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The Missouri Promise: Making College Education a Reality for Middle-Class Missouri Families

Jay Nixon believes that every young person in Missouri deserves the opportunity to get a college education, but today in our state, middle-class families are getting squeezed. With tuition at our state colleges and universities skyrocketing, a higher education is moving further out of reach for more Missouri families each year.

But instead of taking steps to make college more affordable and accessible, the Blunt administration slashed \$350 million from the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority, the agency responsible for providing low-interest loans to middle-class Missouri families. Under this administration, Missouri ranks last in the nation in higher education funding increases. More high school students are dropping out because they don't see higher education in their future, and those who do attend college are graduating with more debt than ever. On college education, Missouri is clearly moving in the wrong direction.

That's why Jay Nixon is proposing the Missouri Promise, a new program that builds on the existing A+ Schools Program, to provide middle-class Missourians struggling to afford a college education with a pathway to earn a four-year degree from a state college or university -- tuition free.

To implement the Missouri Promise, Jay Nixon will:

- (1) Expand the existing A+ Schools Program, which currently is available to only roughly half of the state's high school students, so that all Missouri high school students who meet the performance requirements are eligible to attend community college or technical school on an A+ scholarship.
- (2) Offer all high school seniors who plan to participate in the A+ program the opportunity to sign the Missouri Promise, a contract between the student and the State of Missouri that will allow the student to earn a four-year degree after completing his or her two-year degree at a community college or technical school. In exchange for earning good grades in community college (3.0 GPA) on an A+ scholarship, completing community service (50 hours per year) and staying out of trouble, the student will then receive a Missouri Promise scholarship from the state to complete his or her four-year degree at a state college or university.

Read below for additional details on how Jay Nixon will give every Missouri student who works hard and gives back to the community the opportunity to get a college degree.

How the Missouri Promise Will Work:

- (1) **Expanding A+ Eligibility To Every Missouri Student Who Meets The High Standards Of The Current A+ Program.** Currently, 231 high schools have access to A+ scholarships, which allow students who commit to 50 hours of tutoring and receive a 2.5 GPA to attend a two-year community college or technical school tuition free. Jay Nixon strongly supports the mission of the A+ program, but because of the limited number of participating schools and limited resources, the A+ program has not reached enough students in Missouri. That's why Jay Nixon will support an expansion of A+ eligibility

to all students in Missouri who meet the criteria for the A+ program (regardless of their school location) and then work with local school districts to bring all Missouri high schools up to the high standards of an A+ school.

- (2) **A+ Eligible Seniors Will Have An Opportunity To Sign The Missouri Promise and Get a Four-Year Degree Tuition Free.** The Missouri Promise is an agreement between a high school senior and the State of Missouri that will allow the student to first attend community college (tuition free) and then continue on to receive his or her four-year degree at a state college or university (tuition free). The state will cover the cost of tuition.

By signing the Missouri Promise, the high school senior is agreeing to:

- Earn an associate's degree from a community college or technical school in Missouri on the A+ scholarship.
- Maintain a GPA of at least 3.0 while in community college.
- Commit to 50 hours a year of community service every year they receive scholarship money.
- Stay away from illegal drugs and other disciplinary problems.
- Apply for and take advantage of all federal and state financial aid already available, as well as applicable scholarships offered by the colleges and universities.

In exchange for signing the agreement and completing the requirements above, the State of Missouri will cover the cost of tuition at a state college or university so that the student can obtain a four-year degree.

Targeting Middle-Class Missouri Families. The Missouri Promise is intended to target middle-class Missouri families who are struggling to afford the cost of tuition. To be eligible for a Missouri Promise scholarship, the student's Estimated Family Contribution (EFC) must be below \$12,000 annually. Under Nixon's plan, the EFC will be based on the same formula used for federal aid when students file the FASFA form. For example, a family of four with one child in college could have an annual income of roughly \$80,000 and qualify for the Missouri Promise.

For details on the eligibility chart, see: <http://www.finaid.org/calculators/scripts/quickefcchart.cgi>

Expanding Outreach Efforts So That Every Eligible Student And School Can Take Advantage Of A+ And Missouri Promise Scholarships. A good scholarship program only works if students and schools are aware that it's available. As Governor, Jay will significantly increase outreach to schools and promotion of the A+ Schools Program and the Missouri Promise. He will make sure every high school principal and guidance counselor has information about the scholarship program and how to access it so they can share it with parents and students.

ESTIMATED COSTS

TOTAL COST = \$61,000,000

\$25,000,000 To Expand A+. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has estimated that it would cost an additional \$25 million to expand A+ by allowing all students who meet A+ criteria to participate in the A+ program, even if their school was not designated an A+ school. When contacted by the Nixon campaign, DESE officials noted, "This revision would provide an avenue to post-secondary education for many students who find those opportunities unaffordable. It would also provide additional incentives for students to attend and achieve in all schools by placing the opportunity

for post-secondary [education] within reach.” [Sunshine Request, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Director of A+/Charter Schools, 1/18/2008]

\$36,000,000 To Create The Missouri Promise Program. According to a fiscal note for HB 1693, it would cost between \$13,013,849 to \$22,869,713 to create the Missouri Promise program in conjunction with the *current* A+ program. The Nixon plan assumes a doubling in participation for the A+ program if it is expanded as described above, and thus we must project that it would double the number of students taking advantage of Missouri Promise program. The Nixon campaign projects that the actual costs will be somewhere between the estimates on the fiscal note and then doubled. Therefore, we project the cost to be approximately \$36,000,000 to implement this program. [L.R. No.: 4111-01; HB 1693. 3/5/2008]

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