

One Wisconsin Now: Legislator's choice- common sense protections of students or Gov. Walker's way

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MADISON, Wis. — Gov. Scott Walker's proposal to eliminate the Educational Approval Board (EAB) is set to be considered by the legislature's Joint Committee on Finance on Thursday. According to One Wisconsin Now Executive Director Scot Ross, Walker's latest scheme, a similar version of which was rejected by the legislature in 2015, would undermine protections for Wisconsinites from predatory for-profit colleges at a time when it is needed more than ever.

"The for-profit college industry has earned additional scrutiny with a track record of abuses that have left hardworking students in Wisconsin and across the nation deep in debt and without marketable degrees," commented Ross. "That Gov. Walker would again propose gutting state oversight of the predatory practices all too common in this industry suggests he either doesn't understand the problem or just doesn't care."

In 2015 Walker, as part of his budget, proposed the elimination of the EAB, the repeal of several regulatory provisions and the division of the agency's remaining functions between the Department of Financial Institutions and the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. The legislature rejected the provision at that time.

Included in his 2017 state budget is Walker's new plan — eliminating the EAB as a

stand alone agency including the positions of executive director and board members and moving its functions to the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS).

An analysis of the proposal by the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau notes that while the 6.5 employee positions currently authorized at the EAB would be transferred, the employees that currently fill them are not, instead leaving the decisions about when and with whom to fill the slots to the DSPS Secretary.

The elimination of the Executive Director position would also mean that the DSPS Secretary, with no background in higher education issues, would replace the EAB on the Distance Learning Authorization Board that works with other states to regulate distance learning services.

Scrutiny of the for-profit college industry has increased recently, and what has been uncovered is unsavory. Federal government scrutiny has uncovered how the industry targets veterans, minorities and low income students, encourages them to take on large student debts and oftentimes leaves those who graduate with essentially worthless degrees. States are getting involved too with a coalition of over 30 state Attorneys General investigating deceptive marketing and pressure tactics that lead to students taking on large amounts of debt.

In Wisconsin there have been several high profile closures of for-profit college chains including [ITT Tech](#) and Globe University. Such closures have left hundreds of state students in limbo, without a way to continue their education or get credit at other institutions for classes they had already completed and paid for.

Ross noted that the kind of disregard for students shown with the EAB is par for the course with Walker. As a member of the state legislature, the career politician voted for budgets that increased tuition at the University of Wisconsin and technical college system by over 50 percent. As Governor, Walker cut state funding for higher education by record amounts, imposed a double digit tuition increase on students and so underfunded financial aid that every year tens of thousands of students eligible for help receive none. Walker has also opposed legislation to create a state based authority to help borrower refinance student loans at lower interest rates, just like you can with a mortgage.

He concluded, "Protecting students trying to improve their skills and making sure bad actors are held accountable is just common sense, but Gov. Walker has shown

no inclination to do that. The question tomorrow is what will the members of the Joint Finance Committee choose, common sense or Scott Walker's way?"