



March 30, 2010

Dear Martha,

President Obama signs SAFRA

In a few minutes at Northern Virginia Community College, President Obama will be signing the budget reconciliation bill ([audio only](#)), including the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act. He will be introduced by Jill Biden, wife of the Vice President and a English faculty member at the college.

The historic higher education legislation provides:

- \$36 billion for Pell Grants, funding four years of inflation adjustments and funding the current shortfall due to a record number of participants
- \$2.55 billion for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other minority-serving institutions
- \$2 billion for community colleges to improve education and job-training for unemployed and other economically vulnerable populations. (\$500 million each in FY 2011-2014)



According to the White House, "[a]long with signing this historic legislation into law, President Obama **will also announce that he has asked the Second Lady, Dr. Jill Biden, to host a White House Summit on Community Colleges** this fall. This summit will be an opportunity for community college leaders, students, education experts, business leaders, and others to share with the Administration and with one another the innovative ways they are educating our way to a better economy."

In the [fact sheets](#) released with the signing, the Administration offered more detail for the types of grants anticipated under the \$2 billion Trade Adjustment Assistance funds for community colleges. This is a new grant funding program that will be housed by the Department of Labor with coordination by the Department of Education. The program was created in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act ("ARRA" or "stimulus") bill last year, but is now receiving funding for the first time. The White House fact sheet suggests eligible grant usage could include:

- **Work with businesses:** Colleges could build partnerships with businesses and the workforce investment system to create career pathways through which workers will earn new credentials and promotions through step-by-step, worksite education programs that build essential skills. Colleges will work closely with employers to design training that is relevant to the local labor market and likely to lead to employment and careers.

- Create education partnerships: Colleges could work with other educational institutions to expand course offerings and promote the transfer of credit among colleges.
- Teach basic skills: Colleges could improve remedial and adult education programs, accelerating students' progress and integrating developmental classes into academic and vocational classes.
- Meet students' needs: Colleges could offer their students more than just a course catalog through comprehensive, personalized services to help them plan their careers, stay in school, and graduate.
- Develop online courses: Colleges could create open online course materials such as interactive tutors, simulations, and multimedia software that can help students learn more, and learn better, in less time.

While the loss of the American Graduation Initiative in SAFRA was disappointing, this funding stream could provide California's community colleges with \$400 million over the next four years. At a time of continued state austerity, this could open the doors to tens of thousands of students and fund the innovations that have been recently put on hold.

President Obama and the Department of Education continue to be committed to producing 5 million more community college graduates by 2020. Undersecretary of Education Martha Kanter reiterated the President's commitment at a meeting of urban college leaders hosted by Los Rios Chancellor Brice Harris last Friday. "This is a starting point," Kanter said. "We are absolutely committed to the goal of becoming the leader in college attainment once again."

The grants awarded by Labor will likely be provided to states and institutions that are providing measurable strategies for increasing graduates. As we just saw with the K-12 Race to the Top, the Administration [is willing to say "no"](#) to states or institutions which they believe are not going for enough.

We will keep you posted as the grant program is developed and the timeline becomes clearer, and the League is committed to assisting institutions to ensure that California is competitive in the competition.

Finally, National Public Radio had an [interesting story yesterday](#) analyzing how we fell short on the American Graduation Initiative. I don't necessarily agree with all of the quotes in the story, but it is worth learning from our failures and developing better strategies for future successes.

Sincerely,



Scott Lay
President and Chief Executive Officer
Orange Coast College '94