

Statement by John Hinchliffe
Past Chairman of the Nevada Restaurant Association
Submitted in Response to “Education Regulations: Roadblocks to Student Choice in Higher Education”
House Committee on Education and the Workforce

As past Chairman of the Nevada Restaurant Association, I know firsthand the importance of quality chefs and the importance of the culinary arts programs that prepare them for their careers. Southern Nevada is now the home of many famous world known chefs and restaurants and our industry in “Las Vegas” is the envy of many cities and regions.

The Nevada Restaurant Association represents, educates and promotes a rapidly growing industry that is comprised of some 5,000 restaurant and foodservice outlets employing over a hundred thousand people in this state. We have nearly 300 member companies represent more than 1,000 restaurant establishments. Our Association provides its members with many services. Among those have been the advancement of the culinary arts profession.

Our industry depends on a well-trained and skilled workforce – heavily relying on students who graduate from culinary arts programs, such as the Las Vegas Art Institute. Through this program, Las Vegas has been able to maintain and further support and develop its renowned culinary reputation.

More importantly, however, the Institute has answered the call of many aspiring students who desire to develop their skills and profession in the art of culinary services and restaurant management.

Unfortunately we fear that proposed regulations from the Department of Education will create barriers for students with a passion for the culinary arts. We have been very vocal on our opposition to the department’s “Gainful Employment” rule as we believe it unfairly targets career colleges, especially those with culinary arts programs. As proposed, the rule would punish the learning institutions, the industry’s they support and the very students it purports to serve.

Students in our state should be able to choose which programs and degrees they want to pursue. The government should not be limiting critical funding for students who wish to attend career colleges. We fear the Gainful Employment rule will hurt the exact population of students we need to be helping the most: those from low-income and minority communities. A significant source of our skilled workforce has come from career-oriented colleges; we’ve found that these schools provide education and training in a specific career path for students who are not a fit for, or who do not want to attend a traditional four-year college. If a student in Nevada wants to go to the Art Institute of Las Vegas, they should have that opportunity.

In collaboration with the Institute that serves our industry, we recently filed comments during the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking Process with the Department and corresponded with Nevada’s Congressional members making the following points:

- * The rule should use the higher of the Bureau of Labor Statistics or actual earnings for debt to income tests – it is the most accurate income data;
- * The rule should use a 15 year repayment schedule – it best approximates an average real life educational repayment period;
- * The rule should be phased in to commence no sooner than 2015 so as to not adversely affect students and schools;

* The rule should exclude graduate programs.

We understand the Departments objective through this rule is to protect students, among other things. However, the rule as promulgated will have in our opinion, many negative consequences to the very institutions that support career development, job growth, industry economic enhancements and most important personal individual fulfillment.