



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on December 20, 2018

California Democrats Want Taxpayers to Subsidize Two Years of Community College

Democrats in the California legislature, along with an incoming Democratic governor, want to make the first two years of community college tuition-free for all students in the Golden State, and there's nothing Republicans can do to stop them.

Four Democratic assemblymen — Miguel Santiago, David Chiu, Kevin McCarty, and Rob Bonta — have introduced legislation that would expand a program that provides one year of free tuition to first-time students attending community colleges full-time. The bill creating that program was passed and signed by Governor Jerry Brown, a Democrat, last year, with the only “no” votes coming from Republicans. Next year, Democrats will have such an overwhelming majority that the GOP will be unable to block any legislation. What's more, Governor-elect Gavin Newsom made a campaign promise to accomplish exactly what the new bill would.



“It's very simple — every student who comes through a community college should have the opportunity to earn their associate degree,” Santiago said at a news conference earlier this month. “This isn't a handout because students have every inch of skin in the game to maintain stellar grades and commit full-time.”

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, also a Democrat, said, “We need [Santiago's bill] because that's two years of dreams and two years of a free opportunity to work hard and to find what your goals are.”

And, of course, students who stand to benefit from this and similar legislation favor the measure.

According to the Santa Rosa [Press Democrat](#), at a news conference where Chiu and McCarty appeared, there were “cheers from students holding signs that read ‘make higher ed free for me.’”

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“This is about entries of access for students who would not otherwise have it,” Carlos Gaitan, a 19-year-old student at Moreno Valley College in Riverside County, told the [San Francisco Chronicle](#). “Right after high school, most students get trapped in these night jobs that don't allow them to succeed in life. If we have an opportunity where people know they can go to college for two years without paying tuition, they would take advantage of that.”

Ya'Mese Johnson, student body president at Oakland's Merritt College, told the *Chronicle* that “the two-year savings for a student taking 12 units a semester would be \$2,208. That could mean the difference



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between having to take out more loans or pick up extra hours at a job.” Heaven forbid that today’s students should have to engage in the time-honored practice of working their way through college when they can simply force other people to pay their tuition under the threat of fines or imprisonment.

Note, too, that the existing program and the expanded one apply to all students regardless of income. Pedro Avila, vice president of student services at Santa Rosa Junior College, told the *Press Democrat* he hopes the program will help the growing population of students from middle-class families who are struggling to pay even for community college.

“You have those students that are lower to middle income that sometimes don’t qualify for a lot of aid,” Avila said. “But they, too, are working hard to manage themselves and support their families.”

The state budgeted \$46 million for the first-year tuition program this year; it was expected to cover community-college costs for 50,000 students. Santiago said he expects the second year of tuition to cost taxpayers about the same amount, though it’s too early to know for sure.

The idea of free community college is [popular](#) with Californians, who see it as an excellent way to spend the estimated [\\$15 billion surplus](#) in next year’s state budget. In reality, that surplus would be better spent paying down the state’s massive debt or saving for future obligations. Estimates of California’s red ink run from [\\$1.3 trillion to \\$2.3 trillion](#), with \$1 trillion in pension liability alone. In October, the [Mercatus Center](#) at George Mason University ranked California’s fiscal health 42nd among the 50 states.

Besides, if every Californian who wants an associate’s degree gets one, such degrees will soon lose much of their value, as has happened with bachelor’s degrees since the government began subsidizing four-year college educations.

Democrats are setting Californians up for some free schooling, all right — in counterproductive government subsidies and corresponding fiscal crisis.

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