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Senate hopefuls not in jet set
Both well off but not wealthy

By Rob Christensen
Staff Writer
Raleigh — Republican Sen. Richard Burr and his Democratic challenger, Elaine Marshall, are both financially well off, but neither would likely earn a second glance in a Senate that has been called "the millionaire's club."

Burr and his wife, Brooke, reported net assets of between $1.3 million and $2.1 million, according to a financial disclosure statement filed with the Secretary of the Senate office last month.

Marshall, the North Carolina secretary of state, reported assets between $817,000 and $2.1 million in her most recent report.

While both are financially more comfortable than the average North Carolinian, their wealth does not approach such multi-millionaire senators as Democrat Herb Kohl of Wisconsin ($214 million), Democrat Mark Warner of Virginia ($209 million) or Democrat John Kerry of Massachusetts ($208 million), according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a Washington-based group that tracks the influence of money in politics.

Neither Burr nor Marshall has a fortune, but their wealth gives them an advantage in their Senate race.

A rich past
North Carolina has had some very rich Senate candidates, said Tom Eamon, a political science professor at East Carolina University and the author of a forthcoming book on Tar Heel politics. "But Richard and Elaine are more typical of past campaigns," he said.

Burr's seat mate, Democratic Sen. Kay Hagan, had a net worth of between $2.8 million and $31.6 million in 2008, according to the center.

In many ways, this is the year of the uber-rich candidate - multi-millionaires and billionaires who are dropping big money in Senate and governor's races across the nation. In California, Meg Whitman, a former chief executive of eBay, spent $90 million of her own money to defeat, among others, Steve Poizner, who contributed $24 million from his own pocket in the GOP primary for governor.

Don't look for that here. Not being super rich means that neither Burr nor Marshall will be able to finance their campaigns by simply pulling out their checkbooks, although Marshall loaned her campaign $71,500 last year.

Both Burr and Marshall will have to rely on raising money from others, Eamon said. And because Burr has already raised $10 million, it means that Marshall has to seek the help of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, the professor said.

Son of a minister
Both Burr and Marshall come from middle-class backgrounds.

Burr, the son of a minister, was national sales manager for Carswell Distributing before entering politics. He served 10 years in the U.S. House and the last five years in the Senate.

Burr has consistently ranked in the bottom half of the 100 senators in personal wealth. He ranked 78th in 2005, 63rd in 2006, 65th in 2007 and 68th in 2008, according to the center.

Among Burr's major assets were a residence and rental property on Capitol Hill valued at between $500,000 and $1 million and two financial accounts valued at between $50,000 to $100,000 each.

Much of Burr's wealth was tied up in his IRA retirement account. Candidates are not required to report the value of their personal residences or their automobiles in their financial disclosure statements.

His main liability is a mortgage of between $250,000 and $500,000 with Wells Fargo that he owes on his Capitol Hill residence.

His wife, Brooke, reported earning between $90,000 and $100,000 from a Winston-Salem real estate firm.

Burr's campaign declined to discuss his finances.
OPINION
Scott Mooneyham: Pot for financial aid funding for N.C. college students boiling down
Tuesday, July 27, 2010

College students and their parents were given a little sugar with the recent bad medicine of substantial tuition increases at many University of North Carolina campuses. University officials have been quick to point out that additional financial aid will come with the latest tuition hikes, which will reach $750 at some schools. Here's what they aren't saying: Enjoy the financial aid now because one of the big pots of money used to pay for it is slowly draining away.

The state’s escheats, or unclaimed property fund, is required by the state constitution to go to one purpose and one purpose only — paying college tuition for needy students.

In recent years, the fund has grown rapidly as state treasurers have become more aggressive collecting the money from the banks, the insurers and the retailers where it accumulates. In 2008, $680 million in unclaimed money and property had come to the state, with just $28.3 million being reclaimed that year by the rightful owners, according to the state treasurer’s annual report. In the past, the bulk of the money that state legislators tapped for need-based scholarships and tuition grants came from the interest earned on the fund. But beginning in 2008, legislators began grabbing big chunks of the principal to pay for financial aid.

