



## University Senate

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August 12, 2010

**Dear Colleagues,**

I have just left a special Board of Trustees meeting that focused on the 2010-2011 SUNY budget. Since it was webcast, there are no secrets. The long and short of it is that there will be no increases in tuition rates for in-state freshmen and graduate programs, with the exceptions of MBAs, pharmacy, law, dental, medical, physical therapy (doctorate) and nursing (doctorate of nursing practice), each about 9%. Optometry will increase 5.2%. The non-residence rates will increase, about 4% for undergraduates and most graduate, 10% for SUNY MBA programs, and 20% for the other specified programs. The increase in tuition revenue is expected to total about \$19 million, but as expected it will be distributed very differently across the system.

As almost every one of you now knows, the Assembly refused to act on (and the Senate could not garner sufficient votes to pass) Gov. Paterson's proposal to empower New York's public universities in three distinct ways: by allowing CUNY and SUNY to have greater authority to set their respective tuition rates, within caps specified by the legislature; by permitting CUNY and SUNY to engage more easily in public and private partnerships; and by releasing CUNY and SUNY from the pre-audit process now necessary with large scale purchases of goods and services.

While a "framework" agreement was widely reported, that seems to be little more than a device designed to provide cover for those legislators who most strongly supported PHEEIA and who were standing in the way of a budget resolution until some action was taken on behalf of the public university systems. There was little expectation that any action would be taken this year, since the discussion focused on planning for the next budget cycle and the reintroduction of empowerment, only this time with a different Governor.

On the other, Senator Toby Stavisky was quoted today to the effect that negotiations were continuing and there was a possibility of some action when the Legislature reconvenes next month.

Where does that leave the public universities and state funding? Just about where we began the year, except with an additional \$240 million cut in the core state support for public higher education in New York. That brings the total cut in the past three years to \$634 million in core support for SUNY, and additional hundreds of millions for CUNY, or, about 25% of 2007-08 state support.

To date, these cuts have been – and will continue to be – translated differently across SUNY, since each campus entered this crisis in somewhat different fiscal condition, determined by sector, campus management, local foundation support and/or sources of ancillary income. But, whatever the specific range of responses, it is clear that our SUNY campuses will have fewer resources with which to meet the needs of both our students and external constituencies. And ultimately, since over 80% of campus budgets are personnel costs, the diminished resources will ultimately result in personnel reductions. In truth, next year could be even worse.

First, the state has already used all its traditional devices to close the last two budget gaps, including real cuts to a variety of agencies. So, next year's shortfall, which is projected to be about the same as the current fiscal year – about another \$9 billion – will have to be made from an even tighter beginning base. And the politics of the crisis dictate that the new Governor and members of the legislature will want, to the extent possible, to make the reductions in state support during the first year in office rather than the second, third or fourth.

Second, there is every reason to believe, especially after an interview given by Lt. Gov. Richard Ravitch yesterday, that the just passed budget will not hold for the year. It was put together with some band-aids, baling wire and hope that the economy would improve over the next twelve months. If Ravitch is right, and he has been more often than not on economic forecasts, there will be another mid-year adjustment.

Are there any mitigating factors? Perhaps. The administration is committed to go back to the Legislature, rearguing the need for the essential elements of PHEEIA, which could provide some degree of relief in the short term, and for a select number of campuses, greater relief in the future. In addition, if I heard/read recent comments (post-budget) by UUP President Phil Smith correctly, there may be an opening to craft common ground on two of the three elements of PHEEIA, a "rational tuition policy" and a significant change in state agency pre-audit procedures. On the other, President Smith distributed a letter that congratulated the Assembly for its failure to act on PHEEIA. In addition, NYSUT issued a statement

yesterday that accompanied its lack of support for a number of sitting legislators, in which it identified PHEEIA as one of its four test legislative initiatives. Since its opposition apparently remains adamant, the chances of finding common ground on structural reform may be slim. Slim or not, we'll keep trying.

