

# President Drumm: Tuition-free college plan 'a great thing for the nation'

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In some ways, President Barack Obama's plan to make community college tuition free for students came as no surprise to SUNY Broome President Kevin E. Drumm.

Such a plan has been discussed — albeit informally — in New York, as well as in states such as Oregon. Tennessee, where Obama promoted his plan Friday at a community college, already has such a program in place. Obama's proposal calls for an investment of \$60 billion over the next decade, with federal funding covering 75 percent of costs and the state picking up 25 percent.

"I think, overall, it would be a great thing for the nation," said Dr. Drumm, adding that it would help solve some of the country's larger issues — including the nation's wealth gap, skills gap and need for healthcare providers.

It also would address the financial crunch many prospective students face. "Finances are the number one barrier" for students seeking to attend college, he added.

If such a program were started in the near future, SUNY Broome might initially be overwhelmed in some programs and would have to boost its academic support services to help struggling students succeed, Dr. Drumm told local media. New York State would likely need to review its Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), and the financial aid landscape could change. And while the current campus has room for hundreds more students, a thousand more might not be as feasible with current facilities.

Whether the plan will survive today's climate in Washington remains to be seen.

In the meantime, the discussion is a good first step. Dr. Drumm would like to see adult part-time students included in such initiatives, and not only traditional students who are recent high school graduates.

In the long term, such a program may be necessary to keep up with the changing education world and international competition. At one time, even a high school diploma wasn't necessary to enter the workforce; today, a college education increasingly makes a difference in an applicant's job prospects.

"It's become an economic requirement if not a legal requirement," Dr. Drumm said.

Student Kristen McPeak also supported the idea, provided that it was implemented well. Not having a college degree can make it difficult to get a good job, a reality she's seen firsthand.

“This will give people the push,” she added.

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