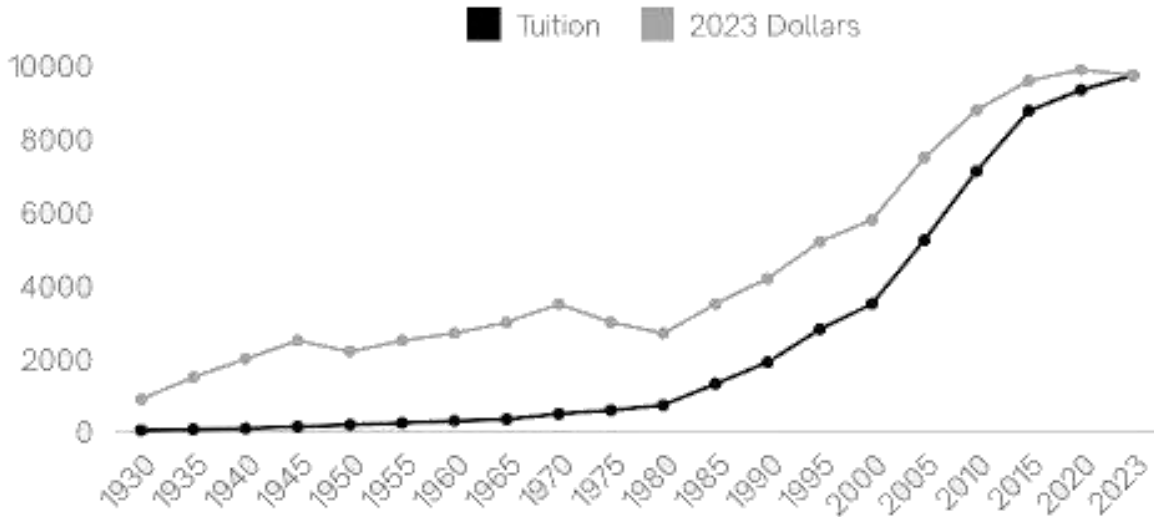


We're Not Proposing This Correctly



College Tuition



America's Best Investment

John checked his mail and found yet another student loan bill. Even after ten years of payments, he still owed over \$30,000. At 32, he had delayed buying a home and starting a family because of this financial burden.

For decades, Americans have accepted that higher education comes with a hefty price tag. We've normalized the idea that young people should start their adult lives buried in debt.

But what if we've been thinking about college funding all wrong? What if free college tuition isn't just a benefit for individuals, but one of the smartest investments our society could make?

The Proposal: College Without Financial Barriers

The concept is straightforward: public colleges and universities would offer tuition-free education to all qualified American students. This wouldn't cover every expense—students would still pay for their books, housing, and personal expenses—but the largest barrier, tuition, would be removed.

This program would apply to public two-year and four-year institutions. Private colleges would continue operating as they do now, providing alternatives for those who prefer them and can afford their higher costs. But no American would be denied higher education simply because they can't afford tuition.

Democrats have been trying to pass this through Congress for years, but I think that changing tactics just might convince Republicans who want us to invest our tax dollars wisely that there's no better investment we could make.

The Dollars and Sense of Free College

I understand your skepticism. "Free" college sounds expensive. Where would the money come from? Won't this just burden taxpayers with enormous costs? These are reasonable questions that deserve honest answers.

Let's start with some basic numbers:

The average cost of tuition at a four-year public university is approximately \$40,000 for a complete bachelor's degree. That's a significant investment, but let's examine what happens after graduation.

Consider two hypothetical Americans: Bill and Joe. Bill completes his bachelor's degree, while Joe enters the workforce after high school.

Bill, with his college degree, earns a higher salary throughout his career. This means he pays substantially more in taxes. Over his 40-year working life from age 25 to 65, Bill **pays an average of \$80,000 annually** in various taxes (income, property, sales, etc.), totaling **\$3,200,000 in lifetime tax contributions**.

Joe, without a college degree, pays an average of \$6,000 annually in taxes over the same period, totaling **\$240,000 in lifetime contributions**.

The difference is striking: **Bill contributes nearly \$3 million more** in tax revenue than Joe over their working lives. And this stems from an initial public investment of just

\$40,000 for Bill's education.

This represents a return of \$73 for every \$1 invested in Bill's education. What investment vehicle do you know that offers a 7,300% return?