That year, the state paid out more money than it took in. Unclaimed money coming to the state totaled $111.9 million; the state paid out $100.7 million in principal and $27.4 million in interest for financial aid.

In 2009, an even bigger chunk in principal — $169.5 million — went out. Another $6.3 million in interest also went for tuition assistance, while just $107.2 million came into the fund. The amount of money reclaimed rose to $39.3 million. The result was that the total fund, in a single year, fell from $680 million to less than $600 million.

It doesn’t take a genius to figure out that the trend can’t be sustained for more than a few years. You also don’t need to be a financial guru to know that depleting the fund’s principal means less interest earnings in the future.

The state budget provision that allowed this latest round of tuition hikes directed that 20 percent of the money accrued from the increase go to financial aid. So, if you’re a student of modest means at one of the UNC school campuses, you might feel like you’ve just been stabbed so that your blood can be used to give you a transfusion.

But recognize that you may be luckier than those who will follow you.

The chance that tuition will ever go down seems about as likely as a tea partier holding up a sign reading, “Don’t Mock Barack.” State budget woes aren’t likely to ease anytime soon. And a key pot of money used to pay for financial aid looks to be as stable as a makeshift cap on a deepwater oil well.

Scott Mooneyham writes about North Carolina government and politics for the Capitol Press Association.
ECU associate AD says Pirate Nation growing

Rick Scoppe
2010-07-22 20:56:20

The country may be struggling to come out of a recession, but the Pirate Nation seems to be doing just fine for the most part.

That, at least, was the assessment put forth by East Carolina associate athletic director Lee Workman on Thursday during a speech and question-and-answer session afterward at the Onslow Sports Club.

"We have a lot going on at East Carolina," Workman said. "We're very excited about a lot of things."

Workman, who has been at ECU since 1984, discussed a number of those things and was asked about a number of others by those attending the club's monthly luncheon at the Jacksonville Country Club.

Also, the Onslow Sports Club gave checks of $225 to each of the county's high school athletic departments. The club gives money to either the county's high school or middle school athletic programs each year on an alternating basis.

While few employers are flush with money these days, Workman said ECU's "great fan base and great loyalty" has helped serve as a buffer against the recession.

ECU ranks No. 53 in athletic royalties, according to the Collegiate Licensing Co. Only two in-state universities, North Carolina (sixth) and Duke (45th), rank higher. Also, the Greenville Walmart ranks among the top three nationally in collegiate product sales, and ECU was second behind UNC in all North Carolina Omega Sports stores, sports information director Tom McClellan said in an e-mail.

"We've had about 240 percent increase in the last three years in the sales of our products," Workman said. "There was a time when you could find product (only) in Greenville, and you can find it (now) in Charlotte and Raleigh and all over the state."

Also, Workman said television ratings have been strong for the Pirates, noting the ratings for last year's Liberty Bowl against Arkansas was comparable in Charlotte and Raleigh with "our sister institutions."

He said the bowl had a 9 rating in Charlotte and a 10 in Raleigh.

"That equates to a huge share," he said. "That's important. We've been really pleased over the last couple years to see where our ratings are."

Other topics Workman discussed included:

- Expansion of the Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium. Workman said the addition of 7,000 seats in the end zone is going well and should be completed by the middle of August, increasing the capacity to 50,000. Also, he added, new chair-back seats are being put in on both sides of the stadium between the 35-yard lines.

"It's exciting," he said. "The only thing that's got to go in on the inner part of it (the expansion) is just the seats. All the concrete's in place. There's work going on underneath. The scoreboard structure is in place.
They started yesterday putting everything on the structure of the scoreboard, the video pieces, etc."

The new end zone seating will be used by students.

