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## WBEN NewsRadio 930 : Buffalo & Niagara Falls, NY

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Posted: Wednesday, 02 March 2011 9:21PM

### State Senate Passes UB 2020

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Albany, NY (WBEN) -- Members of the New York State Senate voted, 55-1, in favor of passing a revised version of the UB 2020 bill in session Wednesday.

"UB 2020 took a tremendous, positive step forward today," Senator Tim Kennedy told WBEN Wednesday evening. "Democrats and Republicans from across New York State, upstate and downstate, came together and overwhelmingly passed UB 2020."

That's a far cry from less than a year ago, when the UB 2020 proposal was included in the broader "SUNY Empowerment" bill. Senators rejected the earlier bill, over a variety of concerns.

However, "...pieces of the legislation that, in the past, have been contentious, have absolutely been addressed," Kennedy said.

The bill would give UB the opportunity to create its own tuition policy, independent of the tuition rates set for the SUNY and CUNY systems by Albany. UB could then use that tuition revenue to pursue the UB 2020 plan for academic excellence, which calls for the expansion and enhancement of many of the university's academic programs, as well as construction of new facilities.

The bill also proposes certain reforms to state law that would make it easier for the university to move forward with the UB 2020 plan.

The idea of giving UB, or any public college or university, the power to set its own tuition rates was one provision that had concerned some senators in the past. They worried that doing so would lead to tuition hikes that would put public education - which, for many students, is the only affordable means of attaining a college degree - out of reach for those from lower-income families.

The revised "UB 2020 Flexibility and Economic Growth Act" passed Wednesday addresses that concern by requiring UB to freeze current tuition rates for students from families earning less than \$60,000 annually.

Lawmakers hail the UB 2020 project as one that will have a positive impact on all of Western New York, particularly downtown Buffalo, by creating thousands of jobs in the construction and higher education industries.

"[The bill] allows for public-private partnerships, and reduce regulations. And ultimately, it gives UB more local control and local decision-making power," Senator Patrick Gallivan explained.

Gallivan said that allowing UB to forge more partnerships with private-sector companies and research facilities will be the driving force for job growth. It's expected that a significant portion of those new jobs and research opportunities will occur on the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus.

The entire Democratic caucus of the State Senate has sent a letter to State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, urging Assemblymembers to pass the UB 2020 bill as quickly as possible. If they do, it will then be delivered to Governor Cuomo for his approval.

Gallivan expressed optimism, particularly about Cuomo's support for UB 2020. He noted that Cuomo often talked about the importance of the project during his campaign last year.

"It's a significant piece of legislation, [and it passed] with bipartisan support. I'm hoping that it signals a new day in Albany, where we can work together for the good of all of our citizens."

The bill only grants new autonomies to UB, but Gallivan said Senate leadership ultimately hopes to pass similar legislation for other schools in the SUNY and CUNY systems.

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