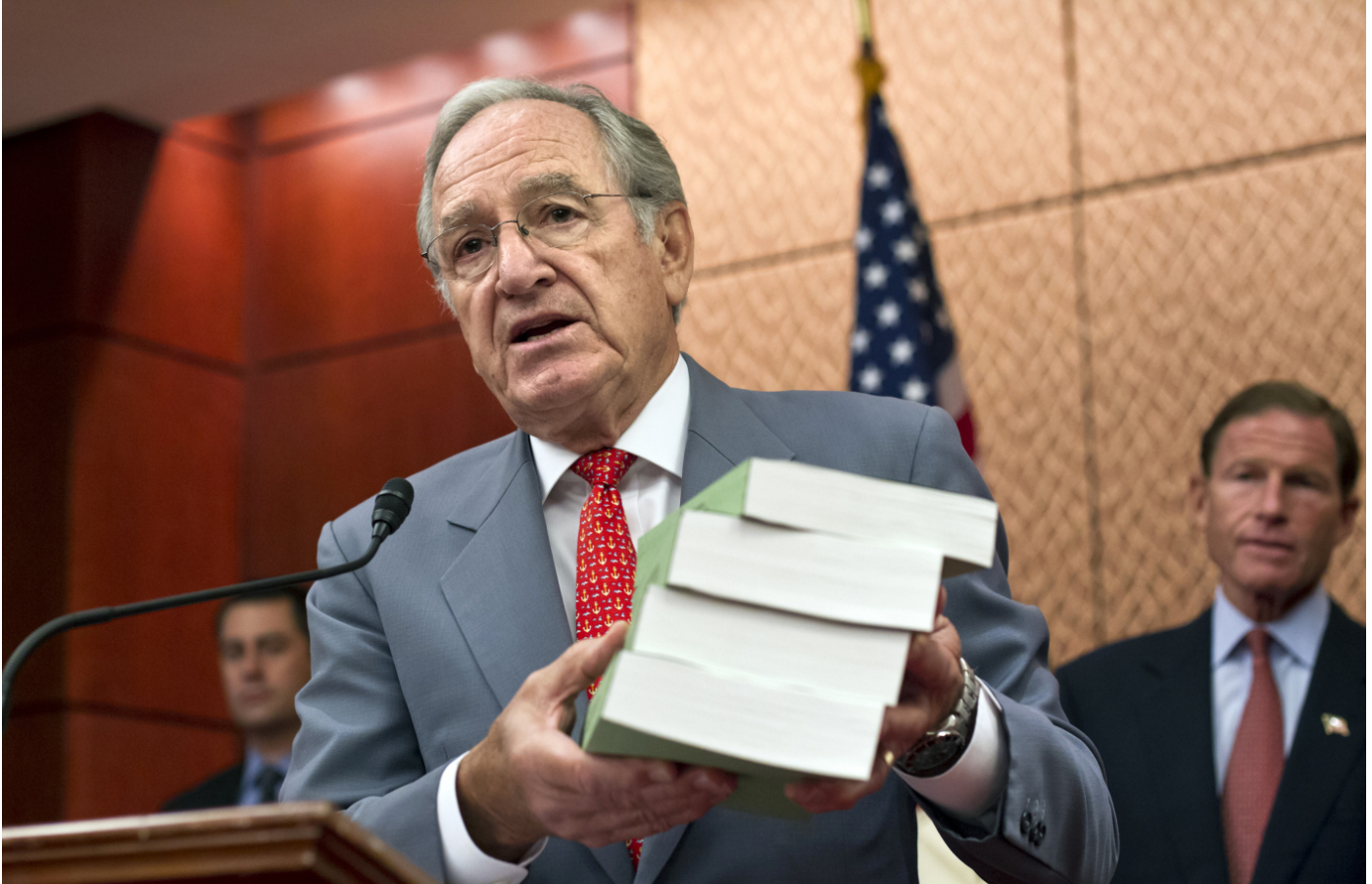


Rolling back for-profit college reforms wastes money and lives



Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Chairman Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa releases a four-volume, Senate Democratic report asserting that for-profit schools often hit vulnerable students with exorbitant tuition, aggressive recruiting practices, and abysmal student outcomes,, July 30, 2012, on Capitol Hill in Washington. At right is Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

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The reputation of the for-profit career college industry has been sullied for decades by con-artists and scammers.

But in the last few years, some effort has been made to weed out the worst offenders, denying them the federal student loan money that is the lifeblood of the entire industry.

EDITORIAL

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Now even that small progress threatens to be undone. The Trump administration — headed by the man who ran the scandalously unethical Trump University — is preparing to pare back regulatory reforms designed to protect students from the worst for-profit college practices. A responsible Congress would step in and block this action.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Education, led by new Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, announced it would delay the imposition of the so-called “gainful employment” rule, which is intended to keep for-profit career colleges from loading up students with debt they can never repay because the schools don’t prepare them for real jobs.

Then last week, DeVos rescinded a rule that prevented individuals with student loans from being socked with fees equivalent to 16 percent of their balance.

By no means are all for-profit colleges unethical, but numerous investigations of the industry have uncovered repeated exploitation.

One of the earliest probes, in fact, was by this newspaper in 1988. And what we said in an editorial then we could say now:

“[The schools] leave the students without an education, without a job and without a dream. But they are left with something: an obligation to pay back a student loan, often running into the thousands of dollars. Taxpayers, who support these schools in the form of government loans and grants, also are left with something: the bill for millions of dollars of wasted student aid.”

Twenty-two years later, a Government Accountability Office probe of 15 for-

profit colleges found that every one made “deceptive or otherwise questionable statements,” including exaggerating graduates’ potential salaries.

A 2012 investigation by former Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, concluded that the industry had “overpriced tuition, predatory recruiting practices, sky-high dropout rates, billions of taxpayer dollars spent on aggressive marketing and advertising and companies gaming regulations to maximize profits.”

In 2013, Lisa Madigan of Illinois and 13 other state attorneys general urged Congress to crack down on the for-profit school industry.

And in 2016, George Washington University and the Treasury Department found that 70 percent of students at for-profit schools dropped out between 2006 and 2008 and that those who enrolled in associate’s and bachelor’s programs earned less money after leaving school than before they started.

Some for-profit colleges fill legitimate niches in American education. But too many others provide people with worthless “educations” that do not lead to jobs, giving them no hope of paying off huge student loans.

Our tax dollars go to waste, and so do young lives.

Send letters to letters@suntimes.com.

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