“They’re excited about it. They did a spring name-the-student-section vote, and they have named (it) the ‘Boneyard.’ We’re looking forward to them taking ownership in there and helping us with a home-field advantage when the opposing team got to come down in that end zone.”

Football season-ticket sales are a record pace, with more than 20,000 sold, Workman said.

"We may not fill it up every game this year," he added. "But I think we’ll fill it up a couple times, even with 7,000 new seats."

• New basketball practice facility. With new coaches in both men’s and women’s hoops, ECU is in what Workman called the “quiet phase” of a fund-raising campaign for the new facility, which will cost about $15 million.

At present, both basketball teams share the facility with the volleyball team. Intramurals also use the facility, which is used for classes in the morning.

"We’re kind of behind the eight-ball a little bit when it comes to our basketball programs," Workman said. "So that’s our next big capital project."

And, he added, a vital one.

"We think that will make a major difference in what we’re able to do with those programs and the success we can have," Workman said. "We’re going to get done. It’s just a matter of how quickly we can get it done."

• ECU will receive 2010 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award given to employers in recognition of their support of employees who serve in the National Guard or military reserve.

ECU is one of 15 employers honored this year out of nearly 2,500 nominees, and only the second university to claim the award since its inception in 1996.

"We have a very good relationship with the military in Eastern North Carolina," Workman said. "We’re very proud of that award."

• Change in tuition costs. The state will begin requiring public in-state universities to pay out-of-state tuition for athletes on scholarship who are from out of state instead of in-state tuition as in the past. Tuition and fees is $2,881 for in-state students and $14,955 for out-of-state students, according to the school’s website.

Workman said that would likely cost ECU’s athletic department an additional $1 million. Like other schools, ECU’s athletic booster organization funds athletic scholarships. But unlike many of its competitors, ECU’s Pirate Club isn’t “fully funding scholarships,” Workman said.

"We need to get to the point where we are full funding scholarships through that," he added. "That’s their primary goal. Then obviously the capital projects (like the basketball practice facility) are next."

• New “Pirate State of Mind” logo that features a skull inside a North Carolina state map outlined in purple. The logo was used last year as part of the promotions for ECU’s home game with Virginia Tech as well as on an “official fan T-shirt,” Workman said.

"Someone said, ‘Let’s just try at midfield that out for the special game … and see what happens,'" he added. "We did. It’s caught on. People like it, and you’ll continue to see it. It sends a message that we’re not just Greenville, and we’re not just Eastern North Carolina.

“That’s our home, and that’s our foundation. But we span the state of North Carolina."
SAT prep business offers college guidance from those who've been there

By Andrew Duan
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Christian Caveness, a rising sophomore at Laney High School, has his sights set on UNC-Chapel Hill.

So naturally, he turned to someone who made the jump from Wilmington to Chapel Hill just a few years ago to help him prepare.

That’s the appeal of Ivy Insiders, an SAT prep and college application mentoring business that has recently opened a branch in Wilmington.

It’s directed by two former students of local high schools.

“I’m only one or two years older than most of the kids,” said Zack Phillips, 18 and a 2009 graduate of Hoggard High School. He is now a sophomore biomedical engineering major at UNC-CH.

“We know what they’re going through, and we can really relate to it.”

He and Alyson Courtney, 20 and a 2008 Laney High graduate, are operating the Wilmington branch this summer.

While SAT prep companies are nothing new, Ivy Insiders bills itself as one of the few in which the teachers are college undergraduates.

“We’ve just taken the tests,” said Courtney, a junior psychology major at UNC-CH.

The company was founded in 2003 by Harvard University graduates and originally employed only students at Ivy League schools. This is the first year that UNC-Chapel Hill students were allowed to tutor.

Instructors teach students to approach the SAT as a game, one with fairly predictable and specific challenges.

For example, there are really only four basic math concepts in the test: algebra, geometry, statistics and arithmetic, Courtney said. You don’t have to study all the math you learned in high school.

