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Tuition plan in play for SUNY

Plan to give SUNY Buffalo power to set tuition could eventually benefit UAlbany

By SCOTT WALDMAN Staff writer

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The University at Buffalo could be the first in the state university system to be granted the ability to set its own tuition. UAlbany officials hope to one day have the same option.

On Tuesday, a panel of school officials, politicians and western New York business leaders presented a \$375 million plan in Albany

that would establish a new medical complex in downtown Buffalo, create thousands of new jobs there and raise tuition for the next five years. The school is also seeking an 8 percent annual tuition hike.

The group presented the plan to Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#), Assembly Speaker [Sheldon Silver](#) and Senate Majority Leader [Dean Skelos](#). The 30-minute presentation at the Capitol generated plenty of excitement about a strengthened university as well as an economic engine that could help turn around the dwindling fortunes of a city that has been losing population and jobs for decades.

About 3,000 new full-time jobs would be created by the plan, according to the school.

There is, however, one significant roadblock remaining: the state Assembly. After the presentation, Silver said he was still concerned with the tuition increase -- even though the revised plan would put 25 percent of the proceeds from the increase toward financial aid -- because it could mean a higher education is out of reach for some families.

"I don't want see a tax on students to balance the state budget," he said.

The Buffalo proposal, which officials view as the first phase of the UB2020 plan, could be the first step toward allowing the four SUNY research centers to break away from the rest of the 64-school system with regard to setting their own tuition rates. The plan also seeks to expand the school's ability to form private-public partnerships. The effort would ultimately become a \$655 million investment in Buffalo's downtown medical campus because it would be boosted by Kaleida Health, a hospital system.

Cuomo told the group he would do everything possible to make the plan become reality because of its economic promise for western New York. He said he was "cautiously optimistic" that something would happen before the end of the legislative session next month.

Proponents of the plan hope it will use the health care industry to boost Buffalo, much as other Rust Belt cities, including Cleveland and Pittsburgh, have done.

University at Albany officials and the other research centers in Binghamton and Stony Brook were concerned that they were being relegated to second-tier status when news of the UB2020 summit at the Capitol emerged. That prompted Cuomo to create a revised plan called NYSUNY 2020 that will award an initial \$35 million grant to each of the four university centers to help turn their campuses into regional job engines. The \$140 million in initial state funding is "seed money," and the blueprint relies heavily on attracting private investors. The other schools are expected to pitch their plans by the end of the year and all will likely include tuition increases.

UAlbany's pitch also will likely include a proposal to develop its Biomedical and Information Innovation Research Plaza, and revitalize the Alumni Quad/Midtown area located east of the main campus where a significant number of students live.

"We support NYSUNY 2020 for the four university centers," President [George Philip](#) said in a prepared statement. "We are confident we will have the opportunity to present our plan and demonstrate the power of UAlbany to drive economic growth and revitalize the community."

The tuition increase would break down to about \$200 per semester for each student and could sunset after five years. The financial aid program would eliminate or reduce tuition increases for families with annual incomes under \$75,000. SUNY Chancellor [Nancy Zimpher](#) has called for a rational tuition plan that would see annual increases across the system. The Buffalo proposal adds another three percent on top of the 5 percent proposed elsewhere.

The Buffalo plan depends heavily on the tuition increase. About \$100 million of the redevelopment would be raised from tuition, and would be boosted by \$50 million in gifts to the medical school, \$100 million from the university and \$50 million from partnership with private companies.

Just as a discussion on the UAlbany proposal last month drew a crowd of local business leaders who enthusiastically supported it, the Buffalo plan is of particular importance to economic development in the western part of the state. Enhanced university centers boost the entire region, said [Robert Brady](#), chairman of [Moog Inc.](#), a precision product maker. He said local business leaders have seen this as a priority for the last three years.

"It's a long-term economic vision for Western New York," he said. "It's our best hope for real economic recovery."

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Jobs by the numbers

What the first phase of the UB2020 proposal will create:

1,325 new jobs at the University at Buffalo, including 410 faculty and 915 support staff

1,740 new jobs from the school's research growth

200 jobs in 10 startup firms

1,600 jobs to build new medical school



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