Beyond Tax Revenue: The Full Economic Impact

The benefits extend far beyond direct tax payments. College graduates:

- Are less likely to require public assistance programs
- Have lower healthcare costs and place less burden on public health systems
- Commit fewer crimes, reducing criminal justice system costs
- Start more businesses, creating jobs and economic growth
- Drive innovation that keeps America competitive globally

These secondary benefits are harder to quantify precisely but represent enormous additional value to our society and economy.

Consider how different our economy would look if millions more Americans had access to college education. We'd have more engineers designing clean energy solutions, more healthcare workers addressing our shortages, more teachers improving our schools, and more entrepreneurs creating the next generation of American businesses.

Addressing the Skeptic's Concerns

You might still have reservations about this proposal. Let's address some common concerns:

"Wouldn't this just be a handout to the wealthy?"

Actually, wealthy families already send their children to college. The current system primarily prevents low and middle-income students from attending or forces them into debt. Free tuition would primarily benefit working and middle-class families who currently struggle with college costs.

"Won't this devalue college degrees?"

Evidence from countries that offer free college suggests otherwise. Germany, Norway, Finland, and other nations with free or nearly-free higher education maintain high educational standards. In fact, when financial barriers are removed, colleges can focus more on academic merit in admissions rather than ability to pay.

"How can we afford this massive expense?"

The math we've already reviewed shows that free college isn't an expense—it's an investment with extraordinary returns.

The \$40,000 investment per student generates millions in additional tax revenue and economic activity. The real question isn't "How can we afford to do this?" but rather "How can we afford not to?"

"Won't this create government overreach in education?"

This program wouldn't nationalize higher education or force a one-size-fits-all approach. It would simply remove the financial barrier at existing public institutions, which are already partially funded by tax dollars and governed by state boards.

Academic freedom and institutional independence would remain intact.

Learning from Success Stories

We don't need to speculate about whether free college works—we can look at real examples.

For decades, many European countries have offered tuition-free university education. Germany eliminated tuition fees in 2014, even for international students. This means **Americans get free college educations in Germany and many other European countries.**

These countries consistently rank high in innovation, productivity, and quality of life measures.

Even within the United States, we have models that have proven successful.

The G.I. Bill provided free college education to millions of World War II veterans, creating one of the greatest periods of economic expansion in our history. New York's Excelsior Scholarship and Tennessee's Promise program have made community college tuition-free for many students, with promising early results.

The Implementation Path

A national free tuition program could be implemented gradually to ensure a smooth transition. We could start by:

1. Making community colleges tuition-free nationwide
2. Expanding to cover four-year public universities for lower-income students
3. Eventually extending coverage to all students at public institutions

This phased approach would allow us to refine the program while immediately helping those with the greatest need.

The federal government would provide funding to states that participate in the program, with states maintaining their traditional role in operating public colleges and universities.

Participating institutions would need to meet certain benchmarks for educational quality and graduate outcomes to ensure taxpayer dollars are well spent.

A Personal Investment in Our Collective Future

When we think about free college tuition, we often focus on individual benefits: less debt, better job prospects, higher earnings.

These benefits are real and important. But the transformative power of this proposal lies in its collective impact.

Free college tuition isn't just about helping individual students—it's about building a stronger, more prosperous, more innovative America. It's about removing artificial barriers that hold back talent and potential. It's about recognizing that in the 21st century knowledge economy, education is the most powerful engine of national prosperity we have.

Consider the moonshot of the 1960s. When President Kennedy declared America would put a man on the moon, the immediate benefits weren't obvious.

But that massive investment in science and technology paid dividends for decades through new industries, technologies, and American leadership.

Free college tuition represents a similar moonshot for our time—a bold investment in human potential that would yield returns for generations.

The Choice Before Us

We stand at a crossroads. We can continue with a system that saddles young people with debt and prevents many from pursuing higher education altogether.

Or we can make a strategic investment that pays extraordinary returns while opening doors of opportunity for millions of Americans.

The numbers are clear: free college tuition isn't a cost—it's our best investment opportunity. For every dollar invested, we receive many times that amount in return through higher tax revenues, reduced social program spending, and increased economic activity.

But beyond the dollars and cents, this is about the kind of society we want to build. Do we want an America where opportunity is determined by the circumstances of your birth and your family's financial resources?

Or do we want an America where anyone with talent and drive can develop their potential to the fullest?

The choice is ours. And the return on investment—both financial and human—would be extraordinary.