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## [A Vote for Students](#)

Recently, I took on the role of managing director for the Coalition for Educational Success, which includes many of the nation's leading career colleges and serves more than 350,000 students at 478 campuses in 41 states. Many may be asking why I chose to work with a sector of education that is under blistering attack from both the Department of Education and critics in Congress. The answer is simple: I support President Obama's goal of the U.S. having the highest number of college graduates by 2020, and I firmly believe career colleges play a unique -- and critical -- role in achieving that objective.

In fact, both the president and Education Secretary Arne Duncan have acknowledged the important contribution of career colleges. Just last year, [Duncan spoke about the essential role career colleges play in achieving the president's vision for higher education](#):

[L]et me be crystal clear: for-profit institutions play a vital role in training young people and adults for jobs. They are critical to helping America meet the President's 2020 goal. They are helping us meet the explosive demand for skills that public institutions cannot always meet.

And he is right. Today, nearly 2.6 million U.S. students are enrolled in career colleges. These schools educate and place students in 17 of the 20 fastest growing fields in the nation. Furthermore, career colleges provide access to higher education for those who otherwise would have none. For millions of non-traditional and at-risk students -- full-time job holders, working parents, workforce returners, minorities, veterans, seniors -- career colleges offer the best, and for many, only real access to higher education. As new jobs are created and technology evolves, career colleges will be first in line to teach and train the new workforce.

Unfortunately, the president's effort risks being derailed by the Department of Education's proposed "gainful employment" rule, which would result in the elimination of career college programs. The Department's proposed rule would close access to a higher education for the very students the Obama Administration is seeking to assist -- it's simply not fair and not right.

I am not alone in reaching that conclusion. Last Friday the House of Representatives voiced its overwhelming support for students at career colleges. A bipartisan group of 289 members of Congress from across the political spectrum voted in support of an amendment that will stop the gainful employment regulation.

Rare in this day and age of partisan bickering, this amendment was supported by liberals and conservatives, members of the Black Caucus and members from the Tea Party. They all agree that the gainful employment rule is standing in the way of our nation's ability to have the highest college graduation rates in the world. Under the gainful employment regulation, too many low-income and minority students will lose access to the educational opportunities critical to their future success.

Congress sent a strong message that the gainful employment regulation is bad policy. While the Department's regulation attempts to address very real problems concerning student debt (a problem that is shared by all students who are seeking a higher education, regardless of where they choose to go to school), the rules are so broad that many students -- particularly those who are most at-risk - - will lose access to programs that provide valuable training for in-demand jobs. In addition, the career college sector is already a highly-regulated industry, with oversight from the DOE, accrediting bodies and state licensure agencies.

Congress also rightfully viewed the DOE as over-stepping its authority by introducing the gainful employment regulation, and proposing such drastic and far-reaching changes to America's system of higher education.

Under the Higher Education Act, career colleges are required to offer programs that lead to gainful employment in legally recognized occupations, in order for them to be eligible for federal aid. The term gainful employment, has been in the statute for over 40 years, and during the most recent reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, there was no debate or discussion about a need to further define the term. The DOE is exceeding its authority with gainful employment.

The bottom line is that students need more higher education choices, not fewer -- and more information, not less. And all colleges should be judged by the same high standards, regardless of whether they are for-profit, non-profit, public or private.

In this critical time when President Obama has called upon the country to once again lead the world in graduation rates, the postsecondary solution for America will need to include community colleges, state universities, private colleges and career colleges. We must embrace all sectors of higher education, recognizing that each one serves a different and important demographic with appropriate programs of study, learning models, student services and student outcomes.

Career colleges fill a vital unmet demand in the nation's higher education landscape and have a proven track record of successfully graduating students and setting them on a better path for life. The success of President Obama's 2020 goal will hinge upon pooling our collective resources and recognizing each other's strengths. We look forward to working with the rest of higher education to be partners in job creation and move the country forward.