

## **Halter proposes matching grants for college savings**

**The Associated Press (AR)**

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Democratic gubernatorial candidate Bill Halter on Wednesday proposed matching grants for parents saving money for their children's college education.

Halter, a former Clinton administration official, said the proposal would take an existing college savings plan and match it for low and middle income families.

Currently, the existing college savings plans commonly called "529 plans" after the federal tax-code section under which they are created allow for Arkansans to open a tax-deferred investment account to save for a college education.

The matching grant program, which would be partly funded by a lottery and money from the state's surplus, would cost \$575,000 a year, Halter said.

"A matching-grant will offer many Arkansas families the ability to make a sound investment into a child's future higher-education," Halter said.

Halter, who lives in North Little Rock, is running against Attorney General Mike Beebe for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. Former congressman Asa Hutchinson is the only Republican running for the post.

Beebe supports the state's 529 plans but is focusing on needs-based scholarships, his campaign said Wednesday.

"Those families making \$20,000 or less a year face a real challenge to put money aside for the future at the sacrifice of today's needs like housing, food and health care," Beebe spokesman Zac Wright said. "That's why Mike Beebe proposed more need-based scholarships for Arkansans."

Hutchinson spokesman David Kinkade said Hutchinson has been traveling the state discussing his plans for higher education improvements.

"He'll be unveiling more proposals, including quality education for grade schools and high schools, as the campaign continues," Kinkade said.