



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

## SUNY Students Unfairly Targeted

JAMES L. SEWARD February 5, 2009

I am proud to represent several State University of New York (SUNY) schools and public community colleges throughout the 51st district. The campuses have grown over the years and are considered among the finest educational institutions in America. Students leave these schools with a first-class education, extraordinary job skills, and a keen perspective on life.

SUNY schools also help support the local economy in so many ways. In many cases the campuses are the community's top employer, providing thousands with quality, good paying jobs. Campus employees and students also help support local commerce. Restaurants, book stores and clothing outlets are just some of the businesses that survive on the SUNY dollar.

Many students who attend SUNY schools are the first in their families to receive college educations. Quite often these students are working full or part time jobs to afford tuition, supplies, and other costs. Many are receiving financial assistance and the vast majority has taken out loans they will be paying off for years to come.

I have worked to keep a SUNY education affordable and I will continue to fight unfair attacks on our students. That's why I voted against the governor's ill-conceived deficit reduction plan (DRP) for fiscal year 2008-09 that passed the senate on February 3rd.

Following a recent \$310 tuition increase approved by the SUNY Board of Trustees for the 2009 spring semester, resident undergraduate tuition rates have now risen to \$4,660 per year. This increase hits middle-class families who are working harder than ever to pay for college.

Adding insult to injury, the funds generated by the tuition hike will provide almost no direct benefit to the students paying the tab. Instead, the governor and senate Democrats have stolen the tuition dollars to pay for expenses unrelated to higher education. Under the Democrat scheme, SUNY would only be allowed to retain \$7.6 million or 10 percent of the tuition revenue, while 90 percent or \$68.5 million would be dumped in the state's general fund to pay day to day state expenses.

Without the ability to retain revenues from the tuition increases, SUNY campuses will be forced to further reduce services to students, limit enrollment for incoming students, increase class sizes, reduce course sections critical to the completion of a student's degree and even reduce faculty and other support staff.

This isn't the first time in recent months that SUNY has been targeted for budget cuts. State support to SUNY in 2008-09 was already cut by \$146 million prior to the governor's latest action.

If you are graduating this spring, congratulations. If you will be back on a SUNY campus in the fall of 2009 get ready to dig even deeper because the resident undergraduate tuition rate will be going up another \$310, hiking the annual tuition rate to \$4,970. Albany politicians are already planning on raiding SUNY again.

If tuition increases are going to be imposed on SUNY students the very least we can do is ensure that we are providing a stronger foundation for education. Pilfering tuition dollars to

make up for other shortfalls should not be tolerated. The deficit reduction plan fails to address the critical issue of affordability and access in higher education.

Education costs are rising, and this is something that needs to be addressed. We increased the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and must keep the promise of college affordability. The senate also passed a bill that would create the “I Live New York” student loan program to provide low interest loans to New York State residents who enroll full-time at a college or university in New York State.

We are dealing with tough economic issues here in New York and it is no time to derail one of our greatest success stories. Charging students more, while providing less, will only weaken one of our state’s greatest selling points, and cause more young people to seek their future elsewhere.

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