



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Mark Grisanti

Summit on UB2020 scheduled

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ALBANY - A summit Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo proposed to consider a stalled effort by the University at Buffalo for its UB2020 plan will be held during the first week of May at the state Capitol.

Sen. Mark Grisanti said the governor called him this morning, asking him to gather names of people from Western New York -- including university and union officials -- to attend the gathering. The panel also will include including Assemblywoman Deborah Glick, a Manhattan Democrat who has opposed the UB2020 plan.

Officials from SUNY at Stony Brook, which is interested in piggybacking onto the UB plan, may also be on the panel, said Grisanti, a Buffalo Republican.

"It's a positive sign," Grisanti said.

Word of the summit came as Glick, an influential lawmaker, expressed concerns about the UB2020 plan in a memo to her Assembly colleagues.

Cuomo has indicated his support for the UB2020 plan, which envisions regular tuition hikes, easier paths to partnership deals with private companies and a major expansion of the campus into downtown Buffalo.

A top administration official earlier this week said there is a concern about permitting SUNY schools to set different tuition levels, as UB has proposed.

"We don't have to make sweeping education policy to make UB2020 a reality," said the Cuomo official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. The official said expanding the UB2020 plan to other campuses "unnecessarily complicates" the UB effort.

"You have such good will and positive spirit about UB2020. How do you dash those hopes? How? I haven't seen this much excitement in Western New York in years," the administration official said of UB2020.

Grisanti last year vowed not to vote for a state budget unless the UB2020 plan was included. Last week, as a freshman Republican, the Buffalo lawmaker gave his votes to the budget's passage. He said he amended his earlier threat because Cuomo had given serious indications that the UB2020 issue would be resolved before lawmakers end their 2011 session in June.

The Senate has already approved the UB2020 bill, but it has opposition in the Assembly.

Glick, the Assembly higher education committee chairwoman, wrote of her concerns about the plan in a letter this week to her Assembly Democratic colleagues, a copy of which was obtained by The Buffalo News.

Glick called the UB tuition hike, which could be as much as \$750 per year, "aggressive," and said the Senate bill does not provide "a clear explanation" how students from families with incomes under \$60,000 would not be affected by the tuition hikes.

The lawmaker, in her "All Colleagues" letter sent Monday, said UB's development expansion effort has ranged from \$500 million to \$5 billion.

"Why a fully independent operation of the Buffalo campus is required for this to take place has never been fully explained, nor is it clear if the tuition increases are in any way linked to the downtown development proposal or how revenues from land leases and/or public-private partnerships would be distributed," Glick wrote.

The lawmaker also raised concerns that the development plans would not have to go through existing legislative oversight -- as has been done with other major UB and University at Albany public-private partnership deals. She said legislative oversight "is appropriate" considering state assets are involved and foundations that run such endeavors are private entities.

Glick also raised issues with a new SUNY push for a "rational" tuition policy for all its 64 campuses, which would provide for annual tuition hikes -- the specific levels have not been proposed by SUNY -- over the next five years. SUNY wants to be able to keep the tuition proceeds to improve campus programs instead of turning over most of the money, as is now the practice, to the state's general fund.

Dean Skelos, majority leader of the Republican state Senate, is scheduled to be in Buffalo Thursday and will meet with UB leaders about UB2020.