



Opinion

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Some free college worth considering

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Democratic presidential candidates are proposing tuition free college and/or forgiveness of student loan debt. This is a conundrum for me as a retiree who worked full-time while attending college and graduated with a bachelor's degree debt free.

In the ensuing years, costs have risen. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics consumer price index, prices in 2019 are 138% higher than average prices in 1985. Add the cost of tuition, books, labs fees, computers, etc.; costs have skyrocketed for education. Now add an average of 5.8% interest rates on student loans, which is higher than current home mortgage rates. The American dream is becoming unreachable for average Americans.

I do not believe taxpayers should shoulder the burden of financing a bachelor's degree. However, I do believe our society would be well-served by financing a two-year associate's degree or a two-year certification from a technical school/college.

Students would be given a four-year time frame to complete all the requirements for earning the degree/certification. If the requirements for graduation/completion were not completed in this time period, the student would be required to repay all fees expended by the country/county/state. Collection would be automatically taken from income sources with a reasonable interest rate. The rules and regulations are far beyond my pay grade, so I will leave this in general terms.

Several forms of this are already benefiting students in Okaloosa County, including the International Baccalaureate program, advance placement courses and vocational technical training, to mention a few. I would like to highlight the Collegiate College.

Students who meet academic criteria and have transportation may attend the Collegiate College on the campus of Northwest Florida State College beginning in their ninth- or 10th-grade year. All of their expenses, tuition, books, lab fees, etc., are paid in full. Students graduate with their high

school diploma and their Associate of Arts degree almost simultaneously. This leaves the Florida's Bright Futures Scholarship (lottery monies) and other scholarships up for grabs to complete the financing of four-year degree programs.

What a boost to achieving career goals! Enriching society by going into the workforce as young, debt-free citizens who can invest in businesses, homes, charitable organizations, and religious institutions instead of repaying student loan debt.

Our society wins! Our young people win.

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