

Obama Wants \$8B For Community College Training

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ANNANDALE, Va. (AP) — President Barack Obama called on Congress Monday to create an \$8 billion fund to train community college students for high-growth industries, part of his broader pitch to make higher education more affordable for all Americans.

The fund was part of Obama's proposed budget for 2013. The overall package aims to achieve \$4 trillion in deficit reduction over the next decade by restraining government spending and raising taxes on the wealthy, while boosting spending in some areas, including education.

Obama warned Congress that blocking investments in education and other proposals in his budget would be standing in the way of "America's comeback."

"By reducing our deficit in the long term, what that allows us to do is to invest in the things that will help grow our economy right now," Obama said during remarks at Northern Virginia Community College.

You can't cut back on those things that are important for us to grow. We can't just cut our way into growth," he said.

The White House says the "Community College to Career Fund" would train 2 million workers in sectors like health care, transportation and advanced manufacturing.

A key component of the community college plan would institute "pay for performance" in job training, meaning there would be financial incentives to ensure that trainees find permanent jobs — particularly for programs that place individuals facing the greatest hurdles getting work. It also would promote training of entrepreneurs, provide grants for state and local government to recruit companies, and support paid internships for low-income community college students.

"These investments will give more community colleges the resources they need to become community career centers where people learn crucial skills that local businesses are looking for right now, ensuring that employers have the skilled workforce they need and workers are gaining industry-recognized credentials to build strong careers," the White House said in a statement.

Even as the United States struggles to emerge from the economic downturn, there are high-tech industries with a shortage of workers. And it is anticipated there will be 2 million job openings in manufacturing nationally through 2018, mostly due to baby boomer retirement, according to the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University. The catch is that these types of jobs frequently require

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the ability to operate complicated machinery and follow detailed instructions, as well as some expertise in subjects like math and statistics.

As costs at four-year colleges have soared, enrollments at community colleges have increased by 25 percent during the last decade and now top more than 6 million students, according to the American Institutes for Research. People with a one-year certificate or two-year degree in certain career fields can earn higher salaries than those with a traditional college degree, said Anthony Carnevale, director of the center at Georgetown University.

Mark Schneider, the former U.S. commissioner of education statistics who now serves as vice president at the American Institutes for Research, said there's no doubt that high-tech companies need skilled workers. But he said there are challenges with leaning heavily on community colleges. Many students enter community colleges lacking math skills. The sophisticated equipment needed for training is expensive, and there's little known about the effectiveness of individual community colleges programs across the country, he said.

"We need measures of how well they are training their students, how well their students are being placed in the job market, and ... are they making money?" Schneider said. "We need to track that really, really carefully. And, we need to make all that information available to students before they sign on ... and before taxpayers subsidize all of this."

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