



United University Professions

February 17, 2010

Dear UUP member:

SUNY is facing the greatest threat to its existence and your job could be affected. Like a wolf in sheep's clothing, this threat comes in the form of the so-called "SUNY/CUNY Empowerment and Innovation Act," proposed by Gov. Paterson and promoted heavily by the SUNY administration in its "SUNY Advocates" Web site and in many public statements.

According to SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher, "The SUNY/CUNY Empowerment Act harnesses high-impact, zero-cost solutions that will create jobs, build the foundations for tomorrow's economy and strengthen public higher education...while saving millions of taxpayer dollars."

Sound too good to be true? It is. In fact, "saving millions of taxpayer dollars" is just another way of saying that our governor and SUNY are pressing a plan that would allow New York State to further abandon its obligation to provide an affordable and accessible system of public higher education. The governor's proposed budget would reduce next year's funding for SUNY by approximately \$152 million. This represents an additional funding cut that, in a span of only two-years, reduces state aid to SUNY by some \$562 million—nearly \$85 million less than it was twenty years ago!

"Zero-cost solution that will create jobs?" Not a chance. This act—which I believe should be more aptly named the "Endangerment and Injury Act"—would *cost* parents and students thousands of dollars! That's because it would grant SUNY authority to raise tuition, including differential tuition, without any governmental constraints. Yes, it is true that across-the-board increases, for both graduate and undergraduate programs, are limited to 2 ½ times the five year rolling average of the Higher Education Price Index (HEPI). However, the governor and SUNY have chosen NOT to publicize the fact that the University could impose differential tuition increases on top of the HEPI limitation. In other words, there would be no limits on what SUNY could charge. This is neither a rational nor predictable plan for tuition increases.

SUNY and the governor claim the act would raise revenue that would be used to create jobs. What's true is, the act would allow SUNY to enter into public/private partnerships with virtually no oversight. There is absolutely no evidence that SUNY can raise any revenue from these joint ventures and partnerships. In fact, SUNY's previous experiences with joint ventures, through special bills enacted by the Legislature, have *cost* New York taxpayers millions of dollars in lost revenue. The near-empty biotechnology facility at SUNY Farmingdale and the various Centers for Excellence are just two examples of how SUNY's partnerships have lost, not raised, revenues.

Here's what the act doesn't admit to: Many of its other provisions have great potential to jeopardize the welfare and job security of you and all our members.

For example, the act eliminates any state appropriations for tuition and other revenues. This removes any guarantee that student tuition and fees will be restricted to benefiting the academic mission of your campus. Even more ominously, the act authorizes the University to deposit its funds *outside* the State Treasury. Imagine the risks that lie therein. Have we learned nothing from the mistakes of removing oversight on our financial industry?

Also, the act eliminates any approvals by the State Comptroller and Attorney General of contracts for services. This means that the opportunities for outsourcing not only increase enormously, but we would not be in a position to stop those contracts before they are executed. And, there is a provision that permits developers to build on University property for purposes not directly related to the campuses' academic mission – simply to achieve local real property tax exemption. This latter provision perpetrates a hoax on working people, who are so desperately looking for jobs in this battered economy. The promises of jobs supported by project labor agreements or prevailing wage provisions are empty ones—construction projects performed by private contractors using private funds are exempt from such labor protections!

The threat to our jobs is real. UUP is aware that, on several occasions, campus presidents have stated to our own members their belief that, if enacted, the governor's proposals will permit them to undo union contracts and much of what we have accomplished over the years. Whether they can do this or not is irrelevant. What is relevant is that's what they think which, in and of itself, signals the University's intent and should be all the warning we need. Moreover, we are concerned that, if this act becomes law, our membership will be harmed at the negotiations table. Why? It's simple: If New York State has a limited or no financial stake in SUNY employees, why would it be inclined to bargain in a fair and equitable manner?

With 80 percent of SUNY's operating budget directed towards personnel costs, there's a lot at stake for UUP and all our members. As we move more and more toward a private university our collective bargaining rights become more and more eroded. According to the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining (at Hunter College), in terms of college and university employees covered by collective bargaining agreements, "less than six percent are employed by private colleges or universities." The Empowerment Act certainly will not "empower" our members.

Don't be fooled by the "SUNY Advocate" hype. SUNY wants the power and freedom of a private university and it will pay any price to get it—including making it easy for the state to walk away from its responsibility to fund public higher education and our jobs.

In Union,



Phillip H. Smith, Ph.D.
President

To take action and for more information, visit uupinfo.org and savesuny.org