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## THE BUFFALO NEWS

### FOCUS: STATE OF THE STATE

## Spitzer says state will back UB plan to grow by 40 percent

*Governor says helping university's downtown growth will provide vital boost to Buffalo's wealth and esteem*

By Jay Rey

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Gov. Eliot L. Spitzer on Wednesday endorsed the ambitious plans for a bigger, better University at Buffalo, which will be made a focal point in the state's game plan for resuscitating Western New York's economy.

While the governor gave no indication how much money the state would be willing to put up for UB 2020 — the university's plan to grow by 40 percent over the next 12 years — Spitzer opened the door for a new medical campus that would bring thousands from UB downtown.

“Over 7,000 students, faculty and staff will work and study on a new downtown campus for medicine and health sciences,” Spitzer said during his State of the State address Wednesday in Albany. “UB will become an economic engine for Buffalo and a flagship institution for a world-class public university system.”

UB President John B. Simpson — who continues to meet with Spitzer's staff about the school's long-range plan — was thrilled by Wednesday's public show of support from the governor.

“This investment can bring a major transformation,” Simpson said, “not only at UB, but more broadly, our community.”

UB's vision for downtown is to build upon the medical and scientific talent along the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and its Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics and Life Sciences.

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Exactly what UB wants to do there, though, is still uncertain. That should become more clear in the coming months, as a university-wide master plan begins to take shape.

But there are a number of scenarios for the downtown campus, UB officials said, including moving programs from the South Campus on Main Street, such as nursing, public health or the School of Medicine.

Whatever happens would mean acquiring more property for new classroom, research and office space, as well as housing — all of which would be costly.

UB already has been assembling pieces of the puzzle along the medical corridor, picking up the M. Wile building last year to relocate community outreach programs and targeting an adjacent parking lot for a new \$30 million building for the school's Educational Opportunity Center.

“What we don't know,” Simpson said Wednesday, “is how [the governor's support] translates into dollars.” Simpson is realistic, too.

While Spitzer's vote of confidence in the university is critical, UB officials need to continue to lobby for support from state legislators.

“At the end of the day, they determine what happens with the governor's budget,” Simpson said.

Since Simpson came to UB in 2004, he has set out to grow the university into a top-tier public research university, with plans to add 10,000 more students and some 2,300 faculty and staff, to fit the mold of larger schools, such as UCLA.

Simpson has been telling anyone who will listen that growing UB — now the largest in the State University of New York with 28,000 students — into a premier public research institute is a key to reviving Western New York's economy.

More students bring in more dollars.

More faculty means more well-paid taxpayers.

More research leads to hightech spin-off companies in a region falling behind in a global economy that thrives on knowledge and innovation.

Now, Simpson has the attention of arguably his most powerful supporter — the governor.

“We will move forward on the University at Buffalo's ‘2020’ expansion as a centerpiece of our strategy to reinvigorate the economy of Western New York,” Spitzer said.

The governor, in fact, talked about strengthening the economy statewide by turning SUNY into one of the best public systems in the nation.

Spitzer also wants to turn Stony Brook University, at the other end of the state, into another of the state's flagship schools.

How to pay for all this is the question, particularly since the state is looking at a \$4.3 billion deficit.

Overall, UB officials were encouraged by Wednesday's news.

Western New York has become accustomed to entities devising plans, then having them collect dust on a shelf somewhere, Simpson said.

But, he said, UB has a plan, it's being implemented, and now it has support from the state's top official.

"We have a lot of work to do," Simpson said, "and this is just the beginning."

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