

Obama on economy: 'Give it to me'

President unveils \$12 billion plan to bolster 2-year colleges

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WARREN, Mich. — Conceding unemployment will get worse before it shrinks, President Barack Obama on Tuesday unveiled a \$12 billion plan to help community colleges prepare millions of people for a new generation of jobs. Challenging critics, he said he welcomed the task of turning around the economy.

"I love the folks who helped get us in this mess and then suddenly say, 'Well, this is Obama's economy,'" the president told an outdoor crowd at Macomb Community College, veering off his scripted words. "That's fine. Give it to me. My job is to solve problems, not to stand on the sidelines and harp and gripe."

Obama did not identify his target for the comments, but he has been under increasing fire from Republicans over the pace of the economic recovery and the soaring

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Clark's Knight likes Obama plan

Clark College President Bob Knight welcomed President Obama's proposal on Tuesday, noting that Washington state's community colleges have already taken some of the steps outlined.

"It's exciting to me that the President of the United States has a good grasp of what a community college can do for its region. They're the economic engine to train the work force for those communi-

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deficit. He brought his message to a state reeling from the loss of auto jobs. Michigan's unemployment rate is 14.1 percent, the nation's worst.

"The hard truth is that some of the jobs that have been lost in the auto industry and elsewhere won't be coming back," Obama said. "They are the casualties of a changing economy."

He proposed an "American Graduation Initiative" to bolster the two-year community college field as a launching point for careers or a step toward expanded higher education.

Under the plan, competitive grants would be offered to schools to try new programs or expand training and counseling.

High dropout rates would be addressed by designing programs to track students and help them earn an associate's degree or finish their education at a four-year institution. The White House says the cost would be \$12 billion over 10 years.

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ties. He sees and gets that," Knight said.

"I think he's right, it's going to help the recovery move quicker if we take care of our community colleges. I think it bodes well for our country."

Knight said he's glad Obama called for greater student success, and not merely increased access.

Washington state has worked to better align courses with grades K-12 curriculum, and pushed online courses, he said. It's also launched an incentive Student Achievement Initiative that rewards colleges whose students complete more credit hours with additional state dollars.

Clark's master plan calls for continued expansion and growth, Knight said. New federal dollars for buildings would be nice, "but when you divide (Obama's proposal) by 50 states and all the colleges in each state, I don't know how much is going to trickle down to us," he said.

Still, Knight is happy for new support.

"If anything, it may sustain us through this economic downturn," he said.