
WORKING PAPER SERIES

**COMMENTARY:
STOP DISINVESTING IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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United
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COMMENTARY:

STOP DISINVESTING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Support for public higher education is under assault in both Washington, D.C., and New York state, at a time when our youth and our workforce desperately need help. President Bush's budget proposes a huge cut to higher education funding. The \$12.7 billion reduction in student financial aid in the so-called budget reconciliation bill is the largest cut in the history of the student loan program.

Meanwhile, our competitors overseas are making their support of public higher education a priority. For example, according to a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the Chinese government doubled its spending on higher education to \$10.4 billion between 1998 and 2003.

Just as the Bush administration is retreating from its commitment to higher education, so, too, has New York state.

Consider these facts. For most of the last decade, the State University of New York — the nation's largest public higher education system — has been forced to scrape by with budgets that seriously underfunded its basic needs, including mandated costs.

This year, United University Professions and SUNY have requested state budget funding that includes a \$153.3 million increase to address those needs. But despite a projected \$4 billion budget

surplus, Gov. George Pataki ignored those needs by including only a \$3.6 million increase in spending for SUNY in his proposed state budget for 2006-2007.

Unless the \$153.3 million is added to the SUNY budget, the results would be devastating for SUNY, its students, and the state as a whole.

United University Professions, representing 31,000 academic and professional faculty, shares SUNY's mission of ensuring access to high-quality public education. That goal cannot be achieved unless New York state provides additional funds to hire more full-time faculty.

While enrollment at SUNY's 29 state-operated campuses has been rising steadily, the number of full-time faculty has been decreasing steadily, with negative consequences. In 2005 alone, 7,500 community college students were denied admission to the SUNY four-year school of their choice, because

there were not enough full-time faculty to teach them.

As SUNY enrollment has grown by 44,000 in the last decade, the number of full-time teaching positions at its state-operated campuses has been reduced by 1,200. This makes it more difficult for students to graduate within four years, as some required courses are not offered due to lack of faculty.

Against this backdrop in New York, Washington has been rubbing salt into the financial wound. Families struggling to pay their children's tuition now face rising interest rates on student loans, because of the budget reconciliation legislation. The president's fiscal year 2007 budget proposes elimination of the low-interest Perkins Loan program, while freezing Pell Grants at current levels.

What we're seeing is a systematic disinvestment

in public higher education, at the very time when we urgently need a greater investment of public dollars, so our young people—and workers seeking retraining—can compete and succeed academically in this global marketplace. We must rely on and invest in our intellectual capital to replace the manufacturing base we've lost overseas.

It's time to stop the disinvestment. UUP urges members of the New York State Legislature to show their dedication to SUNY and the state's economic future by providing the funds needed to support a good public higher education system, and turn it into a great one. Investing in SUNY would pay huge dividends in the long run, as 81 percent of SUNY graduates live and work in New York state after graduation. The presence of a talented workforce will do much to attract and retain the businesses that strengthen New York's economic viability.

We also urge our representatives in Washington to reverse their course, and take action to nurture traditional higher education, instead of taking steps to undermine it. Congress can start by reordering the priorities in the president's proposed budget relating to higher education.

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