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State lawmakers should give SUNY trustees power to set tuition hikes

SUNY trustees should get control over tuition.

If Gov. David Paterson's higher education tuition proposals get legislative approval, the SUNY system would gain some freedom from the politics in Albany.

Lawmakers should go along. Paterson is proposing that SUNY and CUNY trustees be given the power to set tuition within mandated perimeters, with the increases going directly to higher education. Currently, setting increases is the domain of the Legislature, and the money goes directly into the state's general fund.

When fiscal times are good, there is no tuition increase, but when a recession hits, traditionally lawmakers raise tuition double digits, when families are already struggling financially. Some experts call that "tuition roulette."

Paterson's proposal would remove the tuition argument from the state budget process. His budget proposal calls for cutting \$212 million to higher education.

Given that, Toby Ann Stavisky, chairwoman of the Senate Higher Education committee, told this page that she is sure the legislature will need to raise tuition this year.

Paterson also wants to decrease Tuition Assistance Program monies to students as part of closing the \$7.4 billion budget deficit. If that happens, state-run schools should ramp up helping students find other forms of financial aid, especially students in the lower socio-economic classes.

Keeping tuition affordable in this state should remain a high priority.

Another important part of Paterson's proposal is letting SUNY and CUNY charge different amounts of tuition at the various schools. This makes sense; currently, colleges with programs that are less expensive to provide are subsidizing programs that cost more due to equipment or technology.

It also would allow less-in-demand colleges to charge lower tuition.

Area college leaders are enthusiastic about these reforms; lawmakers should enact them.