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| 1. Mark your confusion by identifying anything you don’t understand. 2. Show evidence of a close reading (questions, connections, predictions, reactions, summarizing, clarifying, challenging, etc.). 3. Write a 1-page response. Possible Writer’s Notebook questions:  * Should public support of higher education be expanded? Why or why not? Explain. * Is getting a college education as important as getting an elementary/high school education in America? Explain. |

**President proposes two years of free college for students**

By Tribune Chicago Bureau,adapted by Newsela staff, January 12, 2015

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama rolled out a new plan to make two years of community college free for millions of students. The White House said his plan would change college education across the country.

The program could help up to 9 million students, the White House said. The federal government would cover 75 percent of college, with states paying the rest.

“What I’d like to do is to see the first two years of community college free for everybody who is willing to work for it,” Obama said. He announced the plan in a video shot on Air Force One. It was posted Thursday on Facebook, ahead of his visit Friday to a community college in Knoxville, Tennessee.

White House staff members would not say how much it would cost or how the government planned to pay for it. Experts said the plan could cost tens of billions of dollars.

**The Cost Of College Keeps Rising**

The president's plan would make two years of college “the norm,” said Cecelia Munoz, a White House staff member. Right now, more than 13 million people attend a four-year college or university, according to the government. Only about 7 million attend a two-year community college after high school. Yet, over the last 30 years, the cost of public four-year universities has soared more than 250 percent.

The community college plan is just part of one of Obama's larger goals: helping the middle class through education and opportunity. Over time, the amount of money offered by states and the federal government to students for college has dropped. Obama says this prevents poor people from attending college, which helps them earn money and become members of the middle class.

Obama’s plan would make two years of community college free for "responsible students,” Munoz said. The plan would save community college students an average of $3,800 per year. The president also wants to set aside money to pay for technical training programs, which let students go to school and learn skills for a job at the same time.

Obama's plan is based on programs in Tennessee and Chicago. The Tennessee program pays for students to go to any of the state's technology or community colleges. They can also attend a four-year public university offering two-year degrees.

**New Programs Are Needed**

President Obama wants the states to create their own programs. But for that, he needs Congress to approve the money.

“Anything involving more money to pay for things is going to be difficult in this Congress,” said Ben Miller. He is with the New America Foundation. Republicans, who control both houses of Congress, are often against big government programs.

Munoz disagreed. Tennessee’s program is in a state with a Republican governor, she pointed out.

Munoz said the plan would appeal to both Republicans and Democrats.

So far, Obama’s efforts to reduce the cost of college have been unsuccessful. He has tried to offer government money to schools that have both good education records, and help poorer students. Obama has raised the top amount awarded by the Pell Grant. The government grant gives money to students from poor and middle-class families to help them attend college. He has cut out special fees that banks charged for providing students with college loans.

Two-year colleges are cheaper than a four-year university.

Students at public four-year universities pay an average of $4,646 per year in Wyoming, but New Hampshire students pay $14,712 on average.

In comparison, community colleges in Wyoming cost an average of just $2,719 a year. Vermont community colleges are the highest in the country at about $7,320.

**Students Get The Message**

Some students spend the first two years of college at a community college. Then they transfer to a four-year university. For them, free tuition for the first two years would make a big difference, White House staff members say.

Another benefit would be helping students to have ambition, Miller said.

The plan sends a good message to students, Miller said. It would help more students see college as something they can afford. “We see right now that so many students and families really don’t have a great sense of how much college is going to cost."

They believe college costs much more than it does.

If a sixth grader thinks he does not have any chance of going to college "that’s discouraging,” Miller said. “You may conclude there’s no point in trying" to do well in school.