



Romney and Obama Differences on Education

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Excerpt only

Higher-Ed Funding: Despite their public sniping, the candidates' stated views on higher education spending share many commonalities. Obama at his 2012 State of the Union address put universities on alert by saying, "If you can't stop tuition from going up, the funding you get from taxpayers will go down." But the tough talk confounded many schools, in part over what the ultimatum would look like and also over confusion on how to deliver low-cost courses that have the blessing of regulators. In recent months, the Obama administration has tried to provide more clarity by allowing schools to experiment with alternate forms of giving students credit for what they have learned. A university in New Hampshire applied recently for the first-ever request to base student learning on direct assessments, rather than credit hours. If the Dept. of Education approves the application, analysts predict many universities will follow, potentially driving down cost to the schools and the price students pay to earn their degrees.

Romney too has called for universities to reverse the decades-long rise in tuition prices. He backs for-profit colleges and has chastised the Obama administration for its "gainful employment" rules that sanction proprietary colleges for graduating students with high debt levels. While Obama has criticized the Romney campaign for suggesting rules for Pell grant eligibility should be tightened, the president has also limited the number of students who can receive the maximum reward. Still, under Obama, funding for Pell grants has surged, with a growing chorus of analysts saying the expansion is untenable. During the second presidential debate, Romney stated he would keep Pell grants "growing." In the past, his running mate--Paul Ryan-- has indicated he would preserve funding for Pell grants but make 19 percent cuts to the category of discretionary funding that includes Pell grants.

Also at stake is reversing the money-saving moves the Obama administration made to help finance its expansion of college aid programs. The administration ended its relationship with private financial institutions that took fees from students and the government to administer federal loans, choosing to handle the aid packages itself. Romney says that move was a "nationalization" of student loans. He intends to return to the former model.