA form with thousands of students beginning in October.

It's an attempt to fix any glitches in the system before it goes live for all high school seniors who want to apply for financial aid before committing to colleges in the spring.

"Their hope is to get through the beta testing to get a lot of those bugs and flaws worked out before it opens in the beginning of December," said

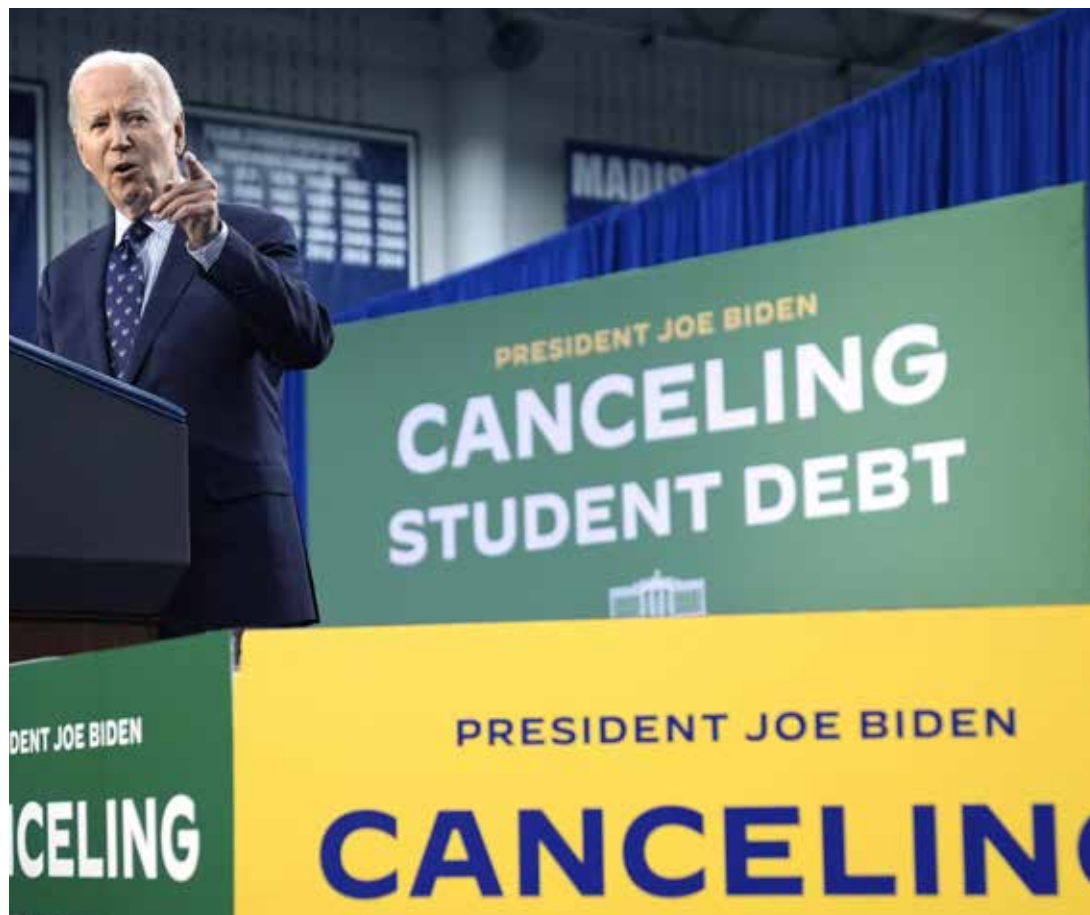
MorraLee Keller, senior director of strategic programming at the nonprofit National College Attainment Network. "It should create a much better form and a much better user experience for everyone who needs the FAFSA for the 2024-2025 academic year."

The FAFSA form is used to decide how much families can pay toward college and to help schools figure out how much financial assistance to offer. It's often the difference between a low-income or middle-class student attending college or staying home.

Congress ordered the Education Department to streamline FAFSA in a 2020 law. Yet the rollout last winter and spring was a disaster, with students struggling to complete applications and schools complaining they got junk data back from the feds. Some eligible students got flustered and never applied.

"People just gave up because the process was so cumbersome and difficult and frustrating," Ms. Keller said.

» see **DISASTER** | C15



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

President Joe Biden delivers remarks on student loan debt at Madison College, Monday, April 8, 2024, in Madison, Wis.

TARGETED

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"The fact that he got pushed out the door after making a hash of the FAFSA update really shows you where they were looking," Mr. Jones said. "They weren't focusing on their core mission, they were focusing on this ancillary stuff, and they missed these problems developing with FAFSA. It just became this national disaster, and Cordray had to pack up and go."

The delayed rollout has been blamed in part on the Biden administration's focus on student-loan forgiveness, which includes canceling student debt to now-defunct for-profit schools such as the Art Institutes.

"I don't think they designed the FAFSA failure, but it's what happens when you don't have your eye on the ball," Mr. Jones said. "The prioritization was clearly on targeting the for-profit system. It wasn't on the blocking

and tackling that they should have been doing."

In his recent report, 'Higher Ed Shakedown,' Mr. Jones outlines how Arnold Ventures, a philanthropic group, funds multiple advocacy groups that have helped drive the Department of Education, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and state attorneys to target for-profit schools.

Back to Obama

Carl Barney, an education entrepreneur whose CollegeAmerica for-profit schools were forced to close in 2021, traced the animus against for-profits to the Obama administration, which took on the career colleges as they surged following the 2008 recession.

"Since President [Barack] Obama took over, what's happened over the last 15 years is that half of the for-profit colleges are out of business," Mr. Barney said. "If you look at the number of students, it's less than half today than it was 10 years ago."

The number of for-profit post-secondary schools dropped from

1.7 million in 2010 to 770,000 in 2021, according to department figures, a decline that advocates attribute to opposition from nonprofit advocacy groups, Democratic state prosecutors and federal regulators.

"This has been a massive campaign to close any for-profit colleges they could, using any excuse that was given to them," Mr. Barney said.

In October 2021, Mr. Biden restored the Office of Enforcement, which was waylaid during the more for-profit-friendly Trump administration, but he didn't stop there.

The Biden administration also has toughened up the regulatory climate by instating the 90/10 rule, which says schools can receive no more than 90% of their funding from federal aid, and the gainful-employment rule, which requires for-profit and non-degree programs to show that their graduates earn more than the average adult who didn't go to college.

"These protections are about

ensuring career college programs live up to higher education's promise as a pathway to a better life," Education Under Secretary James Kvaal said in a September 2023 statement.

David Halperin, an attorney in Washington and leading critic of for-profit colleges, praised the department for going after bad actors.

"The Department of Education under the Biden-Harris administration has appropriately taken action regarding schools that engage in fraud with taxpayer dollars, abuse of students or other violations — whether they are for-profits like Florida Career College, nonprofits like Liberty University, or hybrids like Grand Canyon University," Mr. Halperin said.

The editor of Republic Report, Mr. Halperin said his "main concern is that the Department is not moving fast enough to address egregious misconduct."

"Many colleges remain in business that use deceptive marketing and recruiting to sell poor quality

educations at sky-high prices," he said. "Students — veterans, single parents and others — often end up worse off financially than when they started."

Mr. Kissel, a visiting fellow with the Heritage Foundation Center for Education Policy, said the Education Department should show the same forbearance to for-profit schools that it offers to nonprofit colleges when they run afoul of federal rules.

"The department should say, just like with everybody else, we're your friend, we're trying to help your student succeed, we're not going to try to put you out of business, we'll help you come into compliance, and if you're still out of compliance in two years, then maybe we have to close you down, but we're going to give you a lot of cushion to figure yourself out," he said. "Come into compliance and then we're friends again."

Unfortunately, Mr. Kissel said, "that's the opposite of what they're now doing with for-profits."

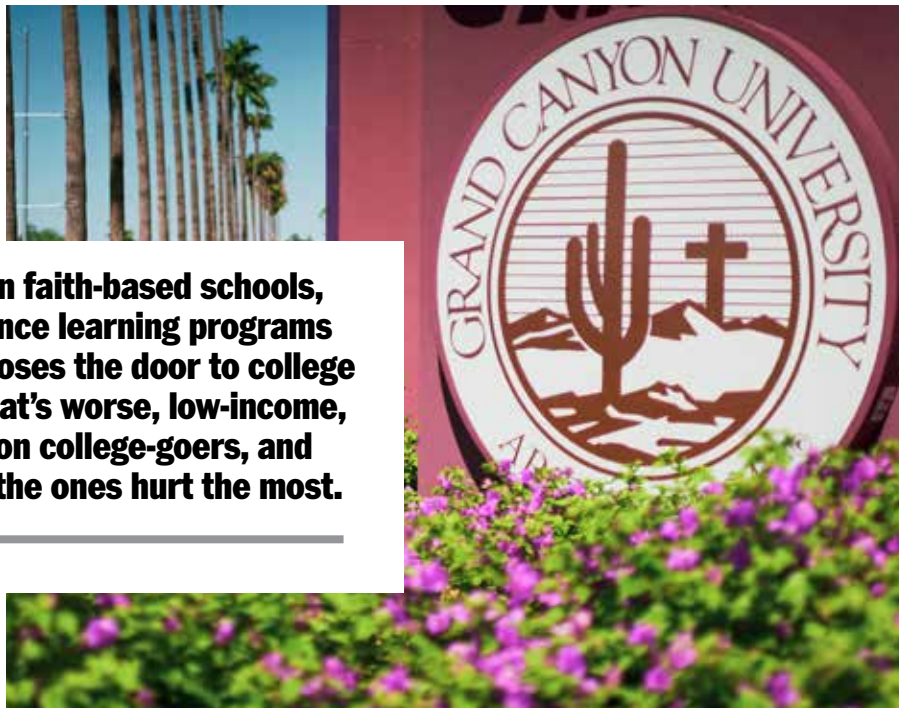
Why are the Democrats afraid of a little competition in higher education?

