

American Dream Alive and Well at Centralia College

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The American Dream is very much alive, but the path to get there is changing.

These days, people need to work hard, play by the rules, and pursue a lifelong education. Centralia College and Washington's community and technical colleges offer the high quality to make it all possible. Each year, nearly 400,000 community and technical college students train for well-paying careers, start work on a four-year degree, or update their skills and knowledge. This week, Centralia College was rated among the very best colleges in the high percentage of students who successfully transfer to universities.

Unfortunately, even as we are doing so well, many students are still unable to afford the cost of earning a college degree or certificate.

In Washington, the Legislature already made great progress toward improving access for students. The College Affordability Program (Senate Bill 5954), co-sponsored by Deputy Majority Leader Sen. John Braun, R-Centralia, reduced tuition at public two- and four-year colleges, making higher education possible for more students.

"I have been making this case since we introduced this bill, college access and affordability should be a priority for our state again," Braun said in a news release. "We've had years of underinvestment in higher education and the results are bad for our economy. Our state faces significant challenges, but this is a long-term policy solution that middle-class families in our state deserve."

This important cause has been taken up at the federal level with the introduction in both houses of Congress of legislation that would ensure all Americans can attend one of our institutions.

As introduced, the legislation, which is modeled on President Barack Obama's America's College Promise proposal, would allow new students to enroll in Centralia College (or any other public two-year college) without having to pay tuition. To be eligible, students must be first-time college students and take classes at least half-time. They would also need to make progress toward earning a transfer degree or workforce training certificate.

In return, the proposal would require states to allocate some higher education funding based on performance. Colleges would also need to work more closely with K-12 education, and all of higher education would need to function cooperatively. Ongoing innovation on college campuses would need to continue and accelerate. Washington is already very far along on all these points.

Centralia College is extremely pleased there is a far-reaching proposal to make community and technical college education universally available. Postsecondary education is a necessity for family wage jobs, and our colleges are the place for Washingtonians to receive it.

Centralia College, our hard-working faculty and staff, and our thousands of hard-working students have proven they merit the support embodied in this legislation. By approving America's College Promise legislation, Congress will ensure the pathway to the American Dream remains open, accessible to all and full of promise.

Joanne Schwartz, *chairwoman, Centralia College Board of Trustees*

Robert Frost, *president, Centralia College*

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