

Op-Ed Piece for College Newspapers

CUNY Day of Action March 26th

Students, staff, and faculty unite

On March 26th on every campus of CUNY, students, faculty and staff are coming together to oppose Governor Pataki's attacks on CUNY. *CUNY Day of Action* was initiated by the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the union that represents 20,000 faculty and professional staff at CUNY; NYPIRG, Student Government, student clubs, and individual students are joining with the PSC to make our voices heard together.

Here's what's at stake

Governor Pataki's executive budget proposals call for the following measures:

- tuition hike of \$900-\$1200 per student per year
- reduction of Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) by 22% plus restructuring of the program
- total cuts of \$105 million to CUNY's budget: 13.2% total cuts; 12.3% cut for senior colleges, 17.7% cut for community colleges
- \$1.06 million reduction in funding for new faculty
- \$7.3 million reduction in SEEK financial aid
- \$6.6 million reduction in Liberty scholarships and \$5.5 million reduction of Vallone Scholarships

What's at stake is CUNY as we know it. Imagine cuts in all our programs, our ability to offer sufficient courses to students, our students' ability to pay for dramatically increased tuition, increased hours of student employment that will detract from their studies, few if any new faculty members to replenish the ranks of full time instructional staff.

What's the historical context?

This proposed budget would represent a decrease in New York State funding for CUNY of over a half billion in real dollars (adjusted for inflation) since 1990. Moreover, students' contribution to CUNY's costs will have more than doubled to 49% of total costs. According to the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education's *Measuring Up: The State by State Report Card for Higher Education*, New York State received an *F* for affordability compared to California's *A*, Illinois's *B*, New Jersey's *C*.

In less than 3 decades, CUNY has lost almost half of its full-time faculty while student enrollment since 1980 has increased. The proposed cut for new faculty lines will increase the downward trend. This leaves students with fewer full-time faculty to advise and teach them, to write recommendations and to have on-going mentoring relationships. It puts CUNY behind in recruiting the newest scholars. It also will increase faculty responsibility for student advisement, curriculum, and scholarly evaluation and governance. While almost all other states have increased their budgets for public higher

education, New York State has *decreased* funding for public higher education over the last decade by 5%- *and that's not counting the new proposed cuts!*

Pataki the “education governor”

While Pataki’s proposed budget calls for overall spending cuts to the state budget of 2.9%, it calls for cutting K-12 education by 5.5% and higher education by 11.1%. The cut to higher education is almost 4 times greater than the overall proposed spending decline. It’s hard not to conclude that our governor has it out for CUNY.

Governor Pataki got re-elected as “the education governor”; now we are asked to live with these massive cuts to education. Pataki claims that he didn’t realize that the state would have such a shortfall. While New York State enjoyed a budget surplus during the 1990’s, CUNY got very little; in fact we experienced significant and persistent cuts. Instead of saving these surpluses, Pataki squandered them with big tax cuts to the wealthy. Now that the economy is failing no one is shocked to learn that there is no surplus to cushion our economic fall. Yet Pataki and his friends in Washington, DC persist in tax cuts to the wealthy as an “economic fillip” while increasing real taxes for those of us with salaries under \$100,000—tuition increases, property tax increases, transit increases.

The National and International Scene

No doubt the “War on Terrorism” and the impending war on Iraq (especially if the US goes in without UN approval) will cost billions of dollars, dollars that are sorely needed at home. While we all want to be safe from terrorism, who among us believes that we will be safer with an active war in Iraq? Don’t we all fear that a war will increase the likelihood of attacks on the US and NYC? And where is the money for the war on terrorism and the promised \$20 billion in aid to NYC for recovery from September 11th? So many of our domestic needs—for education kindergarten through post graduate school, for health care and housing, for transportation and the elderly, for the environment—will go up in smoke as we pursue the war in Iraq. Tax breaks for the rich coupled with billions for a war in Iraq (and perhaps beyond) spell a diminished life for average Americans, not to mention what will happen to the average Iraqi. Whatever your position on the morality or strategic value of a war on Iraq, we all know what it will do to our economic stability and our social services. Just ask Wall Street.

What Can We Do?

First and foremost we must arm ourselves with knowledge. We need to learn more about the proposed New York State budget for CUNY and how it will affect us. We need to come together as a community. We need to act on our own beliefs and needs and make our voices heard. At **CUNY Day of Action**, students, faculty and staff will have the opportunity to share ideas, to email and fax legislators, to send post cards to our governor, to sign petitions, to sign up for lobbying and upcoming demonstrations. We can share ideas for other actions in the future. We must come together as a community and act in our shared interests. We are in this together and together we must learn and act in order to keep CUNY vibrant and affordable.

Please come to CUNY Day of Action, Wednesday, March 26th, 12-2 PM at Gershwin Theater. Speak out, listen, let your elected representatives know what you think. We cannot let our dreams be crushed.