

BACK TO SCHOOL

Judging Colleges on their Affordability

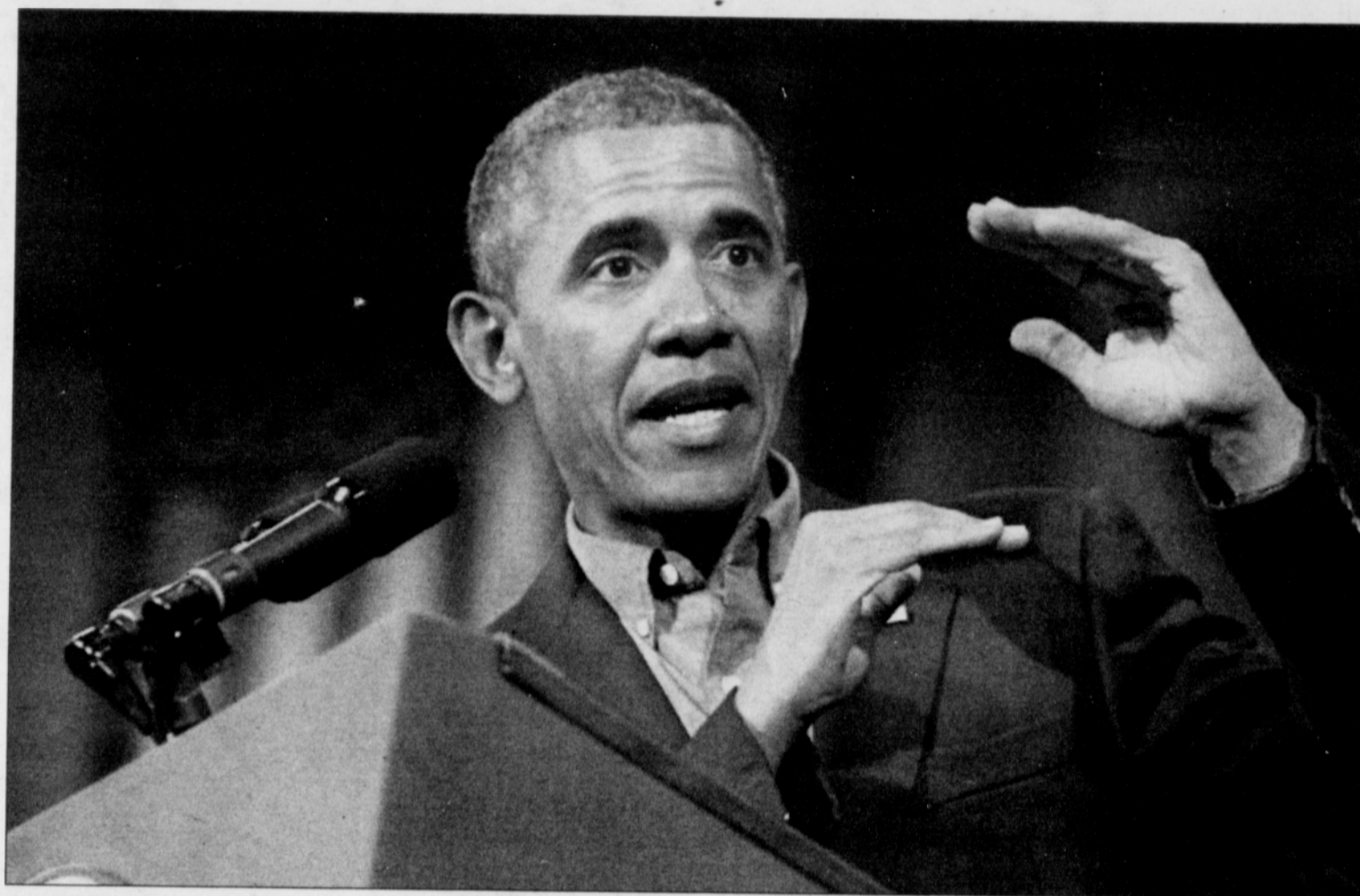
Obama calls for cost-conscious ratings system

(AP) — Targeting the soaring cost of higher education, President Barack Obama on Thursday unveiled a broad new government rating system for colleges that would judge schools on their affordability and perhaps be used to allocate federal financial aid.

The president, speaking to a student-heavy crowd of 7,000 at the University at Buffalo, said he expected pushback from those who have profited from the ballooning cost of college. But he argued that with the nation's economy still shaky and students facing increasing global competition, making college affordable is "an economic imperative."

"Higher education cannot be a luxury," Obama said during the first stop on a two-day bus tour through New York and Pennsylvania. "Every American family should be able to get it."

The education proposals are part of the broader economic agenda Obama has been pitching across the country this summer.



President Barack Obama addresses a packed house at the University of Buffalo as part of an initiative to judge schools on their affordability.

The rising cost of college has increasingly become a burden for many Americans. According to administration figures, the tuition costs at public, four-year universities has tripled over the last 30 years and average student loan debt stands at \$26,000.

Over the past five years, the tu-

ition sticker price at public four-year colleges is up 27 percent beyond overall inflation, according to a College Board survey. At private schools, the average student's cost has risen 13 percent beyond overall inflation.

There has been little consensus among policymakers on how to curb

college costs. While Obama's proposal could give colleges an incentive to slow increases, it could also add massive reporting requirements that could be a burden on schools already struggling to make ends meet.

The new rating system does not require congressional approval, and

the White House is aiming to have it set up before the 2015 school year. But Obama does need support from Congress in order to use the ratings as a basis for parceling out federal financial aid.

In addition to tuition, schools will also be rated on average student loan debt, graduation rates and the average earnings of graduates. Under Obama's proposal, students attending highly rated schools could receive larger grants and more affordable loans.

The president is also seeking legislation to give colleges a "bonus" based on the number of students they graduate who received Pell Grants. The goal is to encourage colleges to enroll and graduate low- and moderate-income students.

Obama's other proposals include a requirement that colleges with high dropout rates distribute student aid over the course of the semester rather than in a lump sum. The aim is to ensure that students who drop out do not receive funds for time they are not in school.

The president also renewed his call for a \$1 billion college "Race to the Top" competition that would reward states that make significant changes in higher education policies while also containing tuition costs.

Lincoln Senior Honored

Lincoln High School senior Alexandra Gritta has won the highest honor bestowed by Congress. Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici, D-Ore., recently presented Gritta with the Congressional

Award Gold Medal. The award is given to American youth who demonstrate initiative, service to others and achievement.

Gritta was the only student from Oregon receiving the award from

Congress this year and the 11th Oregonian to receive it since the program was established in 1979.

The Congressional Award program requires participants to set

and achieve goals in four program areas: Volunteer public service, personal development, physical fitness, and expedition/exploration.

Gritta turned her love for horses into a charity that qualified her for the voluntary public service portion of the award, spending hundreds of hours and raising over

\$25,000 for organizations with missions to rescue and provide safe habitats for horses.

"It is a great privilege to present the Congressional Award to Alexandra Gritta," said Bonamici. "Alexandra is a talented young humanitarian and is well-deserving of this high honor."



The Jefferson High School class of "1963" is celebrating their 50th reunion on September 21, 2013 at the Double Tree located at the Lloyd Center,

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Lincoln High School's Alexandra Gritta (left) is presented with the Congressional Gold Medal from Oregon Congresswoman Susanne Bonamici in honor of Gritta's service to others and her achievement.