

May 6, 2008

John Clark
Interim Chancellor
State University of New York
State University Plaza
Albany, NY 12246

Dear Chancellor Clark,

We, the 21 presidents of SUNY's doctoral universities and comprehensive colleges, have united to address the serious and unprecedented budget cuts facing our State University. SUNY campuses have already sustained heavy reductions through the Executive Budget and legislative process, and now confront additional reductions that would undermine our ability to serve our students.

To compound the problem is the fact that the additional budget cuts are unjustly applied. No comparable reductions have been suggested for CUNY, the Community Colleges or, most egregiously, the well-endowed private New York universities. The cuts are in the form of spending caps on funds that are self-generated, such as tuition and medical care, result in no net savings to the state, and handicap philanthropy, entrepreneurial activities, and upstate economic development.

We must set forth a strategy to be strong together. First, we respectfully request a meeting with the Board of Trustees on May 13, with you as our leader, to present our thoughts and strategies.

Second, we subsequently want to meet together with the Governor to share with him the impact of these proposed caps and cuts.

And third, if necessary, we are committed to engage outside counsel to develop the legal arguments we may need to employ if we are not successful in appealing to the Governor. It is our hope that we will not be forced to resort to that action, but we must be prepared.

If SUNY crafts an alternative plan for budget cuts, this would amount to accepting DOB's premise that additional SUNY cuts are necessary and would cede the principal point: that SUNY is not a state agency and we should not be singled out for another cut when the rest of higher education is exempt.

Board Chair Hayden's May 2 memo evinces the thoughtful and strong advocacy that will be needed to ward off this threat to SUNY. We are grateful for the ongoing efforts that you and Chair Hayden have made to oppose this ill-conceived policy direction.

Some may perceive that as the nation's largest university system there is excess, but SUNY is a lean giant. We are, however, rich in those who appreciate our mission, including an impressive and dedicated faculty and staff that are united and vocal in their concern. We also have great support from the thousands of alumni who have made New York state their home. And, of course, our nearly 200,000 baccalaureate and graduate students who would be directly affected—they are at the core of everything we do, and it is for their future that we must move forward.

These are difficult times, but these are precisely the kinds of times that define leadership as we pursue our mission and defend our public trust. We want you to know we stand ready to support SUNY and deeply appreciate your concern at this critical time. To that end, we ask that you share this letter with the SUNY Board.

Sincerely,

George M. Philip, Interim President
University at Albany

Lois B. DeFleur, President
Binghamton University

John B. Simpson, President
University at Buffalo

Shirley Strum Kenny, President
Stony Brook University

Cornelius B. Murphy, Jr., President
College of Environmental Science and Forestry

David A. Heath, President
College of Optometry

John C. LaRosa, President
Downstate Medical Center

David R. Smith, President
Upstate Medical University

John Halstead, President
SUNY Brockport

Muriel A. Howard, President
Buffalo State College

Erik J. Bitterbaum, President
SUNY Cortland

Joyce Elliott, Interim President
Empire State College

Dennis L. Hefner, President
SUNY Fredonia

Christopher C. Dahl, President
SUNY Geneseo

Steven G. Poskanzer, President
SUNY New Paltz

Calvin O. Butts, III, President
SUNY Old Westbury

Alan B. Donovan, President
SUNY Oneonta

Deborah F. Stanley, President
SUNY Oswego

John Ettling, President
SUNY Plattsburgh

John F. Schwaller, President
SUNY Potsdam

Thomas J. Schwarz, President
SUNY Purchase