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EDITORIALS

Help the university

State push for higher education should match UB's expansion plans

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As Gov. Eliot L. Spitzer prepares to deliver the second budget of his administration, the question of what he will do regarding higher education is increasingly prominent. Many opportunities are possible, but one that should be at the top of his list is to help the University at Buffalo achieve the ambitious expansion goals it has set.

Western New York's economic hopes are bound to UB's success as an educational and research institution, especially as its medical school becomes more closely associated with the Buffalo Niagara Medical Corridor near Buffalo General Hospital. But UB's plans are tied to the vision and funding that comes from Albany.

Some hopeful clues about the governor's plans may be hidden in plain sight in last week's report by the State Commission on Higher Education, appointed by Spitzer to point the SUNY system in a direction that makes it more competitive with other states. Among the report's recommendations are regular, predictable tuition increases and the authority for campuses to set their own tuition levels. It also calls for such crucial actions as:

- Hiring at least 2,000 full-time faculty in the coming five years.
- Recruiting 250 top scholars in the same period.
- Creating "global science excellence clusters" that would collaborate with local industry on developing business in the science and technology fields.

These kinds of goals fit well with UB President John Simpson's plans to expand the university by 10,000 students and 750 faculty over 13 years. In commenting on the report, which Simpson helped

produce as a member of the state commission, he observed in particular a need for the state to support innovation and research within the SUNY system.

As the largest of SUNY's 64 campuses and one of the few prominent research centers, UB would benefit greatly from a renewed focus on research. Indeed, that is key to any effort to put SUNY on a competitive level with other state universities and university systems.

Spitzer's plans soon will be made public. Within the next month, New Yorkers will have the chance to hear his State of the State address and an unprecedented State of Upstate speech (to be delivered in Buffalo), and to review his budget plan for 2008-09. Expectations are high that his proposals for UB will be significant and far-reaching.

That's got to be the goal, if the governor is going to make good on his pledge to revive the upstate economy. Many pieces have to fall into place of that to happen, but bolstering the state's university system, and UB in particular, is prominent among them.

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