



Libertarian Bob Barr Pushes to Keep Higher Education Subsidies

By **Kay Steiger**

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Last week *Politico* published an op-ed from 2008 Libertarian Party presidential candidate and former congressman Bob Barr on the proposed gainful employment regulations proposed by the Department of Education. But Barr's support of subsidies to for-profit schools is less surprising in light of reporting by *Salon's Justin Elliott*, which noted that Barr is a law professor at John Marshall Law School in Atlanta, a for-profit educational institution. The connection is something Barr has neglected to disclose in his writings in support of the industry.

In lockstep with other opponents of the proposed regulations in recent days, Barr criticized attacked Campus Progress' advocacy work to support greater accountability of for-profit schools.

In the *Politico* op-ed, Barr also attacks a report released by the Government Accountability Office last year that found some for-profit schools were deceiving students in their recruitment process. Barr zeros in on the fact that GAO released "revisions" to the report. But while GAO made revisions to the report, a spokesperson also insists they don't change the overall findings of the report.

GAO spokesman Chuck Young wrote in an e-mail that the office issues revisions when "additional information comes to light and provides additional context to our already published work." Of the roughly 1,000 reports issued in the last fiscal year, about 12 received later revisions, he said. He added that the office reviewed more than 80 hours of audio from the investigation before it released the revision on the for-profit college report.

"Nothing changed with the overall message of the report, and nothing changed with any of our findings," Young wrote.

But because the GAO made revisions, many for-profit lobbyists are seizing upon this as means of discrediting the entire report.

At its base, the "gainful employment" regulations issue is about curbing wasteful spending – the regulations promise to cut federal funding from programs that leave students with high default rates or too much debt compared with their earnings. While Campus Progress has been focused on eliminating spending for bad programs to ensure more aid to successful programs, curbing government subsidies more generally is something libertarians normally get behind. In fact, in 2005 the libertarian think tank Cato Institute released a study in which they argue, "Rather than expand the current system, Congress should consider a phase-out of federal assistance to higher education over a 12-year time frame."

Barr seems to have abandoned his libertarian ideas in this case, where the interests of his employer are at stake.

Kay Steiger is the editor of CampusProgress.org.

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