By U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar and Jon Schweppe

It's time to call a spade a spade. Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, and their lawless cronies at the Department of Education (USED) have had it out for any alternative school that dares to compete against the Higher Education cartel, and they seem to be willing to do whatever it takes to knock them out of the competition.

And shockingly, the Biden/Harris administration's war on the cartel's competitors has even extended to some of the nation's most highly attended Christian schools, such as Grand Canyon University (GCU). Is this about the interests of the students? Of course not. Instead, it's a deliberate attempt to destroy educational choice and force students into attending one of the Administration's preferred indoctrination centers.

Last year, as part of a broad scrutinize-and-penalize campaign, the office of Federal Student Aid within USED slapped



career colleges, and unconventional higher education programs that offer innovative, flexible, and cost-effective routes to a degree. It's about propping up a failing model of post-secondary education that even the Harvard Business Review admits is "archaic" and "no longer works."

The reality is that most Americans don't believe that a conventional four-year degree is worth the cost, and students are fleeing expensive, brand-name schools for alternatives that better fit their needs. That does not sit well with President Biden, Vice President Harris, or their toadies at the Department of Education, which is why they have weaponized an army of bureaucrats against faith-based institutions, career colleges, and distance-learning programs. In fact, the Biden-Harris team requested a nearly 600 percent budget increase to beef up its enforcement office with more lawyers to sic on these supposed ne'er-do-wells. Never mind that GCU has not raised tuition in 15 years, or that enrollment at GCU has more than tripled since 2012.

Meanwhile, the Administration diverted resources away from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) program, which has upended hundreds of thousands of high school seniors' college plans and could result in a 20 percent enrollment decline this fall.

It's this simple. The Biden-Harris Department of Education is fundamentally opposed to schools that threaten the status quo. Weeks after it penalized GCU, it charged Liberty University, another prominent Christian university, with an equally outrageous fine. Both actions came just months after a \$6 million penalty against faith-based Ashland University. And ten of the 13 schools penalized by the Department have been career colleges.

Americans deserve better. The Biden-Harris attack on faith-based schools, career colleges, and distance learning programs limits student choice and closes the door to college for many young people. What's worse, low-income, minorities, first-generation collegegoers, and underserved students are the ones hurt the most. It's time to end the assault. That starts with Congressional oversight, a new White House, and a new Department of Education that will put students first.

Rep. Paul Gosar is a Member of Congress who represents the Arizona 9th Congressional District.

Jon Schweppe is the policy director at American Principles Project.

The Biden-Harris attack on faith-based schools, career colleges, and distance learning programs limits student choice and closes the door to college for many young people. What's worse, low-income, minorities, first-generation college-goers, and underserved students are the ones hurt the most.

GCU and its students with a record \$37.7 million dollar fine, the largest penalty in the agency's history. Surely, there must be some bombshell evidence forthcoming to justify such unprecedented action. No way an administration, even this one, could go so far without the grounds to prove their case, right? Wrong.

Since the announcement of the fine, USED has been sued to disclose records that would support its action, beseeched by lawmakers demanding answers, and called before Congress to provide them. But despite all of that, USED has produced virtually nothing — not even one complaint from alumni of the school.

Instead, the administration has doubled down. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona pledged to "shut down" GCU in testimony before Congress this spring. Again, no evidence. No smoking gun. Just total loathing for who GCU serves and what GCU represents.

In any other setting, were we not talking about a federal agency with the full backing of the U.S. government, this type of fact-less slander would be considered defamation. But sadly, this is

the modus operandi of the Biden-Harris administration: single out schools that don't conform to its woke, progressive ideology, gin up allegations, however dubious, and penalize them out of existence. Then, once the dust settles, cancel the loans of the hapless students supposedly "defrauded" by the school — a backdoor attempt to make good on the administration's false promise that was rejected (and rebuffed) by the Supreme Court last year.

If the federal government wants to use its power as a sword against Christians — and against any school that dares to stand up to the woke higher education regime — you'd better believe Republicans in Congress will do everything in our power to stop it.

After learning about the department's preposterous attack against GCU, I (Rep. Gosar) demanded answers from

Richard Cordray, head of the Federal Student Aid (FSA) Office of Enforcement. More than 40 percent of colleges do not provide information about the price of their programs. So how is it that GCU — which an independent accreditor applauded for providing "clear and transparent" information — would incur a record fine? What about the other 40 percent of schools?

Republicans in Congress also demanded answers from USED's Office of Inspector General about the ongoing assault on GCU. We were pleased to see our letter get significant attention and support from the heart of the Conservative movement — organizations representing millions of proud Christians.

Of course, the administration didn't have much to say. Because this assault isn't about protecting students. It's about weeding out faith-based universities,

Department of Education's selective regulation hurts our military

By U.S. Rep. Burgess Owens and Capt. Bob "Shoebob" Carey, USN (Ret)

Our military is only as strong as the men and women who are willing to serve. And to be sure, our Armed Forces are facing a recruiting crisis. The branches of our military collectively missed their recruiting goals by 41,000 last year, reducing our active-duty force to its lowest level since 1940. A study last year found a majority of Americans would not be willing to serve if called upon today, and most young people have never even given a thought to military service.

Education benefits are one of the best tools the U.S. Armed Forces have to recruit, retain, and develop the military and civilian leaders of tomorrow. A 2021 survey of military personnel and veterans found 53% of them enlisted to earn these education benefits—the highest motivation of any factor, and even more important (62% and 71%, respectively) for women and people of color.

Yet the Biden-Harris Department of Education goes to great lengths to micromanage how veterans and active-duty military members can use their earned education benefits. These men and women are entrusted to make life and death decisions with our sons and daughters who serve, but the Biden-Harris administration doesn't trust these veteran students to choose the school that best meets their learning needs.

Instead, the Biden-Harris Departments of Education and Veterans Affairs want to pigeonhole veteran students into traditional public and state-run universities — where enrollment has dropped by more than 12% since 2010 — by instead targeting career-education institutions and distance learning programs with these selective regulations. This forces military and veteran students to choose only traditional public and private nonprofit schools, whether or not they're a good fit for those students.

The 90/10 Rule and Gainful Employment Rule are two examples of such regulatory cherry-picking, applying them only to career, technical, and trade schools. The 90/10 Rule, which expanded under the Biden-Harris Department of Education in 2022 to include GI Bill benefits, requires at least 10% of a school's revenue come from a source other than federally sourced aid such as Pell Grants or federal student loans. But it also specifically excludes distance learning programs from such



We believe that military and veteran students —not bureaucrats in Washington— are best equipped to make decisions that are right for them, especially when it comes to their education.



calculations, because unless the bureaucrats do so, they can't punish the nontraditional schools. And these online programs are the fastest growing sector of higher education, growing 900% since 2000, and expected to grow another 20% by 2030.

Likewise, the Gainful Employment

Rule requires degree-granting career-education institutions to prove their graduates earn more than their counterparts who didn't go to college. This similarly penalizes nontraditional schools from offering the exact type of flexible educational veteran students believe will give them the best leg up on

careers for nontraditional students, like those who are older, or who have families or other limitations on their time.

And while the rule may be well intentioned, if it is so necessary, why isn't it applied to all degree granting colleges and universities, even when the Department of Education's own data shows upward of one-third of private certificate programs and nearly one in five public certificate programs would fail the Gainful Employment Rule? Plenty of brand-name college students graduate with significant debt and job opportunities that don't meet their expectations, yet these schools are not subjected to the same punitive regulations.

There's a reason nontraditional schools and distance learning programs have grown in popularity with military and veteran students, who are generally older, have families, and are making a transition to civilian life: They provide flexible schedules, teach skills that are applicable to a career, and frequently have kept tuition low, creating a cost-effective route to a post-secondary degree. And, distance learning enhances student retention rates from 25% to 60% and reduces study time 40 to 60%.

We believe that military and veteran students —not bureaucrats in Washington— are best equipped to make decisions that are right for them, especially when it comes to their education. That's why the Ensuring Distance Education Act is critical to keeping government bureaucrats out of the business of trying to pick educational winners and losers, and instead letting colleges and universities of every ilk drive innovation, expand learning options, and enhance access to a quality education.

