

Albany & NYC move on CUNY increase

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

In a tough legislative environment, pressure from PSC members created momentum for measures that, if signed into law, would increase funding for CUNY, and ensure that the State covers the university's mandatory cost increases in the future.

After the legislature extended its session, the State Senate approved, by a vote of 62-1, a bipartisan "maintenance of effort" (MOE) bill that would require annual funding starting in 2016/17 for operating cost increases at CUNY and SUNY – including contractual raises for future years – a version of which earlier passed unanimously in the State Assembly. News of the Senate's action broke while PSC elected leaders from across the CUNY system were gathered at a previously scheduled Delegate Assembly meeting. "We just got a message from Albany that our MOE bill passed," PSC President Barbara Bowen announced to the assembly in the union hall. "We tried and tried to get that bill passed...and sometimes you actually do win."

Whether the bill becomes law is now up to Governor Andrew Cuomo, who will review bills sent to him throughout the summer. If enacted, the law will require future funding for the mandatory cost increases incurred in running the CUNY colleges and institutions, beginning with next year's State budget.

"[The bill] covers only future years, not retroactive pay, so we will continue our fight for the State to fund retroactive pay," said Bowen a day after the bill passed both chambers. "It is a huge step forward."

CITY STEPS UP

There was also movement at the City level, where Mayor Bill de Blasio reached agreement with the City Council on an overall budget deal. The Mayor had proposed, in his executive budget, a net increase of \$15 million for CUNY, largely for STEM expansion and for the ASAP program in the community colleges and for CUNY Prep. The final budget reportedly also includes expanded funding for the scholarship program established by the City Council. At press time, the deal awaited a Council vote.

PSC First Vice President Mike Fabricant said that the union worked hard on several fronts with key allies, including borough presidents Eric Adams and Ruben Diaz Jr., as well as the Hispanic Task Force in the Assembly, in order to get the MOE legislation passed. "We had a chorus of voices repeating the same message, 'Adequate funding is necessary for quality higher education,'" Fabricant told *Clarion*. Passing the legislation, he said, demanded a months-long effort that involved repeated meetings with lawmakers who moved from simply understanding the problem of government disinvestment in higher education to making

Lawmakers respond to PSC pressure



Assemblymember Latrice Walker meets with a group of PSC members from Medgar Evers College, including (from left) Roger Green, Eugene Pursoo, Shakia Brown, David Thompson, and Paul Washington.

the issue a priority that required action.

PSC members kept the heat on lawmakers for passage of the funding legislation, visiting with State and City legislators in their district offices, making countless phone calls to legislative offices and sending more than 6,000 letters in six days to their elected representatives.

Taking action on an issue separate from the bill that would guarantee future funding for CUNY, the union also pushed for money for retroactive pay from the State's current budget surplus.

Assemblymembers of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus signed on to a letter urging the governor and legislative leaders "to support a one-time investment of \$240 million to allow CUNY to provide salary increases to its faculty and professional staff for 2010 at the same level as the increases received by other New York State public employees." The governor and the State legislature have so far failed to deliver on that investment, but throughout the summer the union will continue to meet with lawmakers, stressing the need for adequate funding for CUNY.

CONTRACT FIGHT

Funding, however, is but one aspect of the contract fight. After union members applied strong pressure on CUNY Chancellor James Milliken, he testified at a City Hall hearing that CUNY faculty and staff have worked without a contract for "far too many years," and publicly supported "a swift and fair resolution" to collective bargaining.

"I hope we can realize that end so that CUNY can be competitive and retain and attract the faculty and staff who do so much for New York," he told City Council members in a May 29 Executive Budget Hearing. When pressed on whether he would ask for tuition increases, Chancellor Milliken said, "Given what has happened with the State budget I see very little other flexibility in our budget." The PSC maintained that tuition hikes are not the way to fund CUNY, or a PSC-CUNY contract. "There are surpluses in both the State and City budgets," said Bowen. "There is enough money to fund a fair contract for the people who make CUNY work."

