

# CONTROLLER STEVE WESTLY

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## Westly Unveils Free Community College Plan

**SACRAMENTO** – Controller Steve Westly today unveiled a plan to make a community college education free, which would help millions of Californians improve their quality of life and better prepare the state's workforce for the 21st century economy.

“When community college fees were raised in 2003, 180,000 people were priced out of higher education. Instead of turning away thousands, let’s help millions by making community college free,” Westly said.

“We can’t afford to treat community colleges like the stepchild of the higher education family,” Westly continued. “Community colleges are our best weapon against outsourcing and the challenges of globalization. If there’s a job in the new economy, you can bet there’s a community college class that can train someone to fill it.”

Under Westly’s plan, any student completing a two-year degree, vocational certificate, or transfer program at a community college would qualify to have their tuition costs covered by the state. Community college tuition has increased 136 percent in less than three years – from \$11 to \$26 a unit – raising the costs of a full course load to almost \$800 a year.

Students would be required to fully complete their course of study within six years and exhaust other financial aid sources to qualify.

“My plan makes a community college free for every Californian, but asks for responsibility in return,” Westly added. “This not only provides accountability, but a powerful incentive for students to finish their course of study.”

Community colleges educate 2.5 million students a year, more than four times the number enrolled in the UC and CSU systems combined. Seventy percent of California nurses attended community colleges, as did 85 percent of the state’s police, firefighters, paramedics and other first responders.

“Community colleges don’t just train the workforce of tomorrow. They train the entrepreneurs of tomorrow,” Westly said. “I helped build a company called eBay, and I’ve seen thousands of start-ups across Silicon Valley. A little-known secret is that community colleges produce far more engineers than Stanford and Berkeley combined – engineers who start their own companies.”

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Community colleges are often a stop for people who've lost their jobs and are looking for retraining. Westly praised a post-9/11 partnership between the Bay Area's Skyline College and Genentech to train laid off airline workers to work for biotech and pharmaceutical companies.

The proposal's costs would be covered entirely if Proposition 98 were fully funded and community colleges received the 11 percent share that the initiative sets aside for them. Since 1988, community colleges have lost almost \$4 billion in funding. This year, the Governor's budget denies them \$255 million. That amount is more than enough to cover Westly's plan, which would cost \$100 million to \$200 million a year, depending on enrollment and participation.

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