

Submitted Testimony

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE JANUARY 24 JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING ON THE 2017-2018 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL BY DR. EDWARD SCHNEIER, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, COLUMBIA-GREENE COMMUNITY COLLEGE.

Note: The following presentation does not necessarily reflect the views of either the College or its Board of Trustees.

Lost behind the glitter of Governor Cuomo's call for free tuition, his actual budget extends a decade-long decline in the state's share of funding for higher education. Ten years ago, when I joined the Board of Trustees of Columbia-Greene Community College, the College received \$2675 per student in state aid; the Governor's budget proposes \$2697 for next year. Our costs per student, meanwhile, despite minimal salary increases and a growing reliance on cheap part-time faculty, have increased by more than forty percent.

By raising tuition, exhausting reserves, and increasing local taxes, almost all of the state's community colleges have so far avoided significant programmatic cuts. In our case, and, I suspect, with most of our community colleges, what has happened is that the state has simply passed the buck to local taxpayers. As base aid increases by \$2.20 a year, local funding has increased by more than \$100 a year, and tuition by \$50. Yet despite these efforts the cumulative effects of declining enrollments and state aid have forced us to exhaust our reserves, eliminate faculty positions and postpone curriculum changes. Every year, students pay more to get less, and they are forced, increasingly, to postpone or modify their academic plans. Since 2010 the percentage of part-time students at Columbia-Greene has come to exceed full-time, and our master plan predicts that the part-time percentage will increase to 67% in 2019. (Not incidentally, this means that two-thirds of our students will be ineligible for the state's tuition assistance program.)

The emphasis in recent budgets has been on job creation. Ironically, however, many of the jobs that have become available have gone overseas or to imported workers. Sixty minutes recently reported that of the million advanced manufacturing jobs created since the recession, 350,000 have gone unfilled because there are no trained workers to take them. The factory jobs of today no longer involve unskilled laborers performing repetitive, easily learned tasks. Today's factory workers run the robots that do the lifting, grinding, joining and painting. They are hired less for their ability to lift and grind than for their competence with computers, charts and manuals. Some of these jobs require four-year degrees in engineering, computer science and chemistry, and some will prefer to train their own employees; but a growing number will look to community colleges to supply literate, computer-savvy workers able to combine specific skills with a demonstrated capacity for learning. Economists estimate that more than 90% of today's manufacturing jobs require more than a high school degree.

Paradoxically, the greater the widely recognized need for community colleges, the less funding they receive (a trend not confined to New York). The state's recently-created regional councils, designed to augment tax breaks and direct grants to new businesses with cooperative arrangements among educators and local business and community leaders, will have little impact in the absence of educational programs able to provide an appropriately trained labor force. The state's economic development programs

have, in fact, largely ignored the educational component. The START-UP NEW YORK program, for example, very generously subsidized businesses that located on or near the campuses of cooperating colleges; but provided not a penny of new money to those colleges. Thus we have a subsidized fish farm opening near Columbia-Greene, but absolutely no resources to hire the faculty or staff needed to develop the complementary farm-to-table food program, already in the planning stage, to make the desired connections. In theory, we should be helping to train their workers and expand their horizons; in practice, years of effective cuts in state aid have all but decimated our capacity to innovate. What new companies need, and what we need to and can provide, is a more nimble curriculum one able to respond to and anticipate changes in the job market as well as in student needs and abilities.

The combination of declining enrollments, lower base aid funds and the exhaustion of our reserves will make this a very difficult year for us, even if we raise tuition. Our inability to launch new programs or hire even a part-time person to solicit private donations (an area we have been too slow to develop) will, moreover, leave us even more vulnerable when enrollments increase (as our demographic data indicate they will in the next two to three years). As you know, SUNY's original proposal of an 11% increase in base aid was shot down by the DOB in favor a "save harmless" request that would have left last year's total state aid in place. We can avoid drastic cuts with the latter, and would have been able to provide real training opportunities for real jobs with the former; what we need is at least a two percent increase to sustain the status quo. I take no position on the Governor's "free" tuition proposal, other than to note that its convoluted methods of payment will put us in the unfortunate position of having either to pass anyone who is still breathing at the end of the semester or acting as a collection agency for flunked out deadbeats. I doubt that it will have any significant effects on our enrollments where the number of families exceeding eligibility for TAP and the Governor's first year cap of \$100,000 is very small. From our parochial perspective, the costs of this program would be far better used to increase base aid.

One final note. The line in the Executive Budget cutting a very small program of aid to campus day care centers adds budgetary insult to injury. With contributions from users, faculty, staff and trustees we have been able to run a wonderful day care program that serves roughly 30 students per day. Without it, many would go from full-time to part-time status, more would probably drop out entirely. I don't think we can get our stressed friends of the program to contribute enough to keep it afloat. I'd like to think the Governor put this in as a bargaining chip and not out of disdain for poor and working mothers. Last years rather small amount should be fully restored.

Edward Schneier is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the City College of the City University of New York and the senior author of New York Politics: A Tale of Two States.