

## UUP takes offensive vs. SUNY hospital privatization

UUP has come out swinging against the recommendations contained in the Berger Commission report, recommendations that could force the three SUNY-operated hospitals and their affiliated medical schools to close.

UUP quickly mobilized its forces to fight the proposals, starting with UUP President Bill Scheuerman's forceful testimony before the state Senate Health Committee in Albany Dec. 1.

"These hospitals provide a life-line for their communities, offering services many may not otherwise have access to," Scheuerman told the packed committee hearing. He used the

hearing and a NYSUT Board of Directors meeting to outline the threat posed by the report's call for a study on privatizing the three teaching hospitals.

"If privatized, it is likely that many of the more expensive and unique of these critical services provided would be cut back or, more likely, completely abolished," he said. He called attention to Upstate Medical University's state-of-the-art burn unit in Syracuse that stood ready to treat survivors from the 9-11 attack on the World Trade Center.

Scheuerman warned that privatizing SUNY's hospitals in Brooklyn, Syracuse and Stony Brook would also endanger accessible, affordable public medical education in New York state.

"If the responsibility of medical education at our teaching hospitals shifts to corporations, access would suffer as concern about a healthy bottom line -- rather than healthy citizens -- becomes the



Photo by Andrew Watson

UUP President Bill Scheuerman describes the threat posed by privatization of SUNY's hospitals during a meeting of NYSUT's Board of Directors. Listening are UUP Treasurer Rowena Blackman-Stroud and UUP VP for Academics Fred Floss.

main priority," Scheuerman told the committee. "The potential exists that these institutions, highly dependent on the state, would be forced to close their doors."

He implored state lawmakers to reject the commission's recommendations and take the time to thoughtfully consider the health care needs of all New Yorkers, rather than moving with reckless haste.

UUP will carry that strong message before the Assembly's health committee Monday, Dec. 11, when the committee conducts seven regional public hearings. UUP leaders will testify at all of them.

You can do your part to stop privatization in its tracks by taking part in the "Save the SUNY Hospitals" rallies UUP is holding with NYSUT, PEF and CSEA.

### Negotiations Team, Committee to review member input at retreat

The members have spoken, and now their input will be the subject of intense focus by the UUP Negotiations Team and Negotiations Committee at a three-day retreat Dec. 8-10.

The two work groups will meet behind closed doors for a careful review of the many suggestions that have come to them from members in a variety of forums in the last three months. Members have spoken out on issues of importance to them and their chapters during chapter visits; at hearings at the Fall DA; in surveys; and through one-on-one conversations with their chapter representatives to the *Ad Hoc* Advisory Committee.

UUP VP for Academics and Chief Negotiator Fred Floss lauded the participation of UUP members during the recent "Listening Tour" by the Negotiations Team.

"I think it can be said without question that UUP has the most open and democratic negotiations process of any higher ed union in the country," Floss said. "Our work group members have been accessible, responsive and just simply good listeners in their meetings with the membership. As a result of these many forums, the work groups now have a solid foundation from which they can work as they discuss the next task, which is the creation of a solid proposal to present to the state."

The Negotiations Team expects to meet with the state early next year to exchange proposals.

Members will have additional opportunities to ask questions and talk about issues of concern to them in the negotiations process, including a hearing at the Winter DA Feb. 9-10.

### JOIN THE RALLIES TO SAVE SUNY HOSPITALS

**Syracuse:** Mon, Dec. 11, 9 a.m.,  
at Oncenter

**Stony Brook:** Mon, Dec. 11,  
11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.,  
outside the Medical Center

**Albany:** Wed., Dec. 13,  
11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.,  
East Capitol steps

UUP will provide bus transportation to the

Albany rally. Please contact your chapter president to say you will attend.

#### Reminders/Upcoming meetings

##### December

- 8-10—Negotiations Comm./Team Retreat, Lake George
- 22-29—UUP and NYSUT offices closed for the holidays

##### January

- 1—UUP and NYSUT offices closed for the holidays
- 30—UUP Legislative Luncheon, Albany

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(excerpts of selected newsclips)

Dec. 7

**Press & Sun-Bulletin** — **Two groups to forego battle on health cuts**

With two of the major potential opponents of planned hospital closings and mergers deciding to sit out the fight, other foes acknowledged Wednesday that the chances of preventing the health care downsizing are slim.

The Assembly and Senate are due back at the Capitol next Wednesday to consider whether to block implementation of a state report that recommends closing nine hospitals and merging or reconfiguring 47 more. Overall, about 4,200 hospital beds would be eliminated, along with 3,100 nursing-home beds. The plan would save about \$800 million a year.

Unlike most actions that lawmakers consider, they have to act to reject the report if they don't want it to go into effect, rather than voting for it to become law. And they can't make changes in it.

On Wednesday, the largest hospital-workers' union, Local 1199 of the Service Employees International Union, and the Greater New York Hospital Association announced that they're staying on the sidelines in the fight.

"It's obviously disquieting," said Assembly Majority Leader Paul Tokasz, D-Cheektowaga, Erie County, a leader of the forces trying to block the cuts. Now, he said, "it will be difficult to convince my downstate colleagues" to oppose the cuts.

"They were the biggest speed bumps in the road," said Blair Horner of the New York Public Interest Research Group, speaking of the union and hospital association. "If they're not going to throw their considerable political weight in front of (this plan) it is more likely to happen."

