The High Price of College

by Phyllis Schlafly November 26, 2010

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The favorite question liberal newsmen ask incoming Republican members of Congress is: you promised to cut federal spending, so what programs will you will cut? A good answer is college student grants and loans because those handouts are probably wasteful and harmful.

Since Obama became President he has increased student aid by nearly 50 percent to $145 billion a year, including an additional $10 billion in Pell grants. It's unclear that these extravagant handouts benefit the young people they are supposed to help.

It's unlikely that students will get a job that justifies the colossal price paid by the students (or their parents, who may be taking out a second mortgage) who cough up the sticker price, or the colossal debt students accumulate. As Ronald Reagan reminded us, Why don't we find out if what we are doing is part of the problem.

The more federal money handed out for college tuition, the more the price of tuition rises for everyone. Government financial aid always makes things cost more, not less (just like health care), so it should be no surprise that college tuition has been rising faster than the consumer price index.

Tuition prices (not counting room and board) currently average $7,605 for four-year public institutions and $27,293 for private colleges and universities. Including room and board, the average annual cost at public four-year institutions is $16,140 and at private four-year colleges and universities is $36,993.

The total price usually quoted for college is the annual price times four. But that figure is grossly understated because only 60 percent of college students in four-year colleges graduate within six years, making the total price (to parents or to student debt or to the taxpayers) much higher than the four-year price.

The average student-loan debt of students who graduated last year was $24,000. Students, their parents and the taxpayers should ask, is college worth it?

It's unlikely the graduates will get a job that can pay off that kind of debt. In the current economy in which unemployment for 20-to-24-year-olds is running at 10 percent, will they get a job at all?

Law school graduates are even deeper in the debt ditch, with the average tuition debt owed by graduates of public law schools $71,436, and by private law school graduates $91,506. Twelve percent of last year's law school graduates couldn't find law jobs, and many of those who did got only temporary or part-time jobs.

Taxpayers are soaked for $7.6 billion given to "flame-out freshmen": the students who dropped out during or at the end of their first year. No evidence has yet surfaced on whether they were taking only non-college, high-school-level courses euphemistically labeled remedial.

It's not clear that even the students who stick it out for four (or six) years are getting a real or useful education. Exorbitant tuition prices cover salaries for well-paid leftwing professors to teach hundreds of so-called "niche" courses that crowd out general knowledge and skills.

A 2010 survey of 700 four-year universities by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni revealed how many elite colleges allow students to take these niche courses to satisfy core curriculum requirements. The most neglected core subjects

are economics, required in only 4 percent of colleges, and U.S. government and history are required in only 19 percent.

Only 16 colleges require at least six of the seven core subjects, and Yale, Cornell and Brown are among 103 colleges that require only one, or none, of the core subjects.

California State University at Monterey Bay allows students to count the History of Rock and Roll as their required course in U.S. History. Emory University allows students to choose among 600 courses to fulfill the History, Society and Culture requirement including one called Gynecology in the Ancient World.

A class about television satisfies a Literature requirement at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. The University of California in Los Angeles offers Queer Musicology.

The best hope for bringing down the price of college tuition is to get the government out of the mix. Another solution may be the spread of online courses to replace the construction and maintenance of expensive buildings.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology announced in 2001 that it would put its entire course catalog online. Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and the University of Michigan offer major portions of their courses online, all free.

Some colleges let enrolled students take courses online. Estimates are that 4.6 million students took a college level online course in 2008, a number that is rising rapidly.

At the University of Florida, resident students earn 12 percent of credit hours online. Professor Mark Rush has 1,500 undergraduates enrolled in his class, and no lecture hall can hold them.

This isn't distance learning. Students are not far from campus; they may be in bed with pajamas, the casual dress code for attendance.