But the company also is a practical summer job for the students who teach.

“We’re basically running our own small business,” Courtney said.

The branch managers are responsible for renting office space, keeping a budget and profit-and-loss sheet, and developing a marketing plan. Their pay is a cut of the profits.
Beth Caveness, Christian's mother, said she was drawn to the program because she had known Courtney as a student at Laney.

"I knew if she was involved, it would be a good thing," she said. "Any help you can get when you're trying to get in a school like that is important."

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Unpaid internships can cost -- or pay off for -- college students

By Stephanie Steinberg, USA TODAY

Pennsylvania State University sophomore Elysa Mann, 18, is spending her summer in New York City working at two fashion internships — both unpaid. If her parents weren't covering the nearly $3,000 in housing and food expenses for staying in New York University's dorms for the summer, Mann probably would be back home in Philadelphia.

EALY INTERNING: More high-schoolers reinvent or skip their senior year

SCHOOLS' SCORES: Educational experiences outside the classroom

Although she's working 48 hours each week for no compensation, Mann says this is something she "has to do" if she wants to go into the fashion industry.

"It's frustrating," she says. "I know they're not going to pay me because I know there's always somebody who would take this instead of me."

Mann is one of tens of thousands of college students with unpaid internships this summer. Even with the recession, students are willing to dish out hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars to cover expenses for internships far from home.

In some cases, students also pay hundreds of dollars more for the college credits that employers require their interns to receive.

Despite the financial burden, the pipeline is crowded with young people trying to get a foot in the door, especially in a tight economy.

Guidelines re-emphasized

The U.S. Department of Labor, concerned about companies taking advantage of interns, reissued guidelines in the spring that have been in effect since 1947, when the Supreme Court established rules under the Fair Labor Standards Act that employers must follow to offer unpaid internships. Included are requirements that:

• Training is "similar to what would be given in a vocational school or academic educational instruction."

• Training benefits the trainees.

• "Trainees do not displace regular employees" but work under their observation.

Often, employers try to ensure that unpaid interns get something in return by requiring them to get college credit. Unpaid interns are not required to obtain credit under Department of Labor guidelines, but many employers allow internships only for those who do.

Why? The wording of the labor act is unclear, and businesses are confused about whether they must require students to get credit, says Barbara Hewitt of the University of Pennsylvania's Career Service Office, who works with Wharton school undergrads.

According to the act, a student must benefit from an unpaid internship. If students receive credit, employers believe that students benefit from the experience, Hewitt says.

But besides the financial question, students who attend liberal arts colleges can find it's difficult to get credit for internships, says Lauren Valentino, 22, a recent graduate of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn., who wrote a thesis on unpaid internships.

"Liberal arts colleges maintain a distinct identity from other institutions through their non-vocational curriculum, which explains why they are less willing than some other universities to grant credit for internships," Valentino says.

The Department of Labor's guidelines have "unintended consequences" that make internships costlier and inaccessible to students who can't obtain credit, Valentino says.
Paying for college credits, too
On top of the living costs, the cost of paying for the credits, as part of the tuition, discourages many students from applying for unpaid internships in the first place, says Jennifer Antonini, an internship coordinator at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va.
At GMU, a one-credit internship costs $1,052 for out-of-state students and $353.50 for in-state students.
Requiring students to receive credit puts stress on those who need to make money.
University of Michigan senior Stephanie Durphey is interning 20 hours a week this summer doing public relations work for a start-up company in Ann Arbor, Mich., called CreateMyTee.com.
Because the internship is unpaid, Durphey spends another 20 hours working at a paid job at the U-M Hospital.
Durphey, who wants a career in public relations, says the internship is necessary because companies hire employees with experience. "I wanted some experience doing PR and marketing, and I wasn't getting that from working at the hospital," she says.
The Department of Labor and the Bureau of Labor Statistics do not track the number of paid and unpaid internships. But according to a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 90% of employers representing 20 different industries say they pay their interns.
Isabel Roth, 20, took a paid summer internship at the National Institutes of Mental Health in Bethesda, Md.
Roth, who works 40 hours each week in a lab that studies anxiety disorders, is using her earnings to pay expenses at Ohio's Oberlin College, where she will be a senior in the fall. She says she would have accepted the internship even if it was unpaid.
"It's really a great opportunity to spend time here and be mentored by world-class researchers," she says.
'WIN-WIN'?

