It is hard to find someone to say something good about universities and colleges these days. The sector is characterized by high and rising tuition costs, a product of highly uneven quality, and a highly unstable regulatory environment. One reason for that is the nature of competition for students.

It is not true that colleges don’t compete. Indeed, they compete vigorously. Sometimes they compete on the student body, the dorms, the climbing wall, and other aspects of the residential “experience.” Sometimes they compete on academic reputation, programs and course offerings, the research accomplishments of the faculty, and other aspects of quality. And sometimes, sometimes, they compete on tuition costs (prices).

But rarely do they compete on value – high quality and low tuition versus the opposite.

A recent bill from the House Committee on Education and Workforce – the Cost of College Reduction Act (CCRA) – seeks to change that. Now, understand that Eakinomics is not saying that this bill will become law. Eakinomics is not saying that this bill is perfect. And Eakinomics is not saying that it falls to the government to fix all problems – there is nothing stopping a college or university setting out to compete on its own. But Eakinomics is saying that it is a relief that there is a higher education policy that seeks to solve a real problem instead of the administration’s feckless student loan forgiveness.

At the heart of the CCRA is an attempt to create clear and transparent pricing and tools to judge the quality of outcomes from attending a particular school and taking a particular program of study. There are caps on the amount of federal student aid that can be plowed into an institution and a student, and a series of efforts on accountability. Schools are on the hook for student loans that are not performing, giving them an incentive to deliver labor-market-ready students upon graduation and to minimize the tuition (and thus loans) needed to accomplish this.

This bill would also clear away the federal regulatory underbrush, streamline student loan repayment, and legislatively ensure that the Department of Education cannot undercut these efforts. It is a comprehensive and refreshing approach.

Will it work? That requires further study. But it is likely that demography will dictate a large shakeout in higher education over the next two decades in any event. It would be better for the surviving institutions to be more efficient, outcome-oriented, and nimble. This is a step in that direction.