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Obama college tuition plan likely tough sell in Arizona



Mary Beth Faller, The Republic | azcentral.com

1:44 p.m. MST January 9, 2015



President Obama announced Thursday evening that he will call on Congress to pass legislation that will make community college free to two years.



President Barack Obama's [proposal for two free years of community college](http://story/news/politics/2015/01/08/obama-free-community-college/21467865/) could face an uphill battle in Arizona, where the state Legislature would have to approve spending for it.

(Photo: Mark Humphrey/AP)

On Thursday, [Obama unveiled a plan](/story/news/nation/2015/01/09/obama-proposes-publicly-funded-community-college-for-all/21510293/) in which two years of community college would be paid for — 75 percent by the federal government and 25 percent by states, which would opt into the plan. The cost is unclear and Obama will reveal more details today.

Arizona is facing a billion-dollar budget shortfall, and new spending would be a tough sell.

State Sen. Kelli Ward, R-Lake Havasu City, head of the Senate's Education Committee, said Friday that the state is looking to cut spending.

"The governor said we'll be tightening purse strings, not doling out more money based on what this administration is promising," she said.

"I think it's a big spending plan that will turn into an unfunded entitlement, and that's not something people in my district will be in favor of."

Over the past several years, the Legislature has decreased its funding of the Maricopa County Community District from a high of about \$45 million in 2010 to \$7.4 million for this year. That represents less than 1 percent of the district's revenue.

That has forced the district to rely more on tuition and property taxes for income, both of which have increased repeatedly over the past few years.

Martin Cordova, 21, president of the Associated Students of Mesa Community College, said the program would be helpful.

"I run into students all the time who are struggling to even just pay for tuition and make ends meet," he said. "This could take a load off a lot of students' shoulders."

Cordova said he hopes Arizona legislators opt into the program and invest more in community colleges.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life and I definitely figured that out here," said Cordova, a criminal justice major.

"I've met so many people who have guided me in the right direction."

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