

OP-ED

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We can keep community-college students debt free

HIGHLIGHTS

Nine million nationwide face financial constraints

State can take the lead, create Florida's Promise

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www.mdc.edu/main

Imagine all Americans, including all Floridians, being able to pursue higher education without taking on a mountain of debt, and imagine all students embarking on their careers ready to compete and succeed in the global economy.

Nearly a century ago, a movement that made high school widely available helped lead to rapid growth Americans' educational attainment, driving decades of economic growth and prosperity. With the recent launch of the America's College Promise Campaign (CPC) and its Heads Up America (headsupamerica.us) public awareness initiative, we have an opportunity to fully engage in this national conversation by joining in a new movement replicating our earlier success by making two years of community college debt free for responsible students.

This campaign is being directed by Civic Nation, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization. A National College Promise Board of Advisors comprising leaders in education, business, government and philanthropy will share best practices and ideas for models to make community college debt free. Most important, this effort will encourage and assist states to come up with their own solutions.

Many states have already embarked on their own programs. For example, Tennessee Republican Gov. Bill Haslam has led by initiating the Tennessee Promise — a pioneering program with a community-service/mentoring component. And the America's College Promise Act of 2015 has been introduced in Congress.

These ongoing efforts help underscore the importance of making this investment from both a state and federal perspective. The timing is right as more and more leaders have come to recognize the unique and fundamental role of community colleges as we train the workforce and provide opportunity for all.

We should seize this moment and work across party lines to get this done in our state as well. We should create a Florida Promise that can build on existing programs and encourage the potential in all of our students.

The premise of America's College Promise has already been implemented in a limited way with great success at Miami Dade College, which, thanks to private support, has provided more than 12,000 high-performing and mostly low-income students with the American Dream Scholarship since its 2011 inception. Also, since 2002, MDC's Honors College has provided thousands of eligible students with the Honors College Fellows Award, covering the cost of in-state tuition and books. In addition, the dual enrollment program allows high-performing high school students the opportunity to enroll in college courses at no cost while they complete their high-school degrees. We can do so much more.

It is important to recognize this is not about offering "free stuff." It's a wise investment in our future. The benefits of this increased investment in higher education will extend to students, businesses, our economy and society as a whole.

Similar to universal high school, debt-free community college will lead to greater prosperity for our entire nation.

Tuition is not the sole barrier to completion, but it is a large one that America's College Promise, and a potential Florida Promise, can remove from the equation. Providing debt-free community college to responsible students could potentially grant access to an additional 9 million students across the country who dream of attending college, but are hindered by financial restraints.

I encourage all to join in this movement by visiting and signing up at headsupamerica.us. In the "Act" section, download a toolkit that is a guide on spreading the word. Moving this forward will require the engagement of state and national leaders, and all those within our respective spheres of influence who understand the importance of making this investment in our community colleges, increasing our global competitiveness for the benefit of our state and nation, and future.

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True or false: Aortic valve replacement can be performed through the leg.

Answer: True! A less-invasive option for aortic valve surgery is now available. It's called transcatheter aortic valve replacement, or TAVR.

TAVR is for people who have been diagnosed with severe aortic stenosis and who are high-risk or too sick for open-heart surgery. This less invasive procedure allows a new valve to be inserted within the diseased aortic valve through use of a catheter. The TAVR procedure can be delivered through multiple approaches:

Transfemoral: Through the leg

Transapical: In the chest between the ribs

Transaortic: In the upper chest

For the right patient, the TAVR procedure can offer them:

Shorter recovery time: 3-5 days in the hospital is typical for patients who have undergone TAVR, although sometimes the stay may be longer. Every patient is unique. Ask your doctor what you can expect in terms of your recovery.

Immediate symptom relief: If the patient has been experiencing shortness of breath, fatigue, or any of the other symptoms of severe aortic stenosis, they may feel relief shortly after surgery. That's because once implanted, the new valve starts working right away.

Like surgical aortic valve replacement, TAVR has its risks as well, which include death, stroke, vascular complications, and major bleeding.

