

Free college conversation continues

VVC welcomes discussion after San Diego CC District approves pilot program

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Aligning with a national effort to make community colleges free to all students, the San Diego Community College District Board of Trustees approved a pilot program on Thursday that will ensure 200 incoming fall students won't be paying any fees.

Victor Valley College Board of Trustees member Joseph W. Brady said that no such proposal has yet come to their Board, but that it is worth discussing.

"I would welcome the conversation," Brady said. "It gives our taxpayers a better knowledge of who they voted for."

While entirely open to the discussion, Brady does take issue with the idea of free college, calling it "a great idea whose time is not here."

"It's admirable that we want to educate everyone in America for free," Brady said. "The problem is that with our current deficit, where is the money going to come from? Somebody has to pay for it."

SDCCD's effort, which will cost \$215,000 in its first year, rises from the "America's College Promise" proposed by President Barack Obama in January 2015. The proposal would make community colleges free to all students, but has yet to receive congressional approval. Without a federal strategy in place, the president created a committee which in turn asked each state to develop their own strategies to fund community college.

According to the Statement of Issue for the approval of SDCCD's plan, almost 100 programs exist in local communities while many more are being developed through the nation.

"America's College Promise is modeled after a similar movement that made high school free and available to all in the early part of the twentieth century which resulted in the economic growth and prosperity of the nation," the statement reads.

While many college students praise the plan, opinions are mixed.

VVC student Robert Mitchell said he believes that education is "the ultimate equalizer" that any community or government can offer its citizens.

"When we look at outstanding leaders that are active in our community," Mitchell said, "there is something they all have in common — a college education. I personally feel this is the right step forward to better progress in everyone's lives."

However, VVC's Associated Student Body Student Advocate Abigail Ledesma is not in favor of the plan.

"Generally speaking, people, in this case students, do not value things to the same extent if they're free when compared to if the person had to work for it," Ledesma said. "I know that I value things much more if I am forced to work for it with my own capabilities than if someone gives me whatever I'm asking for."

Instead, Ledesma suggests implementing more merit-based scholarships and loans, or programs to incentivize students to do well in school.

Brady also noted the idea that providing education for free would not present a great enough challenge to students.

"When people have to pay for something, they tend to have a much greater attention span," Brady said. "Still, I would welcome anybody to bring it forward."

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