To help students gain work experience, Boston University offers an open 18-week Summer Study Internship Program. Students take two academic courses during 12 weeks and a two-credit internship course, where they learn job preparation skills, including resume writing and interviewing. They're then placed in an internship in the Boston area for six weeks. BU gives up to 10 credits for the internship but charges $6,760 as the program fee. Because participants receive credits, they're often not paid for the internship.

"We don't prohibit employers from paying, but if an employer knows they don't have to pay, they usually don't," says Donna Shea, assistant dean and director of BU's summer term.

Colette Phillips, CEO of Boston public relations firm Colette Phillips Communication, has partnered with BU's internship program for more than a decade. Though Phillips doesn't pay her interns, she says she sees the experience as a "win-win" for her and the student, who gets to write press releases, participate in company planning and work with her on a regular basis.

"They're coming in to an experienced environment where they're getting the opportunity to be mentored," she says. "What student fresh out of college gets to interface with the CEO of a 24-year-old company?"

In 2008, Phillips hired Rachel Tuhro, a junior at Radford (Va.) University internship program. Tuhro dropped out of school after Phillips asked her to be an executive assistant.

"Even though I didn't have a degree, I had to take the opportunity because I can always go back and get my degree, but I couldn't give this offer up," says Tuhro, who is now 25 and working at Millennial Branding.

Despite working 40 hours a week and having a restaurant job on the side during the internship, Tuhro says the unpaid internship paid off in the long run.

"Even though it's unpaid, and you're working your butt off, it really makes a difference," she says.
July 19, 2010

The Accidental Giant of Higher Education

By PETER APPLEBOME

NANCY L. ZIMPHER, the new chancellor of the State University of New York, is a woman with a plan. From 1998 to 2003, when she was chancellor of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, it was “The Milwaukee Idea.” From 2003 to May 2009, when she was president of the University of Cincinnati, it was “UC/21.”

And for much of this year, Dr. Zimpher has been crisscrossing New York State, PowerPoint engaged, promoting “The Power of SUNY,” with its pragmatic and somewhat buzzy bullet points — “SUNY and the Entrepreneurial Century,” “SUNY and the Seamless Education Pipeline,” “SUNY and the World” — about the university as economic and community-building engine for tough times. Dr. Zimpher is somewhat famous in higher education as a tireless and creative marketer.

“I have to say that if you planted me on Mars, this is what I would try to do,” she said a few weeks back, after spending the morning touting “The Power of SUNY” to the staff of the Research Foundation, which administers more than $1 billion in university research funds. She then swore in a new student representative to SUNY’s board of trustees, positively beaming when, without prodding, the student put her hand on the “Power of SUNY” brochure, in lieu of a Bible, in reciting her oath.

“My belief is that to move an organization forward you have to have a common, comprehensive and ambitious agenda,” Dr. Zimpher said. “It has to be aspirational. It has to move you. I think the full manifestation of SUNY is underexposed and underexploited. If people really knew and understood the difference these campuses make in their communities they would be amazed.”

But a funny — and absurdly unlikely — thing happened on Dr. Zimpher’s way to revamping and rebranding SUNY, the unloved colossus that is the biggest comprehensive system of public higher education in the country. The empowerment legislation that was the companion piece for the plan — giving campuses greater autonomy, including the ability to set their own
tuitions — became the pivotal, ferociously contested boulder in the road in New York's seemingly endless budget impasse (which at press time remained unresolved).

