ADAM SCHIFF
U.S. SENATOR *for* CALIFORNIA

Higher Education Accreditation Accountability Act

President Trump has previously referred to accreditation as a **"secret weapon"** against higher education, and his Department of Education has proposed several regulatory changes that would make it easy for institutions to escape accountability and for for-profit, predatory schools to enter the market.

Specifically, the Administration has proposed regulations that would shorten the timeline around the recognition process for new accreditors. Current regulations require agencies to accredit at least one institution or program and carry out other typical accreditor duties before seeking recognition from ED over a period of at least two years. This waiting period enables the Department of Education to examine whether an accreditor is consistently and rigorously applying quality standards before giving it the ability to gatekeep federal funds for institutions.

The Trump Administration, however, plans to recognize accreditors once they establish standards and operating procedures. This lower barrier of entry will enable new accreditors to enter the market more quickly and with less scrutiny, inviting lower quality, predatory, and hyper-ideological actors to serve as the gatekeepers of millions of dollars in federal funds.

Officials from the defunct accreditors of predatory for-profit colleges lobbied incoming Trump Administration officials after 2024 to make these changes and are positioning themselves to establish new accrediting agencies as these regulations are promulgated.

In tandem with this change, the Administration is also loosening regulations around the ability of IHEs to switch accreditors. Switching accreditors is not always problematic, especially when institutional priorities evolve. However, some IHEs have tried to switch accreditors to escape accountability or sanctions from their current accreditor.

The ***Higher Education Accreditation Accountability Act*** would add guardrails to accreditation and push back against the Administration's attempts to allow schools to escape accountability. The bill would require that accrediting agencies seeking recognition from ED must accredit at least one institution or program for at least two years and demonstrate that it can enforce standards and operating procedures. This portion of the bill would add scrutiny to ED's agency recognition procedures, preventing unproven and unvetted accrediting agencies, which could potentially enable predatory institutions to access millions in Title IV funds, from entering the market.

The bill also addresses the Administration's proposal to make accreditation switching easier for IHEs seeking to avoid accountability or sanctions. Under the legislation, schools would be required to submit an application to ED showing reasonable cause for switching accreditors. Applications would be subject to a public input period, while ED would be required to investigate and consider whether the institution is attempting to avoid scrutiny or sanctions from their current accreditor. The legislation also mandates that the IHE does not have reasonable cause to change the institution's primary accrediting agency if it has been disciplined under specific circumstances by its accreditor.