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UB President John B. Simpson said during a news conference Monday that UB's 2020 vision is in "serious jeopardy."

John Hickey / Buffalo News file photo

State lawmakers urged to approve local control of SUNY schools

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NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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This region will lose out on extensive economic benefits if the State Legislature rejects a plan giving State University of New York campuses more control over their own operations, the University at Buffalo's president warned Monday.

UB can't go forward with its ambitious UB 2020 blueprint for growth without the regulatory changes included in the SUNY legislation, which faces an uncertain future in the Assembly.

And a proposed \$16.5 million cut in state funding to UB could lead to program cuts and layoffs of faculty and staff, UB President John B. Simpson said Monday.

"If you want to have the kind of growth that we described in putting together the 2020 vision ... we need a predictable and a stable financial base. We don't have that right now," Simpson said in an interview following his news conference at UB's Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics and Life Sciences.

A key piece of the SUNY legislation would allow schools to set their own tuition rates and to keep any additional tuition revenue on their campuses.

The extra money would help pay for UB 2020, a plan that would add 10,000 students, directly create 6,700 jobs and double the school's economic impact to \$3.6 billion, officials contend.

The plan also would create 20,000 construction jobs and see significant expansion of UB's physical plant, including a move of its Medical School to the university's downtown campus.

UB had pushed a package of reforms in Albany that would give the school more flexibility to grow on its own without having to rely on additional aid from the state.

The measure was pushed by lawmakers from Western New York. But critics feared that the proposed tuition flexibility could make UB too expensive for lower-income students and they said it could give UB officials too much power with too little regulatory oversight.

The legislation passed the State Senate but it never reached the floor of the Assembly. This year, Gov. David A. Paterson embraced the legislation and proposed expanding it to cover all SUNY campuses.

The Senate last week included the SUNY regulatory changes in its non-binding budget resolution, but the Assembly did not include them in its resolution, Simpson noted Monday.

Another concern for university officials is the proposed \$16.5 million cut to UB, part of the governor's attempt to deal with the state's financial crisis.

UB currently receives \$181 million from the state as part of its \$350 million total operating budget, according to university data.

"We have done pretty much all the clever things that we can do," Simpson said in the interview. "It's going to be a very difficult situation, and I wouldn't be surprised if there were layoffs and major program changes."

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