Without the work we do at CUNY, New York doesn't work."

The PSC's goal this session was to bring the attention of elected officials to CUNY's need for increased public investment. The PSC's letter to legislators stated: "Without sustained and adequate public investment, CUNY cannot hire the additional faculty needed to improve its dismal full-time faculty-to-student ratio.... In the absence of a commitment by the State to meet mandatory maintenance-of-effort costs, CUNY is also unable to provide enough counselors for students or improve working conditions for the majority of its faculty – who are part-time adjunct instructors."

Inside the bill

The State legislature passed a bill (see tinyurl.com/moe-bill) that would guarantee future funding for costs at CUNY and SUNY that are deemed mandatory, including such collective bargaining costs as salary and benefit increases. Also classified as expenses covered by the guarantee are those that cover the general maintenance of facilities and other fundamental needs. If signed by Governor Andrew Cuomo, the law would begin to apply for fiscal year 2016-2017, which begins in April of next year.

BIPARTISAN EFFORT

Deborah Glick, a Manhattan Democrat and graduate of Queens College, and State Senator Kenneth LaValle, a Long Island Republican whose district includes

SUNY-Stony Brook, sponsored the maintenance-of-effort bills in their respective legislative bodies, where each chairs the chamber's higher education committee. The bill, if signed by the governor, modifies the maintenance-of-effort language in a law known as NYSUNY 2020, which sets a minimum level of annual State funding for CUNY and SUNY at no less than the previous year's allocation. When SUNY 2020 passed in 2011, it also enacted five years of tuition hikes at CUNY and SUNY; lawmakers said the increases would go toward improvements to the education system – such as the hiring of additional faculty and staff and other educational enhancements. Instead, increased tuition revenues

Radio spots produced by PSC ran some 600 times in Albany and New York City, and brought to the personal level, through the voices of CUNY graduates, what the lack of funding for a contract for CUNY faculty and staff means for students.

ON THE AIRWAVES

"CUNY changed my life. When I started college, I could hardly speak English, but I dreamt of a successful career. Today, I'm an IT expert at a Fortune 500 company," said Mirkeya Cappellan, an alumna of Hostos and Hunter College, one of five CUNY graduates featured in the spots. "I owe everything to professors like Lewis Levine and Bette Kerr." (See more on page 6.)

Members also individually met with elected officials. Shakia Brown, who works in the budget office of Medgar Evers College, was part of a PSC group who met with Assemblywoman Latrice Walker in her district, where the campus lies. Highlighting the more than 3,500 CUNY graduates and 100 PSC members and retirees who live in Walker's district, PSC members demonstrated CUNY's local impact.

LOUD AND CLEAR

"We broke it down to all the different elements [that show] why we need more funding for CUNY. We explained how it would help students, how it would help recruit and retain the best faculty and how it would help keep the great staff," said Brown. "[Walker] totally understood. She knew that investing in CUNY [means] investing in the City's future."

Brown, along with other PSC members, will continue to meet with elected officials throughout the summer. The PSC, according to Fabricant, will continue to push on all fronts in the fight for a fair contract for faculty and professional staff, and adequate funding for the CUNY system as a whole.

were diverted to stopgap measures to address problems presented by crumbling buildings and general operating costs. The current State budget leaves CUNY with \$63 million in unfunded mandatory costs.

The bill now awaits the signature of Governor Cuomo, who, throughout the summer, is expected to review bills passed by the legislature in the session is concluding as we go to press. While the MOE bill would guarantee future funding for CUNY, the union is working on a separate proposal – a one-time \$240 million investment in CUNY – that would cover retroactive salary increases. If secured per the terms of the proposal, the money would be drawn from the State's budget surplus, and would help to fund a settled contract once an agreement is reached.

If signed, future costs will be funded