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U. at Buffalo presents its expansion, tuition plan

ALBANY, N.Y. — The state University at Buffalo's major plan to expand, reinvigorate the western New York economy and raise tuition 8 percent to help pay for it all gained support and some cautions on Tuesday.

"This is the biggest sense of hope in Buffalo I have seen in a long time," said Gov. Andrew Cuomo. He and U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer said they would do all they could to help the project gain the legislative and funding approval needed.

The \$375 million plan is the first to be unveiled for one of the State University of New York university centers that also include Albany, Stony Brook and Binghamton. While Buffalo's plan would expand and improve its medical school, the other university centers are expected to submit proposals by December that exploit their strongest programs.

They are expected to compete for up to \$35 million each in state funding and legislative approval to raise tuition to push to the top academic levels in the nation while spurring regional economic growth.

University at Buffalo officials want to move and expand a 60-year-old medical school building as well as increase tuition 8 percent, or \$200 per semester. That would set the highest tuition in the 64-campus system if a proposed 5-percent general increase is approved next year.

SUNY tuition is about \$5,000 a year now, or about \$15,000 in total costs including room, board and fees.

"Of course I'm concerned," said Assembly Higher Education Committee Chairwoman Deborah Glick, a Manhattan Democrat. She said she wants to see details of the tuition proposal and the financial aid component after broad points were presented in slides. "The PowerPoint looked lovely, but you always have to look at the hard numbers."

Glick and the Assembly have been concerned about SUNY's proposal for a "rational" tuition policy of regular increases to try to avoid widespread spikes in hard fiscal times. The concept would also require most or all of the tuition increase to go to the colleges, rather than the state general fund as it has in the past to balance state budgets.

"The tuition increase doesn't bother us as much as it has to go to the university to do the things we're talking about," said Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver.

"The direct message is that rational tuition is at the base of all of this, everything builds on this," said SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher. "And rational tuition really helps all of our campuses."

The University at Buffalo proposal includes:

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— Moving the medical center six miles to downtown Buffalo.

— Creating 3,000 full-time jobs.

— A financial aid program that would eliminate the tuition increase for families making up to \$40,000 a year with incremental increases up to a family making \$75,000 a year, which would pay \$100 more per semester.

