

Supply state funds to build up colleges and upstate economy



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Gov. Pataki's proposed 2004-05 budget includes a landmark initiative that will create thousands of jobs and enhance the ability of New York's colleges and universities to renovate and build facilities and purchase new equipment.

The N.Y.S. Higher Education Facilities Capital Matching Grant Program would infuse \$350 million into the economy and leverage another \$1 billion in private funding over five years. These projects would create a significant economic stimulus for greater Rochester by putting some 1,000 construction laborers to work and making our educational institutions even more attractive to students nationally and globally.

Now is the time to invest in these institutions to (1) ensure that the state has the work force to compete effectively in the global competition for

jobs; and (2) to enable these colleges and universities to develop the research facilities that will create new ideas and spin off new companies and opportunities for economic growth. The extraordinarily diverse cadre of 18 public and private colleges and universities in this region should have a distinct advantage in competing for these funds.

A capital program that includes independent colleges and universities makes good economic sense. The private college sector is one of New York's largest employers. These institutions award the majority of four-year and graduate degrees, including 69 percent of the health profession, 75 percent of the engineering and 59 percent of the education degrees.

New York is now the nation's No. 1 destination for out-of-state students. In 2000, nearly 25,000 freshmen came here to attend college — more than 80 percent of them to independent campuses. Out-of-state students bring \$1.3 billion into the state's economy. If we are going to continue to attract these students, we must continue to provide first-rate facilities. New Jersey and Maryland already provide capital support for their private colleges, and other states are sure to follow.

It is also important to underscore the importance and timeliness of this program for the building and construction industry and the thousands of workers

that it represents.

A bellwether of the economy, this industry provides good-paying jobs that have a ripple effect throughout the region. While construction activity in this region has felt the impact of the soft upstate economy, a notable exception has been the activity at area colleges and universities, thanks to increasing enrollments, the generosity of individual donors, and state investments in high-tech facilities. This new program will enable additional higher education projects to go forward.

The higher education community, the regional construction industry and the labor community have joined together to make this program a reality. While each of these groups has specific elements that they would like to see included in the program, and will advocate for them, first and foremost it is important to ensure that the program is adopted this year.

New York has a postsecondary system unequalled in terms of access, choice and diversity. Enacting this new capital facilities program will enable us to keep more students in New York state and prepare the next generation for the high expectations of their future employers. □

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