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Opinion Editorial: Reflecting on Obama's America's College Promise Proposal

Brandon L. Rush, Monroe Community College

As I read articles and watch videos pertaining to President Obama's America's College Promise proposal to make community college free to "those willing to work for it," the first word that pops into my mind is opportunity. The second word to pop into my mind is quality. And last I ponder, what will make this work? The education system is a catalyst for a strong workforce. A strong workforce can lead to a stronger economy. Immediately, on a macro-level one can see or speculate on the socioeconomic benefits of this proposal. The institution of such a proposal into law, coupled with the success of students who take advantage of this potential opportunity, will prove profitable to the government and the country as a whole. When a population has access to education, more potential for better opportunity can be realized.

The chance to access the resources of a free education can create new and exciting opportunities almost immediately. That single mother who could not enroll in college due to raising her child will be able to learn new things, and in turn, pass that knowledge and potential of future opportunity on to her child. Adult learners that want to restart their educations will be encouraged to do so because they will not have to worry about the burden financing their education; they will enjoy the advantage of meeting people with similar goals, meeting potential employers, and become knowledgeable of information that will further their progress in life. Parents sending their child to school will have the opportunity to defer loan debt in the first two years and will take advantage of Obama's proposal as long as quality of education is not neglected.

In American culture, there is sometimes a tendency to associate the concept of receiving something for free with lack of quality. In some cases this may be true. For example, apprentice barbers give haircuts for free because they have yet to master the trade; therefore, the service they provide lacks the quality of the service provided of a master barber. Also, as it pertains to education, it has been known for some time that the quality of education is better at private schools, where tuition is paid, than it is at public schools where education is free. I

bring this point because with community colleges being free, I wonder if quality of education and access to resources will be sacrificed or diminished? Will faculty still be compensated as they have? If not, this will affect their performance, no doubt. Will there be the same push to acquire the best resources? Will there even be a large enough budget to insure the availability of the best resources?

On May 30, 2015 I graduated from Monroe Community College (MCC) in Rochester, New York, a community college that is considered one of the best in the nation. I understand completely that I was successful because I had access to the best educational resources provided by the school, and also, because of robust funding, the faculty were able to provide me and my classmates a top-tier education. So because I was aware of the factors that assisted in my matriculation, these factors became important to me, which is why I question any sacrifice of these resources for free education. The last factor that contributed to my success at MCC was the fact that I wanted my degree and was willing to work for it. President Obama noted, "This opportunity will be available to those willing to work for it." This will be the most important factor in making this work if this proposal becomes law.

For America's College Promise to work, the potential opportunity for those who take advantage has to be apparent; people have to be aware of the benefits higher education will bring to their lives; the quality of education must not be diminished and access to resources must be maintained; and lastly, those who take advantage of this opportunity and quality education must genuinely be ready and want to work for it. If not, America's promise will be left unfulfilled.

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