

UUP joins rally to save SUNY hospitals

Neither snow nor wind nor cold could keep UUPers from protesting against the plan to privatize SUNY's Upstate Medical University in Syracuse.

About a dozen UUP members braved a blustery early January evening outside Upstate Medical's emergency room entrance to rally against the Berger Commission's mandate to merge University Hospital with Crouse Hospital, which would end the former's status as a public hospital.

UUPers from UMU and nearby ESF joined forces with about 50 other unionists at the rally. The protest centered on a walk from Buffalo to Albany passing through Syracuse by three members of the Communications Workers of America to protest the Berger Commission's report. UUP VP for Academics Fred Floss joined the CWA marchers ascending the hill, where UMU's campus is located, arriving at the rally together.

"We're using our feet here in Syracuse to keep the legislators' feet to the fire in Albany to save our hospitals," Floss said as he led the rally. UUP and CWA — along with CSEA, NYSUT and PEF members who were also in attendance — are pressing the state Legislature to amend the commission report, which became law Jan. 1, to stop the privatization of UMU, plus the likely privatization of the two other SUNY-operated public hospitals in Brooklyn



Photo by Don Feldstein

and Stony Brook. UUP VP for Academics Fred Floss and Carol Braund, VP for Professionals at UUP's Upstate Medical University chapter, march behind the chapter banner at a rally in Syracuse protesting the planned privatization of UMU.

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"This is really about economic development," Floss told the crowd. "You can't expect businesses to come to central New York without high quality health care that can only be provided by a SUNY medical center such as UMU."

The CWA march continued moving toward Albany, where it will end at the state Capitol today (Jan. 26).

UUP is urging members to keep pressure on legislative leaders by sending faxes opposing SUNY hospital privatization. Visit www.uupinfo.org and click the link on the right side. That will take you to NYSUT's Political Action page. Check the box next to the letter titled "Berger Commission Letter, General SUNY Hospital." Follow the instructions to fax a letter to Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver.

UUP pushes its legislative agenda

The immediate threat of privatization for the SUNY hospitals has abated, with key legislative leaders publicly stating that they will not allow the state Health Department to take such a damaging step. But UUP will make the SUNY hospitals the highlight of its legislative push this session, to ensure that the state's lawmakers keep these valuable institutions in the public conscience.

UUPers will also emphasize campus needs, especially the need for more full-time SUNY faculty, as they gear up to meet with legislators in their home districts and in Albany during the legislative session.

"Legislators know how important the SUNY hospitals are, and that's why we're optimistic that they'll fix this mess," said UUP President Bill Scheuerman, who is urging all UUPers to continue faxing and calling their legislators in a statewide public awareness blitz on behalf of the hospitals.

UUP's legislative effort in this session kicks off with the Legislative Luncheon Jan. 30, the day before Gov. Spitzer's unveils his first state budget proposal. For the schedule of other legislative events this session, go to the UUP Web site (www.uupinfo.org) and click on the "Calendar" link. Members with questions on participating in an Advocacy Day or other UUP event can ask their chapter leaders or call the UUP Research/Legislative Department at (518) 640-6600.

The SUNY Outreach Committee — under the direction of co-chairs Glenn McNitt and Tom Tucker and vice chair Kathy Southerton — will be leading the advocacy and steering the 2007 contributions campaign for VOTE/COPE, NYSUT's voluntary, nonpartisan political action fund. UUP contributions to VOTE/COPE this year are on pace to reach a record-setting \$200,000.

"We are thrilled by this show of support from members," Scheuerman said. "For those who have not yet contributed, we hope you will realize that VOTE/COPE is the single easiest way for you to help UUP make a difference. Speak to your chapter leaders or call an officer in Albany. We'll be glad to speak with you about this critical effort."

Reminders/Upcoming meetings

- JAN 30** —UUP Legislative Luncheon, Albany
- FEB 9-10** —2007 Winter DA, Albany
- FEB 14** —Technology Sector Breakfast, Albany
- FEB 19** —UUP office closed for Presidents Day
- FEB 26-27** —NYSUT Higher Ed Lobby Day

- MAR 6** —Univ. Center/HSC/Optometry Advocacy Day, Stony Brook Day, Albany
- MAR 9-10** —Chapter President Retreat, Mohonk Mountain House, New Paltz
- MAR 13** —Librarian/Part-Timer/Univ. College/EOP/EOC Advocacy Day, Albany
- MAR 19-20** —NYSUT Comm. of 100, Albany
- MAR 27** —Retiree/NYSTI Advocacy Day, Albany

(excerpts of selected newsclips)

The Legislative Gazette —Jan. 22

Committee hears testimony on SUNY, CUNY spending

Representatives of New York State's public colleges and universities recently met with the Assembly committee on higher education to request a budget increase to make up for what they described as more than 15 years of neglect.

"I wish I could sit here and say that the 2006-07 budget lifted CUNY out of crisis mode," said Barbara Bowen of the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY. "But the level of funding provided in 2006-07 was simply not enough."

Representatives from the State and City Universities of New York provided the committee with insight as to how they allocated extra funding they received for the current fiscal year. Many said that although they were grateful for the increase made in this year's state budget, the SUNY and CUNY schools are still underfunded.

After hearing testimony, investigating SUNY and CUNY expenses, and seeing what Gov. Eliot Spitzer proposes budgeting for state colleges in his spending plan due out later this month, the committee is expected make its own budget recommendations.

