



THE STATE UNIVERSITY *of* NEW YORK

**Office of the
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Honorable Sheldon Silver
New York State Assembly
Room 932, Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Speaker Silver:

Almost 440,000 students and their families have chosen SUNY to obtain a top quality education. And, in the present fiscal crisis, applications are up dramatically, at some campuses by as much as 40%.

SUNY has certainly borne more than its fair share in responding to New York's economic troubles. In the last year, SUNY has endured \$210 million in cuts. Our students are feeling these cuts through larger class sizes, elimination of courses critical to degree programs, and loss of full-time faculty. These cuts threaten SUNY's capacity to discharge its core mission: public access to a high quality educational experience for all New Yorkers.

SUNY Board of Trustees responded to this crisis by raising tuition \$620, inclusive of an incremental \$310 increase this Spring. Out of state students will pay \$2,260 more (\$1,130 for Spring). These actions will generate \$68 million this fiscal year and an additional \$140 million next fiscal year. These funds are essential if SUNY is going to have any prospect of sustaining both quality and access.

You may have read that DOB has proposed taking away, in reduced operating aid, almost all the funds represented by the tuition increase. They intend to take 90% this year and 80% next. Instead of tuition being used for campus-based educational purposes, a nearly equivalent sum would end up being swept into the state's general fund to reduce the deficit. This is sleight-of-hand. It violates SUNY's compact with its students and their families. Simply put, it is wrong. We need your support to prevent it. And we need you to authorize the expenditure of tuition so that it may be spent for its intended purpose.

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But tuition is only one challenge among many. Here is a shorthand array of the major issues confronting SUNY, issues that prevent SUNY from realizing its potential:

SUNY must be the engine of New York's economic revitalization, particularly Upstate and on Long Island. SUNY's state-operated campuses and community colleges have a presence everywhere and is the primary means by which New York creates, nurtures and commercializes intellectual capital. As an example, Albany Nanotech has generated 3,000 jobs and \$4.2 billion dollars in private investment in just 4 years. How myopic it would be for us not to exploit this vast potential statewide. And to consciously disable or diminish this competitive advantage should be absolutely unthinkable.

SUNY needs investment on the part of all, not more draconian cuts. And it needs to be freed to compete. SUNY continues to be the most over-regulated public university system in the nation. It is hamstrung by a labyrinthine web of regulatory constraints. Although it has an independent board of trustees whose fiduciary duty is to prudently oversee its affairs, and although it is subject to annual audits, both internal and external, it still must secure pre-audit approvals by you, by DOB, by the AG, by OSC and by SED, for many of its most basic functions. It can't leverage the revenue generating potential of its assets. It can't enter into the public/private partnerships that create jobs. We will be sending up a package of legislative and regulatory amendments that will allow us the flexibility we need to compete with our peers in the nation and around the world. We urgently need your support of a more flexible, more creative, more nimble SUNY.

Our students deserve a rational, incremental, and predictable source of revenue to enhance academic quality. At its meeting in November, the SUNY Board adopted a rational tuition policy. Going forward, students and their families will be able to project and plan for transparent, small increases in tuition. In our view, this policy is sensible and it enjoys wide support among students. Last month, the SUNY Student Assembly, representing all 64 campuses, voted to support a rational tuition plan. We need you to bless it.

It is time to completely rethink SUNY's place in our economy, in the state's strategic response to our budget crisis and in giving substance to our promise of opportunity for all. You will be seeing a great deal of us during the 2009 Legislative Session. We are excited at the prospect and look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,



Carl T. Hayden
Chairman, Board of Trustees



H. Carl McCall
Chairman, Finance Committee