Despite losing two potentially key allies, other opponents of the plan say they will continue to press their case.

"We're full speed ahead, damn the torpedoes," said William E. Scheuerman, UUP president, which sees dire consequences if ideas to privatize SUNY hospitals in Syracuse, Brooklyn and on Long Island are carried out. "We can't say 'woe is me.' We've got to keep fighting."

Steve Madaras of CSEA, which has 60,000 members in health care jobs, said his group wants any closing plans to be more thoughtfully considered. "This is obviously a very complete and far-reaching proposal," he said. "It's not like one size fits all. The argument we're making is you're throwing out the baby with the bath water by doing it on an all-or-nothing basis."

Gov. George E. Pataki, Spitzer and lawmakers who set up the commission said the all-or-nothing approach was the only way to get any significant changes adopted, since otherwise those affected would be able to block any reductions. "If I was a betting man, I would bet there will be no action," said Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, D-Buffalo.

Dec. 4

**The Legislative Gazette** — **Strong feelings on both sides of hospital debate**

Nine hospitals would be forced to close their doors forever as part of a plan to reduce the cost of health care by eliminating, downsizing and merging hospitals and nursing homes across the state.

The NYS Commission on Health Care Facilities in the 21st Century, headed by Chair Stephen Berger, released its long-awaited report Tuesday after conducting an 18-month study on how to best modernize and prepare New York's cumbersome health care system for the new century.

Gov. George E. Pataki and the Legislature enacted the commission in June 2005 and the governor appointed the majority of its members.

"The work of this commission is one step in what must be an ongoing and wide-ranging process to modernize and reshape New York's health care system," said the commission in its report. "The work of this commission is a start, not an end, to the facility rightsizing process."

To aid in cutting the costs of the state's continuously rising health care bill, the recommendations in the report address one-quarter of all the hospitals and health care facilities in New York and call for the elimination of 4,200 hospital beds and 3,000 nursing home beds through closures and mergers.

Gov.-elect Eliot Spitzer said the Commission's report is "an appropriate and important step in restructuring the health care system."

Unions that represent health care workers are not thrilled with the report.

The New York State Public Employees Federation not only questioned the decisions made in the Berger Commission's report, but also questioned the authority the Commission has to even recommend such changes.

"PEF believes the Commission did not have the authority to recommend changes in the operating structure of SUNY hospitals. Such decisions to close or merge hospitals should not be made by a commission that is unaccountable to the public and appointed by an outgoing governor."

The statement PEF prepared following the release of the Berger Commission largely focused on their opposition to the recommendation that SUNY Upstate Medical University merge with private Crouse Hospital in Syracuse. PEF's position is that the joint hospitals would senselessly operate under the framework set forth by Crouse, rather than SUNY, after Crouse Hospital recently pulled itself out of bankruptcy, while the public hospital, SUNY, is financially sound.

"The commission has it backwards," said PEF President Ken Brynien. "It only makes sense to rely on the public SUNY operating model if the merged hospital and the essential health care services they provide are to be successful."

The New York State United Teachers said the commission's recommendation to privatize SUNY teaching hospitals in Syracuse, Brooklyn and Stony Brook makes no sense.

"It's like treating a heart attack by amputating a leg," said NYSUT President Richard C. Iannuzzi. "Privatizing vital health care services and eliminating physician training and education programs will only make New York's health care problems worse."

NYSUT Executive Vice President Alan B. Lubin said the value of hospitals can't be measured in dollars and cents.

"This kind of decision should be made by patient advocates and the health care professionals who actually provide the care," Lubin said. "This is too important to be left to some government-appointed bean counters in Albany."

Uninsured patients who receive treatment at SUNY hospitals will have nowhere to turn if the hospitals turn private, said Lubin, who expressed concern for the families with little income and no insurance that rely on SUNY.

UUP agrees with both PEF and NYSUT in opposing the privatization of SUNY hospitals and strongly urge the governor and Legislature to reject the Berger report.

"We are very troubled by the recommendations in the Berger Commission report, which would devastate the public health mission of the State University hospitals. We strongly disagree with the report's call for a study on privatizing the three public teaching hospitals, and the merger and eventual closure of SUNY's Upstate Medical University in Syracuse," said UUP President William E. Scheuerman. "Privatizing SUNY's three public hospitals would destroy their ability to provide essential medical care, such as burn units and pediatric emergency care, to New York's citizens, particularly for the disadvantages and uninsured."

The Civil Service Employees Association considers the report to be a straight attack on public health care and deems the recommendations unacceptable. CSEA also criticized Pataki for "trying to achieve an ideological victory that he was unable to secure on its merits during 12 years in office."

CSEA said the commission did not have the best interest or the well being of New Yorkers in mind when they conducted their analysis and were more concerned with minimizing expenses. CSEA also demanded the recommendations be further reviewed and debated.

"Ending public health is the equivalent of the state walking away from the elderly and the sick and telling families to go it alone. It is also inconceivable that a report of this kind could recommend changes that would have such a devastating impact on lives, livelihoods and local economies with barely a mention of work force and labor issues. CSEA believes that all the people of New York deserve better."

The Legislature has until Dec. 31 to either accept or reject the report in its entirety. If the Legislature fails to do so by the last day of the year, the recommendations within the report automatically become law on Jan. 1, according to David Sandman, executive director of the commission.