Of the two most powerful men in Albany, one, Gov. David A. Paterson, who proposed the legislation, insisted that it be part of a deal tied to the state's 2010-11 budget. The other, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, was adamant that it never would be.

On one level, this has been a classic case of the warring duchies of Albany, of how an educational issue morphs into a political power struggle. But its issues are both distinctly national and parochial. On the one hand, it provides a condensed glimpse of many of the issues roiling public higher education nationally: access versus status, state control versus campus control, universities as centers of disinterested scholarship versus universities as economic engines, rising demand versus falling revenues. On the other, it is the latest and most conspicuous chapter in a battle over turf, money and, oh yes, education that began 62 years ago, when New York State reluctantly approved a system that has gone on to become the accidental giant of American higher education.

TWO things define the State University of New York. It’s huge. And compared to its public peers, it’s weird.

The numbers suggest a system that’s borderline unmanageable — 64 campuses, 7,660 degree programs, 88,000 faculty members, 465,000 students, a $10.7 billion budget, a campus within 20 miles of 97 percent of the state's population. Many of its campuses are anchors of farflung small communities that only locals could find on a map — Fredonia, Delhi, Cobleskill, Potsdam. People know some campuses by reputation but not that they're part of SUNY — Fashion Institute of Technology in Manhattan, Maritime College in the Bronx, and the colleges of agriculture and life sciences, human ecology, veterinary medicine, and industrial and labor relations at Cornell. Four are ambitious university centers with a national reputation: Stony Brook, Buffalo, Binghamton and Albany. Thirty are community colleges.

In a brand-name culture, SUNY is an awfully hard brand to define, especially when it's still often thought of as an upstate phenomenon in a state whose center of gravity is south in New York City and its suburbs.

But another reason that SUNY has struggled to forge an identity is because that was the idea from the start. New York was the last of the populous states to form a university system. SUNY was not founded until 1948 and over the strenuous objections of the state's powerful private colleges and universities. And it began with the stipulation that it would only “supplement” the private institutions and not compete with them. State legislators established an unfriendly board of regents and imposed the nation's strictest regulations on what the university could
do. An informal prohibition on raising private funds meant that New York's state universities for decades grew without the endowments that supported campuses elsewhere. No wonder that a study in 1960 called SUNY a "limping and apologetic enterprise."

Virtually alone in the country, there was (and still is) no flagship institution, no Madison, Berkeley or Austin to provide a network of loyal supporters for years to come, no beloved Buckeyes, Huskies or Gators to create a common wellspring of good will. (SUNY's most conspicuous attempt to play in that league — Binghamton's one trip to the N.C.A.A. Division I basketball tournament in 2009 — ended in scandal, with arrests of several players, accusations of preferential treatment for athletes and the implosion of the program.) Add in that the City University of New York was there to suck up all the energy and attention for public education in the most populous and influential part of the state, and SUNY has been climbing uphill since its inception.

It prospered in flush times under Nelson Rockefeller but has been under siege of late. State and SUNY leaders repeatedly debate its mission, including the question of whether it could be seen as a great university system without its own Berkeley or the University of Virginia.

Still, not many of the moments has been more challenging than this one.

Since 2000, SUNY has had five interim, acting or full chancellors. It faces a budget meltdown with no bottom in sight, having lost $634 million in state support over the past three years. Those cuts come amid steadily growing demand for its services. Enrollment has increased by 25,000 over the past year, and even the downstate suburbanites who are most receptive to the appeal of private universities are taking long looks at the state's public ones as well.

It's true that on college message boards and in admissions buzz, SUNY doesn't get much love. "Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio all have excellent state flagships and are close to the northeastern private colleges. Where did NY go wrong?" wrote one posting in March on the Web site College Confidential.

But almost all the SUNY campuses are seeing rising numbers of applicants as price and practicality loom larger than the perceived brand on the rear-window decal. Maybe in good times you didn't think twice about spending $50,000 a year for Lehigh or Colgate instead of $20,000 for comparable educations at Binghamton or Geneseo, but that has never been an option for people of limited means, and increasingly it's not an option for many of the affluent, either.

