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EDITORIALS

A lot rides on UB

State deficits could force cuts, but Albany must weigh its investments

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This could hurt. New York's economic contraction is squeezing the University at Buffalo in ways that could affect not only the institution and its students, but all of Western New York. It's up to state and university officials to ensure that only necessary cuts are made and that plans to turn UB into an economic development tool are not torpedoed in the state's efforts to cope with Albany's downturn in revenues.

That the state is undergoing financial stress is beyond dispute. The declining stock market has depressed paychecks on Wall Street. With the New York City financial sector delivering 20 percent of annual state revenues, that decline has put the state in an economic vise, with projections of a \$6.4 billion budget deficit next year and deeper ones thereafter.

Facing numbers like that, it's clear that the state has to find a way to balance its books, and only two ways exist: spend less or find more money. In an overtaxed, over-indebted state such as this, the former solution is the responsible place to start — and given that health and education are where most of the state's money goes, that's where many reductions have to occur.

That's the fact; clearly, the state university system, including UB, cannot be held exempt from helping the state find its way out of this financial thicket (even if the state wandered into it with its eyes wide open).

But that doesn't mean the state can simply slash and burn its way out of trouble. There are decisions to be made. Where — geographically and programatically — should cuts be made? Gov. David A. Paterson's administrative order for 7 percent cuts by every state agency might be sound mathematically, but not strategically. If spending at one university will produce a greater return for the state than another, or if its surrounding regional economy is especially weak — both factors are true here — then some rethinking is in order.

UB 20/20 is a forward-looking program of investment in the SUNY system's premier research center. It will bring national attention and economic development to this region. That growth plan was worth investing in last year and it remains worth investing in now — much more so, for example, than spending a lot of state money on current proposals to open even more unneeded law schools at other state university campuses.

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If New York has to put the squeeze on education in general, and UB in particular, it needs first to consider how much it actually needs and how to do that in a way that is as fair as possible — while also taking account that obvious fact that some investments are more urgent than others.

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