SUNY and CUNY were given \$215 million in operating aid and more than \$1 billion in additional capital funding this fiscal year, which represented the largest increase in 15 years.

Assemblyman Joel Miller, R-C-Poughkeepsie, said he hopes the state will be able to increase funding to make public colleges and universities a top choice for many graduating high school students.

As the number of high school graduates increase, the number of students seeking higher education also increases, Miller said.

For SUNY and CUNY, the problem does not lie only with a lack of capital, but also a lack of operating funds, according to Alan B. Lubin, the vice president of the New York State United Teachers. For the past 15 years there was a gradual "shift of burden" from the state to the students to finance these colleges, he said.

"The state must build upon this year's progress in funding SUNY and CUNY by reversing the practice of shifting more of the burden of financing SUNY and CUNY to students," said Lubin.

In order for the public higher education system to come close to being back on track, as it was 20 years ago, the state would have to increase its operating budget in order to increase salaries and hire more full-time professors.

"The value of an academic experience requires a certain number of academic leaders," said Assemblywoman Deborah Glick, D-Manhattan.

According to the United University Professions, state-run universities would have to hire 2,000 more full-time faculty members to reach what they consider to be an acceptable student-to-professor ratio. However, union officials said the state would have to ensure all of the professors be given full benefits.

"The proposals cannot be implemented without

undermining health care quality and the capacity of these public institutions (SUNY hospitals) to continue serving, effectively, the populations of their respective communities in Brooklyn, Stony Brook and Syracuse," said UUP President William Scheuerman.

As a solution of the lack of full-time staff, CUNY hired many adjunct professors who were not provided with benefits, like health care, said Bowen.

"This is an abusive system on adjunct labor," said Bowen. "We have a growing army of adjuncts who are underpaid and part-time staffers."

"They are alienated by the effort of finding housing in New York City on salaries that compare unfavorably with those at other universities," said Bowen.

Adjuncts are not provided with employer-provided childcare or maternity leave, said Bowen.

"It's just horrible to have those types of working conditions," Bowen said.

SUNY and CUNY still have a long way to go in order to catch up, according to Scheuerman. In 1990, the state provided about 75% of SUNY's budget and now only provides about 51%.

The growth of SUNY capital not only affects the students and professors, but also the towns in which the universities are located, according to Dennis L. Hefner, the president of SUNY Fredonia. According to Hefner, an increase in funding will enable the universities to attract more people to their campuses, specifically students, to help replenish the economy three times over.

"Improving New York's economy can be a reality if we continue to invest in SUNY, CUNY and our community colleges," Lubin said.

"Our college and university systems can be the engine that powers New York's economic resurgence."

Many argued that without state funding for these institutions they will fall victim to privatization, which could lead to detrimental consequences, according to Miller. Specifically, the medical schools run by the state are poorly funded and need to be able to compete with schools like New York University and Columbia.

"Privatization is not always the answer, and I'm not sure it's ever the answer," Miller said.

TIMES UNION —Jan. 17

SUNY wants to expand 3 hospitals

While a statewide commission has recommended possible privatization for the State University of New York's three hospitals, the SUNY board wants to spend \$142.7 million on expansions and new buildings at the three facilities.

SUNY's Board of Trustees endorsed the construction plan Nov. 28. That day, the Commission on Health Care Facilities in the 21st Century—a panel, known as the Berger Commission, established to propose closings and consolidations of hospitals and nursing homes around the state—recommended that SUNY Upstate Medical Center merge with Crouse Hospital in Syracuse, SUNY

Stony Brook University Medical Center in Suffolk County develop more partnerships with neighboring hospitals and the state consider privatizing all three SUNY hospitals.

One SUNY trustee said some of the construction might be necessary but suggested some of the projects could be reconsidered in a new context.

"At a minimum, (SUNY administrators) should provide an explanation of why these hospital projects must now be pursued in light of the Berger Commission report, said trustee Candace de Russy. She would like distribution of money to be based on performance.

Among the hospital spending items, \$59.2 million would go toward a 44,000-square-foot addition at Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn; \$45 million would be for a 150,000-square-foot administrative office building at Stony Brook Hospital in Suffolk County; and \$38.5 million would be spent on a new outpatient cancer facility at Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse.

E.J. McMahon, who follows state finances for the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank, said the SUNY capital plan should be re-examined because it was put together before the hospital consolidation recommendations were released.

The Legislative Gazette —Jan. 16

Canestrari's promotion leaves higher ed committee without a chair

Democrats welcomed Ronald Canestrari, D-Cohoes, with open arms to be their new majority leader of the state Assembly, but with Canestrari's promotion, the committee on higher education is left without a chair.

Many Democrats on the committee said they would be flattered to be named the new chair, but everyone was kept in the dark as to who Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, D-Manhattan would choose.

"I can't call it," Canestrari said when asked about possible successors. "There are a number of members who are interested in that position; it is a very important committee."

Canestrari said that serving on the committee has been one of the highlights of his career, but many of the struggles that the committee faced in the past will not be an issue under the Spitzer administration. The committee spent most of its time fighting tuition hikes at SUNY schools and trying to improve funding in order to update the campus resources.

Some Democrats like Assemblyman Kevin Cahill, D-Kingston, said that being chair would allow him to continue his work to improve public higher education.

"This position is one of the most prestigious and attractive," said Cahill, a graduate of SUNY at New Paltz. Cahill said his major goal is to make sure that the committee keeps a lid on tuition increases and to increase the number of full-time faculty members in the SUNY system.