

*"IT'S BUDGET TIME AGAIN IN NEW YORK STATE  
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IS IN FOR ANOTHER TOUGH YEAR."*



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# A tough year ahead

**I**t's budget time again in New York state and all indicators suggest that SUNY is in for another tough year. Before elaborating on the serious fiscal challenges facing the University, I want to give you some good news. The economy is turning around and Wall Street is doing much better. The state's projected budget deficit is getting smaller. Unfortunately, the economic turnaround will not resolve the massive budget deficit confronting the state for fiscal 2004-05. For the next fiscal year, New York faces a budget deficit of about \$6 billion! That's bad. But what makes it worse are the facts that prospects for another revenue-generating tax increase are slim; the state's "rainy day" fund is depleted; and most of the possible one-time revenue solutions were used last year. Worse yet, the SUNY Board of Trustees is not fighting aggressively for the University. In fact, its budget proposal, which it characterized as a "no-growth" or flat budget, wasn't even that. The trustees asked the governor for the same amount of public money as SUNY had last year, even though the chancellor and others claimed that last year's budget was \$39 million short. In other words, SUNY's trustees have started the budget process by asking for \$39 million less than they said they needed last year. An inauspicious start, to say the least.

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The trustees' budget request doesn't stop there. In addition to asking for a flat budget, the trustees want another tuition hike of an unspecified amount. Public statements by the chancellor indicate they want to tie tuition to a consumer price index, thereby creating a rational and predictable tuition policy that avoids large tuition hikes that could drive students from SUNY.

Traditionally, UUP has not taken a position on tuition. We do so for obvious reasons. If we discuss tuition, the focus of the debate shifts from SUNY's needs to the cost of attendance. In other words, the implications of budget cuts to SUNY are lost in the dialogue. One thing is certain: Hundreds of thousands of students will speak against a tuition hike. But who besides UUP will talk about the implications of funding cuts? Take last year, for example. Many elected officials spoke against the pro-

posed tuition increase. Nevertheless, the practical problems of focusing on tuition rather than on SUNY's fiscal needs became obvious when I approached the anti-tuition speakers and asked them how they were going to fill the \$183.5 million budget deficit at SUNY. Since they were opposed to a tuition hike, I thanked them for finding the public dollars that would save 4,000 jobs and ensure that 80,000 to 100,000 students would have faculty to teach their classes. In almost every case, the anti-tuition speakers said they had no idea of the implications of the budgetary shortfall. Does this mean that UUP supports a tuition hike? No. It just means someone has to talk about SUNY's needs. Otherwise, there's likely to be a lot of well-intended actions that hurt SUNY and its students. Decision-makers need to discuss the facts. All the facts. And we'll do our best to see that that happens.

UUP is well-equipped to make sure there is a public dialogue on SUNY's needs. We're also well-equipped to shape the results of the discussion. Last year at this time, the state was looking at an \$11 billion shortfall, and we reminded policymakers and the public that SUNY was facing nearly 4,000 layoffs. UUPers, in conjunction with our NYSUT colleagues, did everything in our power to protect members' jobs and to ensure that SUNY students would get the kind of high-quality education they expect and deserve.

This year, despite the tough odds, we're prepared to do the same thing. Hundreds of UUPers will again flock to Albany each week to advocate for a decent budget. We'll run a strong television advertising campaign, and generate thousands of letters and phone calls to our many friends on both sides of the aisle in the state Legislature. We'll meet with legislative leaders, demonstrate at the Capitol and do whatever else it takes to get the job done.

It's going to be a tough year. But we'll keep the focus on SUNY's needs and then do everything in our power to make sure these needs are met.