

# The Detroit News

## Hey, do you want to pay my tuition?

By Ingrid Jacques  
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As college students in Michigan and other states head to campus this fall, they are looking forward to immersing themselves in their classes and preparing for their futures.

But many are also concerned about just how much that experience in the halls of academia will cost them down the road.

They should be, anyway.

The exploding costs of college in recent years should have students — and their parents — petrified. Student debt is at an all-time high, and the weight of this obligation is holding young people back from getting married or buying homes after college.

Outstanding student loan balances have reached a record \$1.12 trillion, and students now graduate with an average of \$26,500 in student loan debt.

Yet most of the dialogue on this real problem facing today's youth fails to address one of the glaring causes of high tuition: the steadily increasing amount of federal student aid. Colleges know this large pot of money is available, so they are confident students will find the aid they need to match tuition.

Ironically, politicians — led by President Barack Obama — ignore that correlation and call instead for more federal participation. Much of the rhetoric coming from the White House paints college students as victims the government must help.

For example, Obama took executive action in June to expand eligibility for student loan repayment capping and forgiveness. Students are catching on and starting to treat college as a fundamental right someone else should pay for.

Riding the tails of the very successful ice bucket challenge to raise money for ALS research, young people recently took to social media to challenge wealthy individuals like Oprah Winfrey and Bill Gates and politicians like Obama to pay for their college expenses.

The #PayMyTuition challenge, not surprisingly, doesn't seem to have reaped the kind of success the ALS challenge did. In response, Neal McCluskey, an education expert at the Cato Institute, quipped on Twitter: "#PayMyTuition captures mindset that fuels skyrocketing prices: Someone else should pay!"

To back up his point, McCluskey included a graph along with his tweet that shows since the 1980s, costs of attending college have risen directly with the amount of student aid available.

In the last 30 years, aid per pupil has jumped more than 250 percent. Similarly, college costs have risen more than 100 percent at both public and private four-year institutions.

That's not a coincidence.

Lindsey Burke, who studies education policy at the Heritage Foundation, wrote recently that the most likely cause of the rising costs of college "is the open spigot of federal student aid."

She also points to a new report from the Center for College Affordability and Productivity, which highlights how the proliferation of federal student aid has not only contributed to exorbitant tuition but also to weaker academic standards and other poor decisions by college administrators.

Earlier this summer, Michigan lawmakers and Gov. Rick Snyder gave the state's 15 public universities a boost of 5.9 percent as a way to ease tuition costs for families.

That influx of state aid may offer slight tuition relief for Michigan students, but young people here and across the country shouldn't expect to see any meaningful reductions in college costs and their subsequent debt until the federal government cuts back its involvement.