



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie Legislation: A President for Every Suny College

PATTY RITCHIE September 7, 2011

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Bipartisan Bill Seeks to Protect Canton, Other Ag Schools from ‘Shared Leader’ Plan

State Senator Patty Ritchie today announced that she’s introduced legislation to require a President for every State University college, a measure that would undo SUNY’s plan to merge the top leaders at six colleges across the state, including the only public colleges that focus on agriculture.

Senator Ritchie met with top SUNY officials in Albany Tuesday and told them of her plans to introduce the bill, which is being prompted by SUNY’s decision to merge the leadership of the colleges in Canton and Potsdam, Morrisville and Utica, and Delhi and Cobleskill, a move that will leave the state’s three agriculture colleges without their own leaders.

“These colleges are critical not only to their local communities, but also in helping to prepare students to lead the future of our state’s number one industry,” said Senator Ritchie, who is the chair of the Senate’s Agriculture Committee.

“Our SUNY campuses each are unique, and they’ve been successful thanks to strong, dynamic, independent leadership. But that success is threatened by this plan which would combine colleges with little in common in terms of their mission, history and character.

“While I support the goal of maximizing the use of taxpayer and tuition dollars, and finding ways to share services and lower costs, combining the leadership of two colleges with vastly different missions and character goes a step too far,” Senator Ritchie said.

Senator Ritchie said she has already secured bipartisan support for her bill in the Senate, and that Assemblyman Bill Magee, a senior member of the Assembly’s Majority caucus who also serves as chair of that house’s agriculture committee, has also agreed to introduce the bill.

In a sponsor’s memo filed with the bill, Senator Ritchie explained the role of the college president, and why a shared leader would shortchange both colleges.

“The role of a college president is multi-faceted, and crucial to the success of any institution of higher learning,” Senator Ritchie said. “The president is the public face of a college campus, serving as chief marketer, advocate and a key to private fundraising that can enhance a college’s ability to achieve its mission, and a leading figure in the local community. A successful college—both public and private—is often marked by a chief executive who is passionate about his or her school’s mission and curriculum, and devotes a significant amount of time and energy to becoming personally familiar with the campus’ student body, as well as with leaders and individuals in the surrounding community.”

Senator Ritchie's bill also gives broad new power to the colleges' advisory councils, giving them authority to approve or reject the chancellor's choice to lead a school.