Our fight to stop the Biden-Harris administration's destructive and biased agenda while empowering America's military and veteran students to make their own educational choices is front and center. And our commitment is clear: support those who have supported us, and ensure they have the freedom and resources to succeed and build a stronger, more resilient force — both on and off the battlefield.

Rep. Burgess Owens represents Utah's Fourth Congressional District in Congress and serves as the Chairman of the Higher Education and Workforce Development Subcommittee.

Bob Carey is a retired U.S. Navy captain and Director of National Defense Committee. He served as a veterans and military advisor to two U.S. senators and was in the Senior Executive Service at the Department of Defense.



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

University of California, Berkeley freshman Sanaa Sodhi talks with a friend in her on-campus dorm room while searching online for apartments in Berkeley, Calif., Tuesday, March 29, 2022. Millions of college students in the U.S. are trying to find an affordable place to live as rents surge nationally, affecting seniors, young families and students alike. Sodhi is looking for an apartment to rent with three friends next fall, away from the dorms but still close to classes and activities on campus. They've budgeted at least \$5,200 for a two-bedroom.

Online learning flourishes as residential colleges face rising costs

By SEAN SALAI
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

College degrees cost more than ever, but education insiders note that online programs could erase the need for students to rack up six figures of loan debt for tuition and room and board on campuses.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, "there was a belief among some that an online education was somehow inferior or substandard to the traditional in-person classroom setting," said Jason Altmire, who leads Career Education Colleges and Universities, a network of for-profit campuses.

"Much of that has changed, as

we have all become familiar with online settings in education, as well as in business meetings and our personal interactions," said Mr. Altmire, a former Democratic congressman from Pennsylvania.

"There has been an acceleration [in online enrollment] since before the pandemic," said Doug Shapiro, executive director of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. "I think the pandemic just forced everything online. There [also] seems to be a sense that students are concerned about the costs of college."

The clearinghouse counted 808,000 undergraduates enrolled in four-year programs at online

universities last fall out of 15.2 million students nationwide. That was up 4% from fall 2022 and 22% since 2018.

The audience for online learning

The nonprofit research center said more than half of those students majored in five subjects: business, health professions, computer science, information security and psychology. They were more likely than residential students to be women, Black or Hispanic and older than 25.

The latest data from the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics

shows that 53.4% of all college students took at least one online course in the 2022-2023 academic year. That increased from 36.6% in 2019-2020 before COVID-19 restrictions shuttered campuses.

Reports show that tuition at the nation's elite universities has reached a record high. Boston University, Brown University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Southern California, Tufts University and Yale University are charging students more than \$90,000 this year.

Tuition for online bachelor's degrees is much lower. Other selling points for distance learning

include fewer expenses for food and housing, commuting, course materials and textbooks.

Peter Eckel, who oversees an online graduate program for aspiring college administrators at the University of Pennsylvania, said the demand for online learning nevertheless varies by location and program.

"Students are drawn to specific programs for a catalog of reasons, so it's hard, if not impossible, to make generalizations or comparisons," Mr. Eckel said.

At Southern Evangelical Seminary in South Carolina, officials

» see **ONLINE** | C15

The Biden-Harris Department of Education has weaponized its Office of Enforcement



By Thomas Jones

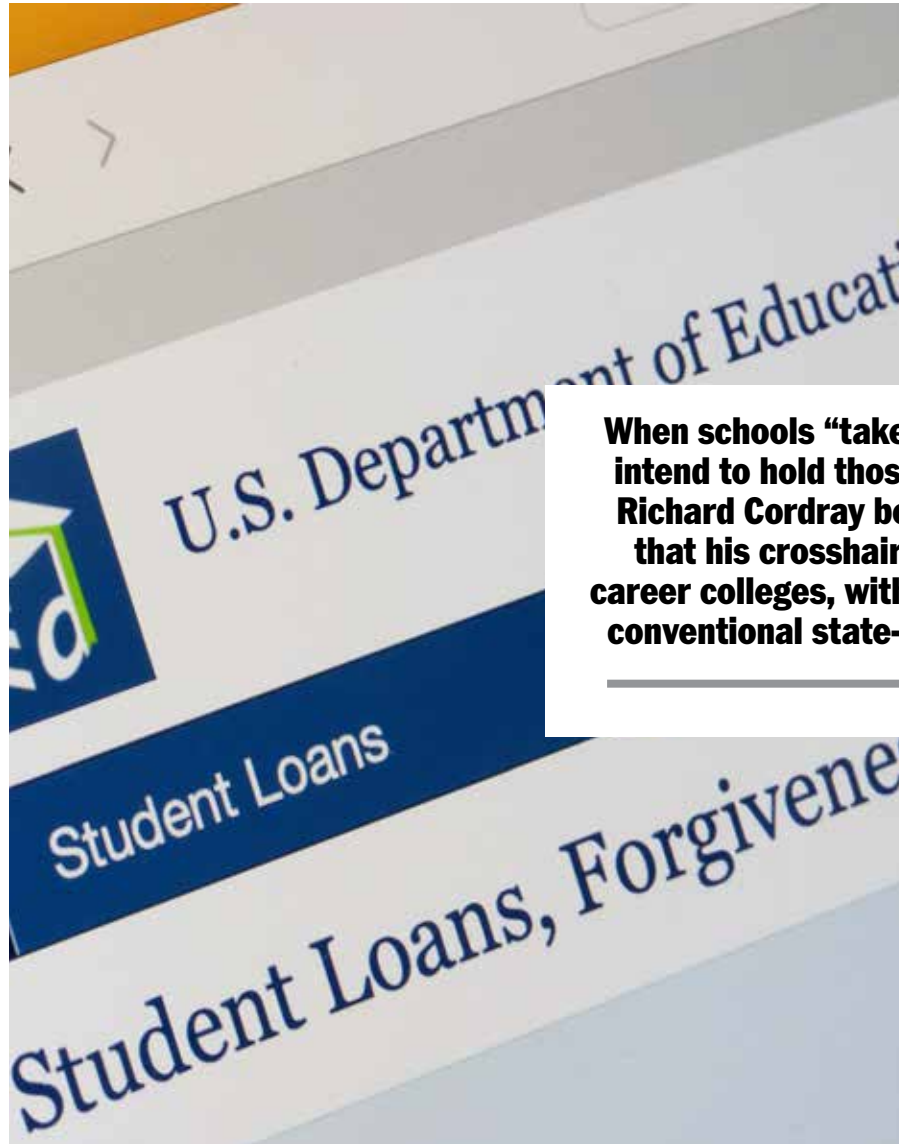
Since taking office, the Biden-Harris administration has turned its Department of Education against students and their families in a way that few could have imagined. Under the helm of Miguel Cardona, a long-time ideologue, the administration repurposed the Federal Student Aid (FSA) Office of Enforcement into a cudgel against career colleges, online programs, and successful higher education vendors that do not align with the administration's woke agenda. And now, students are paying the price.

In 2012, amid the frenzy of the Occupy Wall Street movement, a cadre of Obama-Biden career loyalists latched onto a budding radical idea: government-provided free college and mass cancellation of student debt. They began feverishly drawing up blueprints that could be implemented under a Hillary Clinton administration. Then they ran into a problem. Hillary didn't win.

But the story didn't end there. Following Donald Trump's surprise election, these ideologues flocked to a handful of select special interest groups. Purporting to be "student advocates," these organizations continued to develop their plan for free college, which received a boost when it caught the attention of billionaire donor John Arnold.

In late 2020, this network of ideologues notched the opportunity to finally implement their scheme with the election of President Joe Biden. Pressured by the poles of his party, then-candidate Biden had tepidly committed to the notion of student debt cancellation. And with his ascension to office these veterans of the Obama-Biden administration flooded back to their old haunts—this time quietly behind the helm of the Department of Education.

Much of the ground had already been



When schools “take advantage of students, we intend to hold those individuals accountable,” Richard Cordray boasted in 2023. Unsaid was that his crosshairs were aimed narrowly at career colleges, with the purpose of propping up conventional state-run and public universities.

that Mr. Cordray honed at the CFPB to bring disfavored industries to heel, he began applying the same litigious tactics on career colleges. Between 2021 and 2023 he initiated six investigations, all against career colleges. Ten of the 13 schools that the Biden-Harris Department of Education has fined are career colleges, as are a disproportionate number of those it has used the *Sweet v. Cardona* settlement to penalize and silence.

When schools “take advantage of students, we intend to hold those individuals accountable,” Mr. Cordray boasted in 2023. Unsaid was that his sights were aimed narrowly at career colleges, with the purpose of propping up conventional state-run and public universities.

This search-and-destroy mission initiated under Mr. Cordray has resounding consequences for students. The administration's utterly failed rollout of the new Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a glaring example. By diverting his office's resources away from this critical project—which was authorized by Congress to streamline the student aid process—Mr. Cordray caused delay after delay, which has put hundreds of thousands of high school seniors' college plans in jeopardy.

All Americans are better off with Mr. Cordray's departure, but we all must be vigilant for which ideological bureaucrat will fully take his place. The administration's last budget requested a doubling of its FSA Office of Enforcement and seeks to exclude career colleges from receiving Pell Grant funds. Congress must continue its oversight responsibilities and rein in this unaccountable office and rogue Department.

