

To the Editor December 30, 2019

Postsecondary Education Should be Tuition Free

Two of the main arguments against tuition free college are that we cannot afford it as a country, and that we taxpayers shouldn't pay for the college education of kids from wealthy families. I suspect that the origin of these arguments come from those who have either not attended nor earned a college degree. This may be mainly the crab bucket effect, but I am just speculating on that. Let me try to address these two arguments here.

- My thesis is that the cost of postsecondary education should not be an impediment to those who wish to avail themselves of it.

A quick history lesson. Back in the nineteenth century our countries leaders and thinkers saw a need to educate an expanding population of citizen voters, mostly rural, to allow them to effectively join in this participatory democracy. To effect this, a free primary education system was created and funded by the public as a generational contract or trust to be passed down from generation to generation. In the early twentieth century, with the rise of urban industrialism, they again saw a need to expand beyond these initial eight grades to produce higher skilled workers for the factories and further fulfill the social needs of the expanding population. So high schools were created, again with the same generational promise. In the mid twentieth century, after two World Wars, veterans of these wars were provided with benefits such as loans to start businesses and tuition scholarships and expense stipends to pay for a college education. The results were increases in the millions of college graduates and an unprecedented growth of the economy. This led to the creation of a middle class which was the envy of the world and produced the Baby-Boomer generation of which I am one.

In the later twentieth century educational opportunities expanded for the general public with grants and subsidized tuition costs, funded by the prior tremendous economic growth. By the mid-seventies when I was in college, classes cost about \$25 per at a community college. I personally had a Veterans scholarship and a monthly stipend, so I never paid for anything beyond books, except for the huge expenses like, food, transportation and housing. This hand up, not handout, allowed me to achieve a BS in Education undergraduate degree.

Then In the late twentieth century when government was turned into a dirty word, tuitions began to rise and educational opportunities shrunk. For-profit schools were allowed to exist and raised the cost for all. The Millennial generation incurred student debt equivalent to a first time home mortgage. Now in the early twenty-first century, calls by experts and politicians for expanding public education to fourteen or sixteen years are met with catcalls about a free lunch and unaffordability. But if you know your history, you know that this **old** idea is just another historical and prudent reaction to accommodate the need for high level thinking and working skills to meet the economic and social demands now and into the future. Just like we have done the past. It is our generational responsibility to do this to ensure that our children and grandchildren can have a standard of living which exceeds ours. This is after all ,every parents big dream for their children.

- Do you really think that private college enrollments, one third of the total, are going to change to public college enrollments because of cost?

It doesn't seem that likely to me, and is irrelevant besides.