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CASTELLAW: Let veterans decide what school is right Obama plan to treat heroes like scofflaws is insulting

By Brig. Gen. John Castellaw

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As commanding general of the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, I made it my sacred duty to welcome back all of my Marines returning from combat. No matter your opinion of the war, these brave veterans always deserve a pat on the back and our help for those who choose to transition back into civilian life. For some, that will mean attending college. But, even as [Congress](#) and the [Obama administration](#) have attempted to make higher education more affordable for veterans through the expanded GI Bill, others are proposing arbitrary rules that will make it a lot harder for our warriors to gain their educational goals.

A [Department of Education](#) regulation - called the Gainful Employment Rule - imposes unrealistic federal student loan repayment standards on for-profit colleges. Schools that can't meet these arbitrary new standards would be denied federal financial aid for their students. Far from helping to reduce student loan debt and defaults, as the proponents claim, the rule applies an unfair double standard to for-profit schools, which could leave veterans and thousands of other students on the outside of many campus gates looking in.

For-profit schools are often the best choice for veterans. Years ago, I attended the [American Military University, a for-profit institution](#), and earned a degree that made me more competitive for selection as brigadier general. Due to my frequent transfers and assignments to remote locations, no comparable nonprofit college was available. I am living proof that these institutions provide a critical resource to service men and women.

America's for-profit colleges are invaluable resources for millions of Americans. They provide our economy with roughly one-half of its technically trained workers. They help displaced workers train for new employment or improve the skills of workers seeking to raise their incomes. And they do so more effectively than even our great community college system, producing graduation rates 20 percent higher.

For-profit schools are particularly valuable for veterans. Unlike traditional college freshmen, veterans often return home to busy schedules dominated by work and family. They require the flexible course schedules and online classes that are the hallmarks of for-profit schools. As shown by my example, the needs of veterans often cannot be met by traditional nonprofit schools.

So why is the [Education Department](#) seemingly so intent on making it harder for veterans to attend for-profit school? It's hard for me to understand. While their goal of reducing federal student loan debts and defaults is laudable, this regulation seems ill-suited to this purpose and, for some reason, applied only to for-profit schools.

Far from being a source of high debt or defaults, a higher percentage of for-profit school graduates repay their loans in full than do graduates of community colleges, which are exempt from its regulation. Graduates of two-year for-profit programs earn virtually the same in their first year on the job as graduates of two-year programs at public and private nonprofit schools. The [department](#) also ignores the fact that many low-income graduates pay off their loans over a longer period of time than those completing degrees at other schools. So why the double standard?

Maybe the [department](#) simply isn't fully informed about the benefits of for-profit education or the value of its graduates to our economy. In either case, it's time to put the brakes on this new and harmful regulation until all the facts are thoroughly reviewed. Veterans shouldn't see their plans for a higher education shot down without a full and measured consideration of this regulation's impact on their hopes and aspirations.

America's warriors have done everything we've asked them to do; now it's time to make sure we provide every option for veterans to transition to civilian life and a new career in a tough economy. That's where for-profit colleges come in. Just as hard, realistic training readied our troops for war, for-profit schools are preparing veterans to win jobs and better salaries. The [Education Department](#) should rethink the Gainful Employment Rule and allow our veterans the chance at an education and a better life.

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