Enter "The Power of SUNY," the result of Dr. Zimpher's Hillary Clinton-style listening tour of all 64 campuses, an exhaustive series of meetings across the state and a 200-member task
force.

To be honest, the strategic plan is more broad statements of intent than nuts and bolts. But the plan, and the legislation meant to help put it into effect, reflect both the problems of the moment and SUNY’s historical challenges. To address the former, Dr. Zimpher’s plan, to the chagrin of many of SUNY’s professors, is more about building the state’s economy than it is about the traditional educational missions of higher education. “There is a growing and welcome recognition that in a knowledge economy, institutions of higher education can — and must — be pivotal in generating growth and revitalizing communities,” it begins.

There is talk of research but research translated into tangible, measurable results — more patents issued, more grants won, more jobs created. SUNY StartUP is a program to invite entrepreneurs onto campuses to act as mentors. SUNY-INC (Incent New Companies) is supposed to link researchers at different campuses and companies in a development chain designed to speed up the process from concept to commercialization. SUNY is supposed to bring doctors, nurses and teachers to underserved urban and rural neighborhoods, and create a wellness network to establish statewide health goals and programs in areas like obesity, smoking cessation and the prevention of chronic disease. It is supposed to do groundbreaking research in renewable energy and work with the state’s Smart Grid Consortium to drive down energy costs.

To Dr. Zimpher, who grew up on a small farm near the town of Gallipolis, Ohio, the daughter of educators, it’s a powerful statement of what SUNY can do for New York and an inducement for state support.

“We don’t really have an economic development plan for the State of New York, but if we did, it would look a lot like ‘The Power of SUNY,’” she said.

Her supporters say this is absolutely the right time to enunciate a vision that defines SUNY. “New York north and west of Albany is a disaster area, even great cities like Rochester, so it’s entirely appropriate to say the university has a mission beyond educating students,” said Gerald Benjamin, a professor of political science at SUNY New Paltz. “It’s very important to have a plan while you’re struggling to keep the ship afloat, so your plan isn’t simply to keep the ship afloat.”

To many others, the plan has some good points but reflects a system in danger of forgetting its core mission of providing opportunity to students regardless of economic status. “The strategic plan doesn’t talk about educational missions, it doesn’t talk about affordability or accessibility, there’s very little about undergraduate education and keeping it affordable and accessible,” said Phillip H. Smith, president of the powerful United University Professions
union, which represents more than 34,000 academic and professional faculty members. “It reflects an attempt to corporatize the university.”

Those issues and many others came to a head this summer in the debate over the plan’s companion piece, the clunky-sounding Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act, giving SUNY and CUNY greater control over tuition, purchasing and public-private partnerships. Governor Paterson wants tuition-setting taken out of the state budget process, where it’s forever at the mercy of the state’s fiscal gyrations and where tuition increases go to Albany and often stay there. Instead, different campuses would establish different tuitions, with caps and added financial aid to cushion the blow to access.

To advocates, the effort to break the shackles that SUNY was born with has long been overdue. For the largest SUNY campus, the University at Buffalo, such self-determination is an essential part of its ambitious growth plan, “UB 2020,” which local officials say would create thousands of jobs, expand the campus to downtown and foster new ventures with industry.

Samuel L. Stanley Jr., president of Stony Brook University, said increased revenue from the legislation could enable the hiring of 400 new faculty members over the next decade. And Stony Brook’s most generous donor, the hedge fund manager James Simons, has made a pledge of as much as $150 million, contingent on the passage of some form of the legislation.

But a prestigious flagship or a brand-name research university to some is a quasi-private school with unaffordable tuition to others. Critics in the union, the Assembly and the universities other than the largest research institutions see in this a new, tiered SUNY with higher tuition and campuses perceived to be better for those who can afford them and ones perceived as inferior for those who cannot.

