

Sept. 8, 2008

To the Editor:

As leaders of seven area SUNY campuses we were pleased to read of State Sen. Ken LaValle's support for SUNY funding in his commentary "SUNY deserves and needs more" (Post-Standard, Sept. 2).

We would like to take a closer look at what's at stake:

State and other forms of public financial support have eroded dramatically to the SUNY campuses over the past decade. This year, three rounds of cuts have eliminated \$209 million from SUNY campus budgets.

These cuts put our 38,000 students and the local economy of the communities we serve at further risk.

We recognize that public resources are tight and students' ability to absorb tuition increases is similarly challenged. In response, we have become more efficient, and more entrepreneurial through the pursuit of new funding through public and private grants, and the implementation of new programs and courses for business and industry.

While institutional efficiency and entrepreneurship are critical, funding from the state is vital to continue our unique mission of public access by and for those who live in Upstate New York.

Unlike a state agency with a singular focus, SUNY campuses have varied missions that bring great return—between 500 and 1,400 percent—on every state dollar invested.

We teach. We educate students to become physicians, nurses, anti-terrorism experts, teachers, dairy managers, automotive engineers, business executives, environmental scientists, social workers and substance abuse counselors.

We discover. We find new renewable fuel sources to operate our vehicles and power our factories. We lead the new green knowledge economy. We find cures for blindness and new ways to grow, process and prepare our foods.

We heal. We are a trauma center, a pediatric cancer center, an AIDS center. We treat the tiny infant in need of heart surgery and the elderly grandmother afflicted with Alzheimer's disease.

We connect. With displaced workers, whom we retrain. With schoolchildren, whom we mentor. With lifetime learners, whom we inspire. With alumni, more than 150,000 strong. With our communities, raising money, caring for others.

We energize. Our campuses fuel the local economy with \$2.159 billion by calling on businesses all across the region for their goods and services. We employ 12,688 of our neighbors and reach thousands of people with our programs.

The cuts we face will impact how we teach, discover, heal, connect and energize. These reductions will reverberate throughout higher education and place SUNY at a

significant competitive disadvantage, affecting our ability to serve the residents of New York for more than a decade to come.

The New York State Commission on Higher Education's final report, issued this summer, clearly and explicitly noted the risk of reducing support for public higher education.

Led by Cornell University President Emeritus Hunter Rawlings, the commission wrote:

"[We] unfortunately must warn that New York State is losing ground in an intensifying global competition for pre-eminence in the knowledge economy. We are falling behind because our public institutions of higher education are hampered by too little revenue, too little investment and too much regulation."

The panel urged continued investment in public higher education, not for one or two years, but for the foreseeable future.

Let SUNY be the broad shoulders the Central New York economy can count on. Let SUNY help create a more resilient New York with educational opportunities for all.

The Commission and Sen. LaValle understand what's at stake. We hope others who've ever taken a SUNY course, attended a SUNY event, hired a SUNY graduate, worked at a SUNY campus or applied technology developed in a SUNY research laboratory understand an investment in SUNY is an investment in New York's future that needs to be made now.

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