Our commitment on this issue remains firm: to work collegially and cooperatively with all who are seeking to develop a more stable funding system, using all possible sources, to support of public higher education in the state. That includes the administrations at SUNY, on the campuses, union representatives and our colleagues in the community colleges and CUNY, each of which is budgeted differently, but each of which has suffered from recent budget cuts. The current system is obviously – and in my judgment, irretrievably – broken.

The foregoing is as realistic an assessment as can be given at this point. And, to my mind, it underscores *our* roles and responsibilities, collective and individual, over the next years. As an organization, the UFS and its leadership will continue to advocate for the State University, in fact, for all public higher education in the state, and will continue to explore more effective ways to affect the political process in Albany. Moreover, we pledge to continue working with campus governance organizations to more effectively voice the concerns and perspectives of professional and teaching staff, in all areas appropriate to shared governance.

Part of my message today is a plea for each of us to remember our primary missions as faculty and staff, which are, the education of the next generation of workers, leaders, entrepreneurs and social servants throughout New York State. Our colleagues and students expect, and deserve, no less. And, as continue to educate others in our classrooms, laboratories and studios, we are also working to extend knowledge through our research and to continue our service to the communities, campus and beyond, with which we are inextricably bound.

In other words, take a moment to appreciate anew those elements of our professional lives over which we have immediate, direct control. The source of our deepest professional satisfactions, they remain the real reasons we have committed our professional lives to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, in all its wondrous forms. While budget crises come and go, these are the constants that sustain us.

Yours truly,

Kenneth P. O'Brien  
President  
University Faculty Senate

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#### **Statement from SUNY Chancellor Nancy L. Zimpher on Future of the Empowerment Act**

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#### **For Immediate Release: Wednesday, August 4, 2010**

"Through the Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act, SUNY brought forward positive, zero-cost solutions during a time of serious fiscal problems. This legislation would strengthen the entire SUNY system while improving our economy and the quality of life for New Yorkers. Unfortunately, the final budget contains none of the Empowerment Act's provisions while enacting over \$210 million in additional cuts to SUNY – bringing the three-year total to a 30 percent reduction of our operating budget.

"Not passing the Empowerment Act this budget cycle is a missed opportunity for the State of New York. Above all, we are concerned for SUNY's students and the state's economy. The combination of severe cuts now exceeding more than \$634 million and no regulatory relief nor enhanced entrepreneurial flexibility will seriously compromise New York's ability to harness SUNY's 64 campuses as its greatest educational and economic asset.

"We want to thank SUNY's many supporters who have stood with us during this critical time, including students, faculty, campus presidents, administrators and staff, alumni, trustees and system and campus governance leaders, building trades unions, economic development organizations, business leaders, local, county and federal officials, state legislators, the Governor, and the majority of New Yorkers.

"With this strong support, we remain optimistic that the legislature and its leaders will stay true to its promise and come to a three-way agreement on the Empowerment Act in the very near future.

"Meanwhile, we will continue to advocate for reforms that are essential for fullest access to a quality public higher education and essential for our state's economic revitalization, and move forward on SUNY's strategic plan, *The Power of SUNY*. Our students – and all New Yorkers – deserve nothing less."

**About the State University of New York**

The State University of New York is the largest comprehensive university system in the United States, educating nearly 465,000 students in 7,351 degree and certificate programs on 64 campuses. To learn more about how SUNY creates opportunity, visit [www.suny.edu](http://www.suny.edu)

Be a part of Generation SUNY! Follow us on [Twitter](#), be our fan on [Facebook](#), and watch us on [YouTube](#).

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Aug 4, 2010

Colleagues,

We would like to express our appreciation to members of the State Legislature and, particularly, to the leadership of the State Assembly for recognizing that the Public Higher Education, Empowerment and Innovation Act greatly conflicted with the fundamental purpose of the State University as an institution of public higher education.

SUNY was established by the State of New York and financed by the people of New York for the singular purpose of providing a broad-based opportunity for New York's students to obtain an education of quality.

In putting aside the enactment of the Governor's proposal to permit SUNY to unilaterally raise tuition and enter into public/private partnerships, the Legislature has preserved access and affordability while protecting SUNY's core public mission.

We thank them for their thoughtful and wise decision regarding an issue of critical importance to all New Yorkers.

In Union...  
Phil

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