

## Educational Issues in the 2012 Presidential Election

The federal government's role in education is a major issue in the 2012 presidential election. As college students, this issue hits close to home because of the large amount of student loan debt that many students will have after graduating. For the first time, student loan debt is now higher than credit card debt.

Historically, according to Richard Longworth in his book Caught in the Middle, the Midwest has placed an emphasis on providing high-quality education, but an even stronger emphasis on blue collar labor over white collar desk jobs. In the age of globalization, many of these blue collar jobs, especially manufacturing, have been sent overseas and it is now more important than ever to have a college degree for employment.

Obama's administration wants to make college more affordable and accessible for all American individuals who are pursuing a higher education. How is he going to do this? In order to make college more affordable for students, Obama has "expanded federal support to help more students afford college, while calling for a shared responsibility in tackling rising college costs. Obama's effort to make college more affordable, has been the largest investment for our government since the G.I. Bill" (White House Government, Higher Education). Obama goes on to state, "Education is not a luxury; it is an economic imperative that every hard working and responsible student should be able to afford" (White House Government, Higher Education). Obama's administration is taking several steps to make higher education more accessible for more Americans. The White House website explains that in Obama's State of the Union Speech, he emphasized the duties that states, higher education institutions, and the federal

government have in order to make education more affordable and attainable for Americans by lowering the costs of college tuition (White House Government, Higher Education). The next important issue in obtaining a higher education is the debt that students face after getting their degree. Obama and his administration asked Congress to help out the several million individuals who partake in borrowing loans from the Federal Government. By making this a primary goal, according to the White House Government website, Obama was able to keep the rate from doubling on subsidized Stafford loans, helping as much as \$1,000.00 to each loan, keeping this a goal for Obama's future towards education. Obama also has developed two plans, the Pay as You Earn Plan and the American Opportunity Tax Credit, in efforts to help with federal loans, making higher education more accessible. The Pay as You Earn plan helps student borrowers by making their payments 10 percent of their monthly income, helping over one million students pay back their loans more efficiently. The American Opportunity Tax Credit helps over 9.4 million families by providing up to \$10,000.00 per year towards college tuition. Obama has asked Congress to keep this plan in effect after 2012 (White House Government, Higher Education). Obama's main argument is that without a higher education, our nation will not be as competitive against other nations. Higher education also plays an important role in our society as we are reaching a point where it is becoming necessary to have a college education in order to enter the middle class work force.

Mitt Romney supports the government's involvement in education. If elected, he would keep the No Child Left Behind Act that was created by President Bush in 2001. Romney supports standardized testing, saying it allows for better schools. In Massachusetts, he approved efforts to require parents in poorly performing schools to

attend parental education classes. Romney is in favor of paying bonuses to teachers who are “successful” teachers. In 1994, Romney said that he would like to abolish the Department of Education but he is now taking back this remark. Romney believes that the proper role for government is to encourage economic growth to make sure that all students receive the best education possible. Again in 1994, Romney pledged to vote to establish a voucher program which would allow students to choose to attend public school or a private school. Romney does not believe in seniority when it comes to teaching. He believes that superintendents should be able to fire a teacher no matter how long they have been there. On the issues of student loans, Romney does not promise that he will give free “stuff” because he knows that students will pay for it in the future. Romney has told some students to “get as much education as you can afford”, “borrow money if you have to from your parents” and “join the military”. Romney’s view on higher education is much different than Obama’s because Obamas wants to get Pell grants for more than one million students.

As college students, it is our responsibility to be as informed as possible before voting in the upcoming presidential election. Educational policies are a crucial issue that will have an impact on all college students, especially those who rely on grants and student loans to fund their educations.

Sources:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education#college-affordability>

<http://www.educationnews.org/education-policy-and-politics/mitt-romneys-views-on-education/>

Longworth, Richard C. *Caught in the Middle: America's Heartland in the Age of Globalism*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2008.

Jillian Rundle

Tana Pierce

Matt Dutton

Courtney Bennett

Stephanie Hedden