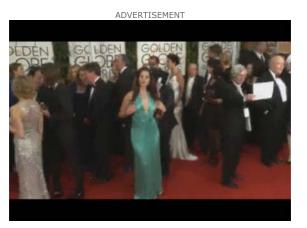


Scott Walker announces GOP college affordability initiative



The Republican college affordability legislative package also includes:

■Increasing Wisconsin Grants for technical colleges. The legislation would increase need-based Wisconsin Grants by \$1 million for technical college students in the biennium. Last year, almost 37,000 technical college students who were eligible for a need-based Wisconsin Grant did not receive one because of insufficient funding. With an average grant award of \$1,000 historically, the program could meet the needs of as many as 1,000 additional students.

•Creating grants for students in emergency financial need. The legislation would allocate \$130,000 to UW System colleges and \$320,000 to technical colleges to provide emergency grants to students to increase the likelihood they will stay in school and finish degrees.

Increasing internships. The legislation is intended to create more pathways to internships by funding two new positions within the Office of Skills Development at the Department of Workforce Development, as well as additional UW System positions.

■Helping students and families make informed decisions. The bill would require all state universities and colleges to provide financial literacy to their students within the first semester of enrollment.

Critic calls plan 'peanuts'

Critics said the Republican plan wouldn't help Wisconsinites currently paying off student loans.

"There are only two things Gov. Walker can do to reduce existing debt on student loan borrowers," said Scot Ross, executive director of the liberal group One Wisconsin Now. "Forgive the debt, or allow students to refinance their loans at lower rates under the Higher Ed, Lower Debt bill. The first would cost \$19 billion, the other, costs nothing."

Ross said what Walker proposes is a "short-term political solution to a long-term crisis." He said the tax break for borrowers would amount to "peanuts."

Walker opposes a plan from Democrats with 50 sponsors that would give borrowers a tax break on student loan payments, not just the interest paid on loans.

It would also create a state authority to allow them to refinance their loans at a lower interest rate.

Walker said the proposal to refinance loans through the state wouldn't work. He said Connecticut has tried that, and "their rates in most cases are higher than the federal interest rate."



About Karen Herzog

Karen Herzog covers higher education. She also has covered public health and was part of a national award-winning team that took on Milwaukee's infant mortality crisis.

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SCOTT WALKER

"According to the most recent report, Wisconsin's high school graduation rates are also up again -to third best in the country."



DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF WISCONSIN

Wisconsin dropped "from second in the country to 41st" among states where more than half the students took the ACT exam.



Under Scott Walker, Wisconsin "moved from 16th to third in percentage of people with student loan debt."



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