Stopping the Biden-Harris administration's higher education shakedown will take a total house cleaning at the Department of Education—either by Congressional oversight or new leadership in the White House. Its leaders and the public speak up before more doors are closed to students.

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Thomas Jones is the president of the American Accountability Foundation.

seeded. While masquerading as student advocates, these groups had courted influential state attorneys general, who were recruited to build state support which would be necessary to generate public morale. This recruitment included dictating closed-door meeting agendas, buying drinks for government officials, even critiquing dinner menus.

When President Biden assumed office, his disdain for career colleges and other unconventional routes to a post-secondary degree were well-known enough. No one expected the Biden-Harris administration to be friendly, even though these options had grown significantly in popularity and enrollment, particularly among young people who didn't fit the traditional college student mold. But few could have anticipated the lengths the President's network of cronies would go to put these schools out of business.

Upon taking office as Education Secretary, Cardona crowned Richard Cordray, the controversial head of the partisan

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), as the new head of FSA. Almost immediately, he began to weaponize the office and its resources against career colleges. He relaunched the Department's Enforcement unit, which was established by President Obama to ostensibly oversee all federal education funds, but in truth it served as a vehicle to investigate and penalize career colleges. And Mr. Cordray steered it as such with aplomb.

Mr. Cordray staffed up the FSA with a network of like-minded loyalists, many colleagues from his tenure under President Obama. These hires, all ideological leftists, split into two camps: The first, his team from the CFPB, now restaffed in the Department of Education, and the second, a posse of activists from state attorneys general offices and outside activist groups. This cohort brought the political will and legal knowhow to leverage the tools and might of the federal government against higher-ed schools and businesses they disdained.

Employing a sue-and-harass model

Higher ed is broken, and Republicans have a plan to fix it



By U.S. Rep. Virginia Foxx

Democrats and Republicans rarely see eye-to-eye these days, but I think we can all agree that earning a postsecondary degree or certification is just too expensive. Acknowledging the problem is a good start, but how will we actually lower the burden on millions of American families? My Democrat friends want to punt the problem while Republicans want to tackle it head on.

It's no secret that college is tremendously expensive, and younger generations have waning confidence in the current postsecondary model, with two-thirds of high school students signaling they are better off without a degree. With tuition, fees, and inflation on the rise, we need solutions that ease the challenge of college affordability while holding schools accountable for the outcome of today's students and tomorrow's workforce.

That's why earlier this year I and almost 150 of my colleagues introduced H.R. 6951, the College Cost Reduction Act (CCRA), which offers much-needed accountability, transparency, and affordability to the college marketplace. The CCRA treats the disease, not just the symptoms, and I'm pleased to have shepherded it through the House Education and the Workforce Committee back in January.

Unfortunately, none of the Democrats on the committee joined in passing this bill during the markup, offering only poison pill amendments. Hopefully, they will reconsider their opposition when this bill comes to the House floor. Already, our bill has unified many common-sense conservative organizations, including Americans for Prosperity, the National Taxpayers Union, and Consumer Action for a Strong Economy.



The College Cost Reduction Act would promote a new quality assurance model that ensures colleges have skin in the game. The bill holds every college in the country financially responsible if they overcharge for degrees that simply don't pay off and leave students and taxpayers with debt they cannot afford.

Students have voiced their frustration with the postsecondary education system, and it is reasonable for them to expect a commensurate return on investment on their tuition and for regulators to hold schools accountable to this standard. But the Biden-Harris administration has responded to this problem by targeting career colleges that enroll just 5% of students, rather than by holding all postsecondary institutions accountable for workforce development and placement. The CCRA would promote a new quality assurance model that ensures colleges have skin in the game. The bill holds every college in the country financially responsible if they overcharge for degrees that simply don't pay off and leave students and taxpayers with debt they cannot afford. In addition, this bill would encourage change by offering

performance-based PROMISE Grants to provide funds to institutions committed to lowering tuition and aligning their degree programs with the nation's workforce needs.

By contrast, the Biden-Harris administration is repeatedly attempting to force American taxpayers to pay for a wide-sweeping student loan bailout scheme. The Biden-Harris plan puts the loans of degree holders—to the tune of nearly \$138 billion—on the backs of workers who have either paid off their loans or who chose not to attend college at all. The CCRA curbs this unconstitutional power grab and takes action to rein in the Biden-Harris Department of Education, which continues to ignore the law and push a progressive agenda to appease the far-left in its party. At the same time, the bill actually fixes the broken student loan program by

streamlining loan options and simplifying repayment, eliminating predatory interest capitalization and unnecessary loan fees, and providing targeted relief to borrowers who need it instead of blanket bailouts to those who don't.

Students, families, and taxpayers can no longer afford the status quo when it comes to financing college. As an elected official, it is my duty to help foster freedom, good competition, and an environment where every American has a pathway to success. The CCRA lives up to this promise, offering real solutions that deliver the kind of postsecondary education students need and our economy demands.

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Rep. Virginia Foxx represents North Carolina's 5th Congressional District. She is chair of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce.

On higher education, the difference between Republicans and Democrats couldn't be starker



By Matt Kandrach

With less than two months to go, the 2024 presidential election is nearing its final stretch. While Donald Trump and the Republican Party have made inflation, border security, and the economy their top issues, it's refreshing to see another concern get outsized attention from the campaign: higher education. For too long, this important issue hasn't been part of the policy discussion. And if Republicans offer solutions to the current administration's incompetence and bias, it could be a winning message in November.

Higher education has become a campaign issue because college affordability and accessibility is now a real kitchen table issue for millions of American families. Nearly half of parents say they would prefer not to send their children to a traditional four-year college after high school, and two-thirds of high-school students think they will be just fine without a college degree. According to recent data the average cost per year to attend a private nonprofit four-year school was a whopping \$40,000.

Today, most traditional colleges fail to equip students with marketable skills to take into the workforce. They do, however, trap them in student loan debt that is becoming increasingly difficult to repay.

Students need better options. Despite the cost, many Americans still see long-term value in earning a traditional four-year degree, but many others do not. Exacerbating the problem, the U.S. Department of Education is closing off alternative options through enforcement actions and crippling regulations by ideological bureaucrats. Instead, the Department of Education is going after career colleges and proprietary



Republicans recognize that alternatives to the traditional four-year school will help Americans over the long-term, which is why their 2024 party platform is geared toward reforming our higher education system.

schools, cutting off alternatives to the expensive four-year schools.

Notably, two harmful regulations – 90/10 and gainful employment – will potentially lock out thousands of students from schools the department doesn't like. The regulatory burden of these rules only apply to a small segment of higher education institutions, ignoring the true drivers of the college affordability crisis: private non-profit schools.

By stifling students' ability to attend programs at career colleges, the department instead pushes students to community colleges and traditional private and public colleges many sought to avoid.

Republicans recognize that alternatives to the traditional four-year school will help Americans over the long-term, which is why their 2024 party platform is geared toward reforming our higher education system. Not since the advancing of land-grant colleges in the 19th century has a party's platform been so focused on higher education issues. It's a step in the right direction, showing how a Republican administration will be focused on governing and making government work better for all Americans and students.

Though the entire platform is shorter

than it was in 2016, it's clear that education is still a top issue. As the platform notes, "to reduce the cost of Higher Education, Republicans will support the creation of additional, drastically more affordable alternatives to a traditional four-year College degree." This means making it easier to become a welder or electrician, rather than more degrees in gender studies or other unmarketable areas of study.

That's why so many people choose to attend career colleges and proprietary schools. They want to learn real skills in health care, criminal justice, and information technology, among many others. Career colleges help equip students with hands-on experience in fields such as public safety, medical and nursing, cosmetology, senior care, and much more. Importantly, programs at career

colleges are usually more affordable and offer significantly greater flexibility than traditional four-year schools.

The platform also promises to "prepare students for great jobs and careers, supporting project-based learning and schools that offer meaningful work experience." Equipping the next generation with skills to succeed is incredibly important, especially as the skills gap continues to widen in sensitive areas like elder care, health care, and IT.

Americans have seen the failed record of the Biden-Harris Department of Education. With Republicans offering a real alternative, the difference could not be starker. Under this administration, we've seen the department fumble its FAFSA roll out, offer unconstitutional student loan bailouts, cut off access to higher education alternatives, and ignore antisemitic protests across college campuses. Republicans will offer real solutions to expand access, cut costs, and deliver for the next generation of workers.

The results of this election may be close, but on education issues, the two parties are nowhere near each other.

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Matthew Kandrach is president of Consumer Action for a Strong Economy.



Vice President Kamala Harris' extreme higher education record

By Thomas Jones

The Biden/Harris Department of Education (USDE) is perhaps the most progressive in American history. USDE continues to ignore the court system by doling out billions in student loan bailouts, fumbling the rollout of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and cutting off options for students to attend alternatives to the traditional four-year school.

