

The Southern Illinoisan, February 18, 2011

## Simon starts college tour near home

BY ROB CROW, THE SOUTHERN | Posted: Friday, February 18, 2011 4:00 am

CARTERVILLE - Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon started her statewide tour of community colleges Thursday in a location near and dear to her family.

Simon spoke Thursday at John A. Logan College about the need to get more people into Illinois' community colleges and graduating from them. She also took a tour of the campus, where her husband, Perry Knop, is a professor.

"I know about community colleges. They're no secret to me," Simon said. "And I know that community colleges are a really significant part of how we have to move our state forward in the world of education.

As Gov. Pat Quinn's point person on education, Simon is visiting each of Illinois' 48 community colleges. The goal of the tour is to find out what colleges are doing and what the state can do to bring in and retain more students. The long-term goal is to get 60 percent of working-age adults to have college degrees or certificates by 2025. Currently, that number is at 41 percent.

Simon wants community colleges to play a large role in that increase, and the initiative began last week when she met with community college presidents.

"What we're talking about is getting more people into college, and getting more people out of college successfully," Simon said.

On Thursday, Simon discussed the need to better promote the access community colleges provide students, and more so, the success stories to come out of such colleges. Again, she turned to her husband for an example, discussing how Knop attended Rend Lake College to study automotive mechanics before deciding he wanted to extend his education and, eventually, work in education.

JALC President Bob Mees said the college is working on ways to increase enrollment and graduation rates, and touted such programs as the college and career readiness program, which helps high school students be better prepared for college classes. The program, Mees said, allows students to start taking higher-level classes once they enter college, and thus, to graduate from school earlier.

"We need to serve the students," Mees said. "That's what it's all about."

Also this week, JALC student trustee Mandy Little met in Washington with U.S. Rep. Jerry Costello, D-Bellefonte, to discuss education and community college funding.

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