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**This Fall**

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## **Albany's Latest Excuse to Shirk Its Duty**

New York's state budget is now officially more than 15 weeks late. The main reason for the latest delay is that Gov. David Paterson and several Democratic senators whose votes are crucial want to give state universities more freedom to run their own campuses. New York's state universities badly need improvement, but the proposals on the table are not good enough and this is not the right time to do it.

This emotional and complex debate should not be attached to the mess of a state budget.

New York's state university system suffers under the control of one of the worst legislatures in the country. The lawmakers in Albany have their thumb on everything from the cost of tuition to the purchase of school pianos, and they handle the job badly.

Tuition can spike in bad economic times when students can least afford it. In 2008, lawmakers allowed an increase, then took 80 percent of it back for general state operating funds. Students ended up working nights to pay for Albany's pork.

Mr. Paterson has proposed allowing all state universities more control over their operations — an idea rejected noisily by the Assembly. Now, Democrats in the State Senate have come up with a flawed compromise. They have proposed that as many as four universities in the system be allowed to break out on their own, a kind of pilot program for campuses in Stony Brook, Buffalo, Albany and Binghamton.

But the plan does not offer assurances of enough scholarship money for poorer students. And there is not a firm enough promise that lawmakers will continue to support the state universities, without cutting funds whenever tuition goes up.

Giving New York's university system a few world-class campuses is a lofty idea. It just doesn't belong in a hastily drawn compromise as part of a very late budget. The Legislature should drop the idea and finish the budget.