Here's what we know. In 2013, then-California Attorney General Kamala Harris sued Corinthian Colleges, accusing the career college chain of false and predatory advertising, intentional misrepresentation to students, and more. As the Wall Street Journal editorial board notes, "she struggled to support her claims," which caused the Obama administration to come to her rescue through its own investigations. Ultimately, the pressure was so immense it led Corinthian Colleges to close its doors to over 16,000 students in 2015.

Once a thriving university system educating hundreds of thousands of students across the nation, Harris' bold move set the higher ed shakedown into motion. It's easy to see this was a defining moment in Harris' early political career: it was a huge win for the political left establishment who have harbored ill will against career colleges or any

school they cannot control.

She is also a big supporter of Richard Cordray, who has been described as "left of Lenin." She was proud to endorse his controversial rise to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and then

Our research uncovered a secretive, yearslong campaign bankrolled by a billionaire mega-donor and advanced by costly litigation to achieve the Education Department's tunnel-visioned mission to deliver mass student loan bailout, prop up convention colleges and universities, and wipe out successful higher education businesses that stand in the way.

lead the Office of Federal Student Aid at USDE. If you are a parent, you know that his "leadership" – or lack thereof – resulted in the disastrous rollout of the FAFSA – a critical financial lifeline for students to attend college. His failure has prevented millions of students from hearing back about how much money they'll need to fork over to attend college in the fall.

But that's not all he's known for. Our organization penned the Report, "Cordray's Witchhunt at the Department of Education," which details the lengths Cordray has gone to advance the failed student loan model and attack career colleges at any cost starting in the CFPB.

His "harass-and-sue" approach began under President Obama, and perhaps with Corinthian Colleges, and found a home in USDE's Investigations Group. Today, this multi-million government-funded operation has assembled a team

of progressive political appointees, advocates with close ties to left-wing groups, and liberal attorneys to punish schools with next to no oversight.

Earlier this year, we also pulled the curtain back on how vast and all-consuming the Biden/Harris administration's debt cancellation ambitions stretch. Our research uncovered a secretive, yearslong campaign bankrolled by a billionaire mega-donor and advanced by costly litigation to achieve the Education Department's tunnel-visioned mission to deliver mass student loan bailout, prop up convention colleges and universities, and wipe out successful higher education businesses that stand in the way.

Inside the White House, the Biden/Harris administration vacillated on the student loan proposals and faced immense pressure to bow to the progressives. Politico's writeup in 2022 described politics inside the White House to be "delicate." The real answer is simple: President Biden resisted lobbying efforts to unilaterally cancel student loan debt because he feared it would spur resentment among Americans who had already paid off their loans; Vice President Harris internally pushed the administration to forgive student loans, regardless of the legal ramifications, and offered to be the public face of the campaign.

Sure enough, the largest student loan bailout took place early that year, discharging all remaining federal student loans for students who attended Corinthian Colleges. Harris took much of the credit, and still uses it as a top messaging point on the campaign trail.

The Biden/Harris administration has shown us time and time again that they're fighting for the most progressive, borderline socialist, education policies – from shutting down career colleges to broadening student loan bailouts. Not only is Vice President Harris' rhetoric dangerous, but the Supreme Court has also declared it unconstitutional.

Thomas Jones is the president of the American Accountability Foundation.

The Biden-Harris administration has failed our students



By U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik

As students return to campus this fall, university leadership needs to take decisive action to ensure there are no repeats of the horrific failures of the past school year. Far-left ideology has gripped our universities and has led to rampant antisemitism and the violation of basic civil rights on campuses. Jewish students and faculty must be able to learn and work on college campuses without fear for their safety, and House Republicans are demanding change and fighting to hold accountable those responsible.

The failed presidents and board members of these universities, brimming with elitists and individuals with antisemitic and pro-terrorist affiliations, are out of touch with the priorities of the American people. American colleges and universities are pushing a divisive DEI agenda that breeds hate and antisemitism instead of preparing our next generation of leaders. Our country needs leaders who will prioritize the wellbeing of our students. This starts with the total elimination of DEI curriculum and dismantling of DEI bureaucracy.

The Biden-Harris Department of Education has refused to hold the presidents and board members of our so-called “elite” universities accountable for their inability to stop and prevent antisemitic attacks against Jewish students and faculty, and instead allowed taxpayer dollars to continue to fund this hate. House Republicans have worked tirelessly to fill the void left by far-left Democrats and demand accountability. In what quickly became the most-viewed congressional testimony in history, I asked former Harvard University President Claudine Gay whether calling for the



The failed presidents and board members of these universities, brimming with elitists and individuals with antisemitic and pro-terrorist affiliations, are out of touch with the priorities of the American people.

genocide of Jews violated Harvard’s code of conduct, and she answered that it “depends on the context.” This straightforward question should have a straightforward answer, and universities should ensure that those who call for the genocide of Jews on their campus are held accountable.

Perhaps former Columbia University President Minouche Shafik was following Gay’s example on April 17th. Shafik and Columbia board members epitomized their own failed leadership in another congressional hearing when they could not account for Columbia’s lack of response to antisemitism and anarchy on their campus. This anarchy later led to the violent storming of a campus building due to her failure to crack down on an unauthorized pro-Hamas encampment. As of today, Gay, Shafik and President Liz McGill of the University of Pennsylvania have all resigned in disgrace.

Their long-overdue departures were only the beginning of House Republicans’ work to rid these institutions of the antisemitic rot festering not only at the top, but also throughout the higher education bureaucracy. Harvard leaders doubled down on their indifference towards the harassment and violence against Jewish and Israeli students by failing to present the committee with adequate documents relating to their unsatisfactory responses not once, but three times. House Republicans once

again took charge, with House Committee on Education and the Workforce Chair Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.) issuing a subpoena for the documentation. The slow-walking of ongoing civil rights investigations by the Biden-Harris Administration underscores the desire of this White House to continue pandering to pro-terrorist and anti-Jewish faculty and mobs instead of protecting our Jewish students.

Changes and decisive action are required. Antisemitic harassment, illegal encampments, and the hostile takeover of buildings by pro-terrorist mobs must be met with zero tolerance, not the dismissal of charges, as recently happened at Columbia. Far too often, we see universities turn a blind eye to despicable harassment and violence, allowing attacks on Jewish students to go unpunished and breeding environments of lawlessness. If universities and far-left prosecutors fail to deliver consequences, these pro-terrorist mobs will

be emboldened as classes resume.

To address the root of these issues, universities must also be transparent and disclose their foreign funding. Malign actors have taken advantage of the vulnerabilities of our universities’ foreign-gift reporting structure and the weak leadership of the Biden-Harris Administration. Foreign money has flown unchecked into our universities, threatening our national security and giving our adversaries undue influence over the minds of our students. Additional reporting has shown that hostile actors like Iran are funding pro-terrorist and anti-American mobs, giving adversaries undue influence over our students. Foreign-gift reporting loopholes must be closed, and our universities must be transparent about what foreign nations are funding their operations.

If we are to see calm and order restored to our universities this fall, action must be taken. Jewish students should be able to pursue an education in peace without fear of antisemitic harassment and threats of violence. University leaders have had the summer months to prepare and learn from their mistakes and must be ready to act to ensure their campuses are places of learning where the civil rights of students are protected.

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Rep. Elise Stefanik represents New York’s 21st District in her fifth term and serves as the House Republican Conference Chair and most senior Republican in New York.

DISASTER

From page C6

While federal education officials blamed the glitches, in part, on inadequate funding to administer the program, GOP lawmakers accused Mr. Biden of diverting Education Department staff from the congressionally mandated FAFSA overhaul to his loan forgiveness plan.

“It is unacceptable that for the second year in a row, the Biden-Harris administration will be late in making FAFSA available for students,” Sen. Bill Cassidy, Louisiana Republican and ranking member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, told *The Washington Times*. “This administration should be focused on ensuring students

get the financial aid they need to afford college, not enacting its irresponsible student loan policies designed to buy votes before the November election.”

The Department of Education said it will work with community-based organizations (CBOs), high schools, institutions of higher education, states and “limited groups of students and contributors” to fill out and submit the form during the testing period in early fall.

“This testing period aligns with software industry best practices, to identify and resolve the kind of system errors that can derail students, contributors, and institutions,” a department spokesperson said.

The damage from last year’s fumble is tangible.

NCAN data show a 9.3% drop in the number of FAFSA forms

completed nationally by the 2024 high school class, compared to the 2023 class.

Stressed-out parents and students were flummoxed by error messages and an inability to access their online FAFSA forms. Families who typically received financial aid offers in early April had to wait until much deeper in the spring.

The updated FAFSA system also struggled to handle some types of applications, such as those from students whose parents are in the country illegally.

In March, the program acknowledged it was spitting out bad data from a vendor and would have to reprocess a large chunk of applications. A week later, the Education Department said it discovered another error involving IRS data and would have to reprocess some applications.

Education Department officials made some quick fixes, including a temporary workaround to allow illegal immigrants without Social Security numbers to apply for financial aid for their U.S.-born children.

The department also reduced verification requirements and suspended routine program reviews to confirm colleges meet the requirements for financial aid eligibility.

The Government Accountability Office is investigating what went wrong. While there was a laundry list of glitches, experts said the main issue was that the system wasn’t fully ready despite three years of planning for the congressionally mandated overhaul.

