

April 5, 2011

Dear Senator Harkin,

As a Navy veteran and former student at a for-profit school, I am writing you today in strong support of the gainful employment regulations proposed by the Department of Education. These long overdue regulations would help prevent waste, fraud and abuse in some career college programs, programs like the one I was enrolled in that provided subpar training with a high price tag and left me with significant debt.

Immediately after High School I joined the US NAVY as an aircraft electrician. I spent most of my career working on F/A 18's at NAS Oceana in Virginia Beach. Like many young servicemen I had aspirations of higher education and was depending on the G.I. Bill to pay for it. While in the service, my interests began to shift from electronics to Information Technology. I believed that the best way to grow in a new career was to take a break from active duty military and attend college full time. I often came across commercials advertising ITT Technical Institute's computer networking security program, and I decided to see what the school had to offer.

Unlike other institutions I reached out to, as soon as I expressed interest in ITT Tech, they began to actively and aggressively pursue me. Minutes after I filled out an online form a recruiter called me. He then called every day, telling me it was urgent for me to enroll. In the end, my recruiters' insistence that ITT Tech's national accreditation was superior to regional accreditation is what convinced me to attend the school.

The financial aid administrators at ITT Tech seemed very skilled in finding funds for my education and even completed all of the paperwork for my G.I. Bill benefits. Unfortunately, the bills started to come. The ink on the paperwork had hardly dried before I was required to pay the school \$800 a month. I would later learn that ITT Tech was making more money off of my attendance than I was even aware of.

My cost for a year and a half of enrollment was \$36,000. I received \$19,000 in federal loans, \$7,000 from the Pell Grant, \$250 a month from a military scholarship, and \$1,300 a month in G.I. Bill benefits. What's worse, the expensive tuition did not seem to go toward a quality education. I saw very little of the school's income go to staff or equipment. Some of my instructors were very passionate about their fields and would go the extra mile in providing value to my education, although some had to compensate for the school's extremely slow network and outdated equipment by bringing software from home. However, the majority of teachers seemed less than concerned with the quality of education being provided. On one occasion, I came to suspect that one of my instructors was not actually grading my homework. I confirmed this suspicion by placing notes in my reports and projects inviting the reader to confirm that they were actually reading what I wrote. Without fail, if I turned in anything with my name spelled correctly I was guaranteed an A+.

What little I did learn from my time at ITT Tech, I learned by buying my own books and doing my own online research. Not only was the school in the habit of issuing text books for the wrong Operating System we were required to learn, but much of the software I used at school was actually pirated.

I was dropped from ITT Tech due to administrative ineptitude. I needed to go on a business trip for my employer, and prior to the trip I notified every instructor of the exact dates I would be gone. I also had a representative of my company personally contact the chairman of IT at ITT Tech. This chairman made a miscalculation in determining how the absence would stack with the school's attendance policy. The result was that upon my return that I was no longer a student at ITT Tech. The school that had been so eager to enroll me was no longer interested in retaining me. I asked everyone I could, including the Dean of the Norfolk campus, and was told that there was nothing that they could do, but I was free to re-enroll next year.

I decided that it would be important to protect myself financially from the school. I had financial aid prepare transcripts on the day I was dropped to show how much I owed the school or how much they owed me. That was when I was shocked to discover just how much money ITT Tech had made off of me. My financial dealings with the school amounted to \$36,000 and the transcript revealed that the school had overcharged me by \$1,300 in the last month. As an additional blow, within two months of leaving ITT Tech, they sent me a bill for \$2,000 and a transcript that showed clear signs that it was altered in a way to specifically make my positive balance disappear and create a negative balance. I called the institution and revealed that I had saved copies of my finances that conflicted with the version they had mailed to me. The school never bothered me again about the \$2,000 discrepancy.

In hindsight I regret attending ITT Tech. The institution provided at best an absolute minimum education and left me with nearly insurmountable debt. Even worse, ITT Tech took taxpayer money in the form of grants and my G.I. Bill, amounting to a net loss for all taxpaying Americans.

In these times marked by budget crises it is paramount that an investment is made in ensuring that educational institutions that benefit from any type of taxpayer money provide genuine value to their students. When more people are educated, our national wealth increases – not only in homegrown innovation and talent, but in earning power and therefore tax revenue. Regulating these 'for-profit' schools is therefore the fiscally conservative thing to do.

Sincerely,



Adam C. Gonyea

Norfolk, VA