

Calif., N.Y. rethinking higher ed, feds lag behind

By Nick Anderson, Washington Post

In its first few years, the Obama administration played a major role in higher education as the nation's economy was foundering. The expansion of Pell grants for students in financial need, the provision of billions of dollars in stimulus funding for university research and other purposes, an overhaul of federal student loans to put the government at the center of lending – these and other measures enacted in 2009 and 2010 showed that Washington was thinking big.

Now, it seems, it is the states that are expansive. Or at least some of them. That's a takeaway from recent interviews with higher ed leaders from the Empire State and the Golden State.

Nancy L. Zimpher, chancellor of the State University of New York, is promoting a new goal for a system that grants 93,000 degrees a year. She wants SUNY to award 150,000 degrees a year by 2020.

With 460,000 students from the community college level to doctoral programs, SUNY is a key player in public higher education. President Obama in August 2013 launched a significant initiative at one its campuses, choosing the University at Buffalo as the backdrop for a speech announcing that the federal government would rate colleges on measures of value and access. More than a year and a half later, the federal ratings plan is inching forward slowly. Some college leaders wonder whether it will ever happen.

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