“It was still being built after it opened,” Ms. Keller said. “The system was not fully open.”

Rep. Virginia Foxx, North Carolina Republican and chairwoman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, said students and colleges are “still reeling” from the problems.

“Needing yet another delay to ‘fix’ issues for the second consecutive year reveals yet another layer of the department’s mismanagement of FAFSA these past four years,” she said. “Clear communication has been sorely lacking and should be the bare minimum going forward. I’ll continue fighting for transparency and accountability until a complete and ready FAFSA actually materializes.”

• *Stephen Dinan and Susan Ferrechio contributed to this report.*

ONLINE

From page C9

said e-learning has become especially attractive to people seeking graduate degrees in religion. They touted the benefits of online classes for theology studies, which require less in-person interaction than other subjects.

“I think this is the wave of the future for us and I don’t see us going back,” said Phil Ginn, Southern Evangelical’s president. “It doesn’t make sense to run up a lot of debt to get a degree in anything these days, with the possible exception of medical studies.”

The non-denominational Christian college of 350 students went online before the pandemic and charges \$325-\$400 per course hour, with its cheapest masters degree costing about \$12,000.

Out west, Southern Utah University charges \$75 per credit hour for its online bachelor of general studies, compared with \$300 per hour after the first credit for residential students. The public school markets the degree to people who have dropped out of college for financial reasons.

Started during pandemic lockdowns with 79 students in fall 2020, the university’s Speedway Bachelor of General Studies program expanded to 528 students in the spring and has awarded 162 degrees, with more growth expected this semester. The university charges up to \$9,000 in tuition for the

baccalaureate degree, roughly \$18,000 less than residential students would pay.

“There are tens of millions of Americans that started college at some point but left without completing their degree,” said Steve Meredith, the college’s associate vice president of graduate and online. “The Speedway program ... is designed especially for those that want to finish what they started and do it in the most affordable and efficient way they can.”

College administrators say remote classes appeal to disadvantaged minorities who have delayed college, dropped out or started a second career while working full time and raising children. They expect online enrollment to climb as inflation prices more students out of residential schools.

At DeVry University, a for-profit career preparation school west of Chicago, officials say the popularity of online learning has allowed them to keep tuition rates flat over the past five years. They report a growing number of women, minorities and working adults studying for technology workforce degrees.

“Our flexible schedule and career-oriented programs cater to a diverse student population, many of whom balance their studies with professional and family commitments,” said Agnam Memeti, DeVry’s chief enrollment and student support officer. “These learners have long been left behind by most of the higher education community, but this untapped pool

of talent is only growing.”

Nonprofit colleges go online Remote learning also has grown at nonprofit colleges.

Western Governors University, a private online school based in Utah, has responded to a nationwide shortage of K-12 teachers by ramping up skills-based degrees designed to match evolving certification requirements in all 50 states. More than 43,000 students studied for one of 30 education degrees in the spring, with more expected to enroll this semester.

“Our students are drawn to WGU’s flexible, online, competency-based education model, which measures skills and subject knowledge rather than seat time, and this approach has proven successful,” said Stacey Ludwig Johnson, executive dean of the WGU School of Education.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints allows students to complete an online degree from Brigham Young University-Idaho through the BYU-Pathway program, created in 2009.

Courses cost \$82 per credit hour, allowing students to earn a four-year bachelor’s degree for less than \$7,500. Enrollment in the 90-credit program has grown steadily and reached more than 70,000 students last school year.

“Our primary focus was to serve what we call the ‘hidden many’ prospective students who thought that higher education was either too expensive or too difficult and never applied

or in some cases applied but dropped out,” said Clark G. Gilbert, an elder in the LDS hierarchy and top official at the Church Educational System, its network of schools.

Teaching the workforce

Across all higher education sectors, Instructure, which makes the Canvas software that many campuses use for hybrid and virtual learning, said it “has grown like gangbusters” since the onset of the pandemic.

Ryan Lufkin, a vice president at Instructure, said Canvas experienced 40% user growth from 2019 to 2020 as campuses shuttered. Roughly 50% of college students nationwide now use the software for some or all of their learning, including in-person classes.

“As we realize not every student needs a two- or four-year degree to secure a well-paying job in the field of their interest, enrollment numbers at traditional colleges and universities will plateau at a level that coincides with market demands and the ability to earn wages aligned with the debt incurred,” Mr. Lufkin said.

Less selective state university branch campuses, community colleges and private liberal arts schools have struggled with plunging enrollment and revenue since the pandemic began. The Education Department’s National Center for Education Statistics reported last month that 99 colleges and universities eligible for federal financial aid shuttered during the 2023-24

academic year, shrinking the sector by 1.7% as closures accelerated from previous years.

Julie Uranis, an official at the university distance learning advocacy group UPCEA, said remote certification programs for in-demand trades have become more popular than degrees among an increasing share of students. She noted that more first-time students have opted to study online in recent years, bringing “their pandemic experiences” and comfort with digital instruction.

“More and more institutions are looking for on- and off-ramps for learners that are workforce aligned,” Ms. Uranis said. “Some have closed or consolidated due to economic conditions, but residential campuses will not cease to exist.”

Although online college classes started in the mid-1990s, she said, they trace their roots to correspondence courses in the late 1800s, when students completed college classes by mail.

Peter Wood, president of the conservative National Association of Scholars and a former associate provost at Boston University, predicted that online education will “mature into a disruption of traditional college education” as more students opt for career-focused classes over political and personal interest coursework.

“The students who want to steer clear of radical ideology and trivial courses now have a ready alternative that didn’t exist a quarter of a century ago,” Mr. Wood said.



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

Police stand guard as demonstrators chant slogans outside the Columbia University campus, on April 18, 2024, in New York.

House bill goes after antisemitism on campus by making universities reveal protest policies

By **KERRY PICKET**

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

House Republicans introduced a bill this summer that would make public disclosure of a university's campus protest policies a requirement for federal accreditation.

The "No Tax Dollars for College Encampments Act" would amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 and require universities to adhere to their own procedures and reporting requirements when responding to campus civil unrest.

The legislation is ready to move this fall as anti-Israel protests again break out on campus. The protests returned to Columbia University in New York and called on students preparing for the new semester to ditch classes and pressured the school to divest from Israel.

Protesters vandalized Columbia's prominent "Alma Mater" statue.

"Last school year, makeshift encampments were allowed to flourish on campuses across the country, disrupting classes and intimidating Jewish students.

This is unacceptable," said Rep. Jim Banks of Indiana, who co-authored the bill.

He said his legislation holds "woke universities accountable and ensures they enforce protest rules fairly and equally, not only when it fits their political agenda."

House GOP Conference Chair Elise Stefanik of New York, the bill's other co-author, said she wanted to prevent "disgraceful mob riots" such as those seen at Columbia University from taking over campuses nationwide.

She said the bill is intended to ensure school leaders are enforcing policies "against hostile campus takeovers" and any university officials who fail to "stand up for our Jewish community will be held accountable."

Mr. Banks and Ms. Stefanik are members of the House Education and Workforce Committee.

The top Democrat on the committee, Rep. Bobby Scott of Virginia, did not respond to a request for comment.

Several conservative organizations support the legislation including Heritage Action, Parents Defending Education Action

and the American Principles Project.

Last year, law enforcement authorities across the country shut down anti-Israel protester encampments at universities. The encampment protests started at Columbia, where students demanded the school divest from Israel and companies supporting the Jewish state.

Columbia University Apartheid Divest, a coalition of 116 different groups that supported the anti-Israel encampment, did not respond to a request for comment about the Banks-Stefanik bill.

The legislation was introduced on the heels of the committee's release of a chain of text messages from four Columbia administrators who mocked concerns about antisemitism on campus.

During a May 31 event titled "Jewish Life on Campus: Past, Present and Future," three university deans exchanged jokes about Jewish campus leaders exploiting antisemitism to raise money and scrutinized the experiences of Jews on campus.

After the text messages were made public, the university permanently removed

the three deans from their posts.

A month earlier, Mr. Banks and Ms. Stefanik had questioned university officials at congressional hearings from different top-tier schools about allowing antisemitic protests on their campuses in the wake of Hamas's deadly Oct. 7 terrorist attack.

Mr. Banks asked Columbia President Minouche Shafik about an orientation glossary that was passed out to new students at the Columbia University School of Social Work.

The document that had been shared with incoming students defines Ashkenormativity as "a system of oppression that favors white Jewish folk."

Mr. Banks also sent a letter calling on State and Homeland Security departments to deport student and foreign exchange visa-holders who have supported Hamas, a foreign terrorist organization.

Ms. Shafik stepped down as Columbia University president on Aug. 14. Katrina Armstrong, the former CEO of Columbia University Irving Medical Center, is currently serving as the Ivy League university's interim president.

When it comes to education, we should encourage diversification



By Steve Pociask

President Biden is trying again to implement a widespread student loan cancellation package, and again the administration has run into a pesky obstacle—the Constitution. In April, the Biden-Harris administration announced its second attempt to “fix the student loan system” and forgive millions of student borrowers’ debt. And again, the plan has been blocked by federal courts.

