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### **Speakers at House Hearing Assail Regulatory Burden on Colleges**

*By Kelly Field*

Washington

Is overregulation undermining the nation's education system? Colleges certainly think so, and Congressional Republicans say they want to find out.

On Tuesday the House education committee held the first in what it says will be a series of hearings on the regulatory burden on colleges and schools.

In an opening statement, Rep. John Kline of Minnesota, the panel's chairman, promised to root out rules that "hinder job creation and economic growth."

"We will leave no stone unturned as we look to strengthen education and the work force," he pledged.

Much of the hearing focused on education mandates imposed on elementary and secondary schools under the No Child Left Behind Act. But lawmakers also heard from Christopher B. Nelson, president of St. John's College, in Maryland, about the "massive" federal regulation of higher education. He urged Congress to apply its "pay as you go" budget rules to regulation, eliminating old requirements as new ones are added.

"There are things we are measuring because they can be measured, not because they are good, and those are the most dangerous," he said.

Mr. Nelson drew sympathy from Mr. Kline, who said he knew regulations were "a real burden" on colleges. "We want to get at that," he added.

#### **3,000 Recommendations**

Tuesday's hearing came less than two months after President Obama issued an executive order directing federal agencies to drop rules that are outdated, ineffective, or overly burdensome.

But it's unclear if anything will result from this latest round of

regulatory review. Colleges have been complaining about overregulation for years, but the rules have continued to multiply, and efforts to streamline them have fallen flat.

A decade ago, Rep. Howard P. (Buck) McKeon, who was then chairman of the education committee, asked colleges to identify regulations that they would like to see altered or eliminated in the process, then pending, of reauthorizing the Higher Education Act. Colleges submitted more than 3,000 recommendations to the committee, but the changes never made it into law. In the end, Congress enacted a reauthorization bill that critics say doubled colleges' reporting burden.

This past fall, the Education Department made final a package of "program integrity" rules aimed at protecting taxpayer dollars from fraud and abuse. The package created dozens of new reporting requirements for colleges and universities. Mr. Kline alluded to those rules in his opening remarks on Tuesday, saying they were "forcing schools to redirect critical funds to pay the inevitable fines or hire outside counsel to help make sense of the new regulations."

Somewhat surprisingly, none of the lawmakers or witnesses brought up the Education Department's proposed "gainful employment" rule, which would cut off federal student aid to programs whose graduates have high debt-to-income ratios and low loan-repayment rates. The controversial rule has been the subject of intensive lobbying in Washington, with student and consumer groups pushing the plan and for-profit colleges vigorously opposing it.

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**11336803** 15 hours ago

Lets see, the Congress selectively chooses funded research topics like demagogues to embarrass higher education, then creates reporting requirements to "stop this abuse" and now leads the charge against these rules. I predict that more reports of research funds for unacceptable projects are not far behind

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**marktropolis** 14 hours ago

The title of the article says "speakers." The \*one\* person quoted, Nelson of St. John's College, a \*private\* institution with tuition exceeding \$40K a year, 511 students, and he's talking about "massive" federal regulation? Really? Massive?

Nice cherry-picking of a speaker. Very small, private, oh, and don't forget their entire curriculum is the Great Books.

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**griggsrk** 13 hours ago in reply to marktropolis

Smaller institutions have the same reporting requirements as large ones, but no dedicated staff. I think St. John's might be disproportionately affected compared to the University of Maryland, for example.

Also, I may not be reading the tone of your comment correctly, but you appear to be sneering at the liberal arts in general and the Great Books curriculum in particular. My experience is that small private liberal arts schools produce the very well educated, very successful, very civically engaged graduates—people you want to meet. And look at the proportion of their graduates that go on to get PhDs. If you were sneering, your sneers are misplaced.

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**08230010** 11 hours ago

In order to reduce the cost of regulation, we need data. Each school should be required to annually calculate their cost of compliance based on a set of vague yet complex rules. We can then spend the next ten years arguing over the methodology and what if any conclusions can be drawn. Thus Congress will have addressed the issue without providing any relief, and all the while making the problem worse.

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