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COUNTERPOINT

Misrepresenting the GAO's Revision

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By **Tom Harkin**

Friday's op-ed in these pages, "[Sweating Bullets at the GAO.](#)" by representatives of the American Enterprise Institute, offers a lopsided, inaccurate depiction of the Government Accountability Office's recent update to its Aug. 4 report on the recruiting practices at for-profit colleges.

First and foremost, the authors ignore the fact that these updates did not alter the very troubling findings or conclusion of the report. While the GAO made some revisions and clarifications of the long list of misleading practices it documented, the finding stands -- every single school its investigators visited engaged in misrepresentation, deception or outright fraud.

In an attempt to paint the GAO's update as a dramatic development, the authors cite an anonymous source who claims that the GAO rarely issues this sort of revision.

That's just not true. According to the GAO's spokesman, GAO has issued 12 such revisions in the last year alone, including a similar one in September. Additionally, their assertion that all of the edits were made to correct "errors" that cast "for-profits in the worst possible light" is misinformed. Many are simple clarifications, and some bolster the GAO's findings.

And let's not forget -- the GAO's discovery of fraudulent or deceptive recruiting tactics was just the tip of the iceberg. My Committee has issued three reports based on data we collected from 30 for-profit education companies that raise several more serious concerns about whether many for-profit colleges have the best interests of their students at heart.

We've found that 95 percent of for-profit students end up saddled with debt (as compared with 16 percent of community college students), and that 57 percent of students at 16 for-profit schools withdrew without a diploma in a single year. Most recently, we documented a startling increase in the amount of military education benefits flowing into this sector in the last year.

Given the findings of this investigation, it's no surprise that the for-profit education industry has turned the full force of its multimillion dollar lobbying operation on the GAO in an attempt to muddy the waters and distract from the growing consensus that their industry needs greater regulatory oversight.

Far from "sweating bullets," the GAO is helping to illuminate a growing problem.

Senator Tom Harkin, a Democrat from Iowa, is chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.