While the administration’s efforts remain in legal limbo, the practical, real-life implications are clear: this misguided mainstay of President Biden’s and Vice President Harris’ education platform would incentivize colleges to raise tuition costs, diminish the value of a post-secondary degree, and set the stage for continued undoing and redoing as future administrations assume office – all creating real uncertainty for students. Not to mention, the unilateral action—which the Supreme Court has already ruled violates the Separation of Powers principle—would saddle everyday taxpayers with the enormous cost of subsidizing the education of the wealthy and highly educated.

Sadly, putting ideology ahead of practicality has become a hallmark of the Biden-Harris administration. The president and his advisors seem to care more about symbolic victories than the impact its policies have on students and their families, employers, and taxpayers, as well as those who choose not to attend college or instead choose to attend vocational training and trade schools.

This is true even when you look at the Department’s own rulemaking. Last year, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released its Gainful Employment (GE) rule as part of a massive trove of new regulations designed to establish new safeguards for university students



The federal government shouldn’t put its thumb on the scale and cut off access to some schools while shoveling subsidies towards traditional schools.

at the detriment of career institutions. The ED insists this new rule is needed to protect students from “unaffordable debt or insufficient earnings from career development programs.” However, in practice, this new rule will have disastrous consequences for students and the higher educational landscape in general.

Consequently, more than 700,000 students – roughly the population of the District of Columbia – stand to lose access to the educational programs of their choice when the GE Rule takes full effect. These students will have little choice but to apply to traditional four-year institutions, many of which are expensive and unlikely to offer an equivalent degree. Some students may discontinue their education altogether, having initially chosen to pursue a non-traditional education for a reason. Such an outcome should be troubling to anyone who values closing the skills gap and promoting equal access to education.

The American Consumer Institute has a record of standing in support of nontraditional and career institutions of higher education because they play an important role in the education ecosystem. In fact, our own research has found that proprietary and trade schools

provide educational and economic opportunities to students who might otherwise be left behind. Students who spend money to earn an education are consumers, and we’re standing up for their interests.

America benefits from an all-of-the-approach to higher education; we need a mix of traditional higher education, career colleges, and trade schools. Taken together, students should have options to go to any school they desire. Unfortunately, there is often an overemphasis on students going to expensive private non-profit schools. When it comes to education, we should encourage diversification.

The Wall Street Journal dubbed Generation Z the “Toolbelt Generation,” and rightly so. An unmistakable trend has taken hold in higher education with more students turning their backs from the traditional four-year diploma and toward colleges that provide skilled training for in-demand, high-paying jobs. Last year, enrollment in vocational schools rose 16 percent, with students studying construction trades up twenty-three percent over the past five years. At the same time, Gallup found Americans’ confidence in higher education

has fallen to 36 percent, a sharp decline from just a few years ago.

But with the Biden administration on the hunt to shutter these schools, America’s students would be worse off. The federal government shouldn’t put its thumb on the scale and cut off access to some schools while shoveling subsidies towards traditional schools.

Proprietary schools are also more important than ever due to the widening skills gap. There is significant demand for blue collar positions such as electricians, health care and IT professionals, and welders – all of which require a great deal of certification. Unfortunately, fewer workers are entering these fields, due in part to the ongoing regulatory onslaught from Washington. In recent years, the Department of Education’s Federal Student Aid Office of Enforcement shuttered two of these schools -- Florida Career College and Colorado College America – which has reduced access to earning skills in the areas that are more in demand than ever.

Unfortunately, the Biden administration isn’t focused on increasing access, they are preoccupied with “rolling out a debt-relief program for more than 40 million Americans, revamping the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program and resuming student loan repayments.” In other words, its resources are focused on student loan cancellation, not on making sure that students could access college.

The Biden-Harris team also seems to ignore the huge costs associated with its student loan cancellation fanaticism. While “free college” may appeal to the naïve, ultimately the tab must be paid by someone, and that someone is taxpayers. An analysis by the University of Pennsylvania found the President’s latest loan cancellation plan would cost \$84 billion, not including the \$475 billion it is expected to cost.

With Vice President Harris as the Democratic nominee for president, there’s no sign that the Biden-Harris team plans to get real and refocus its energy and resources on student interests. It is incumbent then on Congress to implement guiderails to keep the Department of Education honest, and the courts to keep it in its lane, so that this administration and future administrations put reality ahead of high-minded ideals, in the interest of all.

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Steve Pociask is president and CEO of the American Consumer Institute, a nonprofit education and research organization. For more information about the Institute, visit www.TheAmericanConsumer.Org or follow us on Twitter (X) @ConsumerPal.



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FILE - Students walk on the campus of Boston College, Monday, April 29, 2024, in Boston. Americans are increasingly skeptical about the value and cost of college, with most saying they feel the U.S. higher education system is headed in the “wrong direction,” according to a new poll.

Is college worth it? More Americans question the cost, value of higher education

By **MALLORY WILSON**
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The confidence level in the value of a college education has steadily declined over the past decade, with polls showing that Americans feel the higher education system is heading in the wrong direction.

Only 36% of adults say they have a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in higher education, while 32% say they have “some” confidence and 32% say they have “little to no” confidence, a report from Gallup and the Lumina Foundation found in July.

The same question found that 57% of Americans had a high confidence level in higher education in 2015.

“It is sad to see that confidence hasn’t grown at all,” said Courtney Brown, vice president at Lumina, an education nonprofit focused on increasing the numbers of students who seek education beyond high school. “What’s shocking to me is that the people who have low or no confidence is actually increasing.”

For the roughly one-third of

Americans who have little to no confidence in the college system, 41% say colleges are “too liberal,” or trying to “indoctrinate” or “brainwash” students. Another 37% believe colleges don’t teach relevant skills, graduates struggle to find jobs and the degree doesn’t mean all that much. Some 28% said the cost concerns them, along with student debt levels.

Americans don’t believe colleges are on a positive path, either. A whopping 68% believe higher education is heading in the wrong direction, while 31% say it is heading in the right direction.

Michael Itzkowitz, founder of HEA Group, a research and consulting firm focused on college, argued that “overall, college is still very much worth it.”

“We know that those who obtain an associate’s degree generally earn more than those high school graduates, and those with a bachelor’s degree go on to earn more than those with an associate’s degree,” Mr. Itzkowitz said. “In fact, bachelor degree holders now earn nearly \$3 million more than someone with just a high school diploma.”

Still, he acknowledged that

the cost is what is driving people away from college.

“While employability and a financially secure future is the number one reason why students go to college, we know that concerns about affordability are the number one reason why they’re hesitant to obtain more post-secondary training,” he said. “So these two factors together are really crucial in terms of making sure that college continues to be worth it for those who choose to see that cost.”

Peter Wood, president of the conservative National Association of Scholars, said the answer isn’t that simple. When asked if he thought college was worth it, he said “no.”

“But, of course, the more complicated answer is that it’s certainly worth it for some students, if ‘worth it’ implies a monetary evaluation of how much their college degrees pay off in the marketplace afterwards,” he said.

Mr. Wood, a former associate provost at Boston University, said whether someone has a beneficial college experience “depends on the student and their ability,” and that the idea that going to

college means a guarantee of a well-paying job after graduation has “evaporated.”

“Now we see large numbers of Americans who look at the cost of college and say that the risk is too great, at least for themselves or maybe their children,” he said.

In a video explaining the findings, Ms. Brown said there are four things that need to be done to get the confidence level back up: make sure college campuses are “comfortable for everyone,” no matter their political affiliation; fix the price of higher education; provide better support for students, and make sure what’s offered aligns with what’s needed in the workforce.

“People today value a credential because they know it will lead to a better job, more pay and a better life,” she said. “However, if that credential is not aligned with what the workforce needs, then they feel like they’re not getting anything for their money.”

Mr. Itzkowitz said there is still room for “significant improvement” within higher education, like making sure there are “safeguards in place to ensure that all institutions are providing

economic opportunity” and that students “feel more confident in their educational investment.”

“I think it’s critical that we encourage post-secondary education as one path to create economic opportunity for individuals, but also to ensure that we remain globally competitive,” he said. “It’s critical that we provide students with the right skills to be able to enter and succeed in the workforce.”

Mr. Wood said colleges need more law and order, especially after the pro-Palestinian protests that took over college campuses across the country in response to Israel’s retaliation to the Oct. 7, 2023 attack by Hamas, demonstrations that disrupted learning and made some students feel unsafe.

He also said colleges should be presenting themselves “as places where, yes, it’s going to be hard to get an education.”

“The challenge is one that you have to internalize and decide if it’s something you really want to do,” he said. “Education definitely is a good thing only if you’re actually doing it, rather than pretending to.”

• This report is based in part on wire service reports.