Henry Steck, who teaches political science at SUNY Cortland and has written on SUNY’s history, wrote to his colleagues during the height of the budget battles last month that if the legislation passed in its current form, “I believe we will face the end of SUNY as we know it.” He added: “SUNY will move dramatically toward a ‘privatized’ university and SUNY will be (like UVa or UVt) ‘public’ more or less in name only in terms of its financial support. ... It would be as if we moved the cost of our K-12 public schools to the children and their families, with ‘aid’ for poor families.”

What SUNY should be doing, many of these critics say, is fighting for adequate financing and affordable tuition, not looking for higher tuition and private sources that will inevitably sap resources from the public contributions while expecting something in return. “If we look at the public-private partnerships the university has entered into in the past, we see that not only have they not brought significant and continuing dollars into the university, but instead have
caused a long-term drain on university revenues and financial resources,” said Dr. Smith, the union president. “My question is, Why is now any different than the past?”

That’s a good question. And increasingly the answer seems to be: It’s different because it’s different. The way public higher education has traditionally been supported no longer seems to be working. Until 1963, SUNY had free tuition. Three decades ago, the state bore about 80 percent of the cost of running SUNY. Now it’s more like 30 percent.

And it’s not just SUNY. Books about public higher education these days have titles like “Saving Alma Mater: A Rescue Plan for America’s Public Universities,” by James C. Garland, and “Saving State U: Fixing Public Higher Education,” by Nancy Folbre. Both argue that the economic trends buffeting public higher education will continue with state budgets under a long-term siege and other expenses — elementary and secondary education, health care, prisons — deemed more critical and less discretionary.

“The business model of higher education that has worked for a century isn’t working anymore, and it needs to change,” said Dr. Garland, a former colleague of Dr. Zimpher at Ohio State and the former president of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. “Is New York going to be able to meet the financial needs of future students? The answer is no. The money just isn’t there. None of the forces depleting state resources are going away, and it’s wishful thinking to think government can find the money to fund campuses at the level they once did.”

So maybe the new face of SUNY was the scene at its headquarters in May. That was when Mike Russo, director of government relations and regulatory affairs for GlobalFoundries, a leading semiconductor manufacturer, was meeting with SUNY officials about the training and personnel needs of the $4.3 billion plant under construction near Albany. The plant is expected to create 1,400 technology jobs in its first phase, with perhaps more to come. Mr. Russo says the company is working not just with nearby community colleges and the nanotechnology institute at SUNY Albany, but also with the chancellor’s office to identify potential workers throughout the SUNY system.

“Educational institutions are very parochial by nature,” he said. “They want to sell you their wares. It’s the survival of the fittest. In order to change that you need more than a strategic plan; they’re a dime a dozen. You need leadership that makes everyone feel they have a stake in it. And I tell you that’s happened with SUNY over the past seven months.”

CHANCES are SUNY will never be reducible to a single brand. It’s too many things to too many people with too many competing interests: to be accessible and to be elite, to be intellectual centers and to be job creators, to serve their communities and to (belatedly) compete with private universities that are its neighbors.
Still, if there's no single beloved campus, for some the hope remains that SUNY can morph into something more than the sum of its parts, though it's not clear whether the more tiered system that autonomy seems to foster would help the system build a common identity or blur it further.

“A lot of us still want New Yorkers to think of SUNY as their university, a part of our patrimony, like Ole Miss or the Texas Aggies,” Dr. Steck said.

But then patrimony and the tug of the heart may be luxuries in the current Darwinian educational world. So despite the bruising battles this year, Dr. Zimpher is betting that in hard times, SUNY can find the identity its founders were half-heartedly groping toward six decades ago. “We are the growth engine for New York,” she said. “We will yield a return on that investment and eventually enhance the taxpayers’ ability to grow ourselves out of this deficit. Cut the engine loose, and let it do what it will for New York.”

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