Taking the Biden administration back to school on college costs



By Nicholas Johns

Over the last few years of President Biden's administration, taxpayers have gotten stuck with the bill for more than a hundred billion dollars in student loan debt. And this fall, millions of families will receive an invoice from a college or university for their children's tuition. Many of these families will have sticker shock at the exorbitant prices—college costs have increased over 130% over the last twenty years. The costs of housing, books, meals, and more all make the burden heavier on families seeking to secure their child's future. Unfortunately, among the biggest drivers of this six-figure bill are inefficiencies passed along by the universities themselves due to free-flowing federal

dollars in the higher education system. A lack of information and transparency about degree programs and their return on investment can lead students astray, in turn generating crushing debts, which the Biden administration keeps trying to pass along to all taxpayers.

The House Education and Workforce Committee, led by Chair Virginia

on family finances. First, the legislation would create more accountability mechanisms for families to understand the return on investment for varying degree programs. Adding a net price calculator along with a comparison tool for different programs will allow for easier and more prudent decision-making on college selection. Another provision would

in this legislation, since the bill would ban further debt cancellations from the administration. This would potentially save taxpayers tens of billions of dollars and prevent executive branch overreach on this issue. Even the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, the official scorekeeper for Congress, says this legislation would save taxpayers \$185 billion over the ten-year budget window. In a time when excessive government spending is contributing to price increases that squeeze taxpayers at checkout, this bill would help reduce that burden.

Overall, what back-to-school legislation could be a riper apple on the desks of all taxpayers? The CCRA takes an innovative and detailed approach to making concrete improvements to the factors behind spiraling higher ed costs for taxpayers and families. Creating more accountability for institutions themselves will reduce the incentives to continually pass along price inefficiencies to families. And by providing better tools for families to make decisions on degrees that will pay for themselves, taxpayers will also win by not having to foot the bill for every exorbitant college experience. Congress should take the opportunity to pass this legislation and educate the Biden administration on how to meaningfully improve the college debt crisis.

Nicholas Johns is a policy and government affairs manager for the National Taxpayers Union, a nonprofit dedicated to sound fiscal policy for taxpayers everywhere.

A lack of information and transparency about degree programs and their return on investment can lead students astray, in turn generating crushing debts, which the Biden administration keeps trying to pass along to all taxpayers.

Foxx, R-N.C., has developed a uniquely tailored solution to both problems, called the College Costs Reduction Act (CCRA). This fall, Congress should help lower costs for all taxpayers and families with kids seeking to attend college by passing this legislation immediately.

Unfortunately, by contrast, President Biden has taken exactly the wrong approach to this issue. His attempts to unilaterally cancel student loan debts would pass the financial load onto the backs of taxpayers, the majority of whom did not attend university. Many of these attempts have been ruled unconstitutional, but the Biden administration has not let up, approving hundreds of millions in forgiveness recently.

The College Costs Reduction Act would take several new approaches to decreasing the strain that college places

cap the total allowable amount of federal aid at the median cost of similar degree programs. Finally, the CCRA would add new limits on the amount that borrowers can take out by ending the uncapped PLUS graduate loan program. All these provisions would help to slow runaway college costs by making higher education programs more judicious with their tuition charges. With these innovations, and by consolidating other loan programs, this legislation would rein in cost drivers, help families make more informed decisions, and discourage rampant tuition inflation.

There's plenty of good news in CCRA for families with kids going to college. But what about for all taxpayers, particularly those currently footing the bill for President Biden's student loan debt transfers? Well, there's a lot to like

Nation's largest Christian college refuses to pay fine amid Biden-Harris investigations

By SEAN SALAI
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Grand Canyon University, the nation's largest Christian college, has refused to pay a record \$37.7 million fine as it resists multiple federal investigations from the Biden-Harris administration.

The Phoenix campus appealed the fine in November after the Education Department's Federal Student Aid Office accused it of "deceiving" government loan applicants about graduate program costs. School officials expect a hearing on the appeal to be held early next year.

The fine noted tuition ran \$10,000 to \$12,000 higher than the advertised \$40,000 to \$49,000 for some 78% of doctoral graduates the school required to take "continuation courses" — a common requirement in universities for students writing dissertations after finishing their coursework.

Building on that fine, the Federal Trade Commission sued GCU in December. That complaint accuses the school of using misleading advertising and telemarketing to falsely present itself as nonprofit and suggest programs cost less than they did.

At the end of December, GCU received word that the Department of Veterans Affairs had started a separate financial audit. In March, however, the VA's Arizona State Approving Agency issued a report that found "no substantiated findings" of wrongdoing in its review of GCU records.

The Biden-Harris administration has opened five investigations into GCU since February 2021, when the school sued the Education Department for denying its request to transition from a for-profit to a nonprofit institution.

Administrators say the investigations represent a pattern of harassment and retaliation for their lawsuit, which a federal judge dismissed the following year.

"Somebody has to stand up to these people," GCU President Brian Mueller said during a news conference in November, his voice rising with indignation.

In an email this week, GCU spokesman Bob Romantic insisted on the university's nonprofit status under state law and IRS statutes. He also noted positive accrediting reports and pointed to multiple federal court rulings exonerating its financial practices.

"The Department of Education's action against us is still a proposed fine at this point, as we have not had our opportunity to refute their findings through the appeals process," Mr. Romantic said. "As such, no amount has been paid nor do we expect that it will once objective third parties have had a chance to review these unsubstantiated claims."

In recent months, the Arizona Department of Education and conservative

Education Department accused Grand Canyon University in record \$37.7 million fine of 'deceiving' grad students



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

FILE - The Jerry Colangelo Museum at Grand Canyon University is seen at dusk in Phoenix, on Sept. 20, 2017. Grand Canyon University, the country's largest Christian university, is being fined \$37.7 million by the federal government amid accusations that it misled students about the cost of its graduate programs.

Goldwater Institute have come to the school's defense as federal rhetoric about the investigations has intensified.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, Connecticut Democrat, asked Education Secretary Miguel Cardona during an April congressional hearing how the Biden-Harris administration might shut down GCU as a "predatory for-profit school."

"We are cracking down not only to shut them down, but to send a message not to prey on students," Mr. Cardona responded, according to Fox News.

Mr. Cardona accused GCU in his testimony of "preying on first-generation students" who didn't understand the degrees could cost more than the advertised price.

He cited "borrower defense, debt discharge, holding colleges more accountable, and holding higher education institutions more accountable" as ways the federal government could change that.

"Mr. Cardona's inflammatory comments, which are legally and factually incorrect, are so reckless that GCU has no choice but to demand an immediate retraction. He is either confused, misinformed or does not understand the actions taken by his own agency," GCU said in a statement about the hearing.

Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne, a Republican elected in 2022, responded with a letter urging Mr. Cardona not to "shut down" the university.

"In the U.S., anyone accused of wrongdoing is presumed innocent and entitled to their day in court," wrote Mr. Horne, a lawyer and former state attorney general. "For a Cabinet-level official, one who is sworn to uphold the U.S. Constitution, your threat against GCU is contrary to those constitutional guarantees and unworthy of your position."

As of Tuesday, Mr. Horne's office said he had received no response to the letter or acknowledgment of its receipt from the Education Department.

In February, the Phoenix-based Goldwater Institute filed a lawsuit against the Education Department after it refused to turn over emails between federal agencies discussing last year's record fine.

The complaint asks a federal judge to make the department comply with a Freedom of Information Act request that Goldwater submitted to understand why the fine exceeded what other schools have paid in the past for covering up sexual harassment.

"The records may help inform the public about this extraordinary fine, as well as coordination between various federal agencies in what appears to be the intentional targeting of a successful university — one that's no stranger to run-ins with the feds — based on extraordinarily thin allegations," Goldwater staff attorney Stacy Skankey said in a statement.

The Education Department did not respond to multiple emails this week seeking comment on the dispute.

In the Oct. 31 announcement of the fine, the department said it would encourage more than 7,500 former GCU students to file federal borrower defense to repayment claims to cancel their loan debts.

Efforts to cancel federal student loan debts through BDR claims and other means have intensified under President Biden, who made it a signature promise of his 2020 election campaign. Vice President Kamala Harris has issued multiple public statements trumpeting the administration's student loan forgiveness policies, which Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump opposes.

Meanwhile, Grand Canyon has argued it is more transparent about graduate degree costs than most universities. The school has long posted online notices that "continuation credits" may increase the course hours and fees required to complete advanced degrees.

Founded as a nonprofit liberal arts college by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1949, Grand Canyon morphed into a for-profit, nondenominational Christian university in 2004 as it struggled to pay its bills.

The school hired Mr. Mueller, a former leader at the for-profit University of Phoenix, in 2008. He said the campus — which does not accept state tax subsidies — subsequently grew from 900 to 26,000 students and from "a couple thousand students online" to 92,000 virtual learners in 14 years.

School officials have pledged to sue the Education Department if their appeals fail next year. They noted the federal agency has refused their requests for independent mediation.

GCU's president said in November that while 23 regulatory agencies had visited campus and approved its financial practices, Education Department officials had refused his invitation to do an on-site inspection.

"Could we pay the fine? It would be a hardship, but it doesn't matter to me whether the fine is \$37 million or one dollar, we're not going to pay the fine because the truth is just the opposite of what they're saying," Mr. Mueller said. "We are the single most transparent university in the country in terms of helping students understand what the time to complete a degree and the cost to complete a degree is."