

SUNY Downstate Focus of Senate Budget Debate

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Keeping the SUNY Downstate Hospital in Brooklyn solvent was a major focus of the budget debate in the Senate last night. The budget bill as passed calls for the financially troubled institution to come up with a "sustainability plan" by June. Sen. Kevin Parker and a number of his colleagues from Brooklyn don't feel that is enough.

SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher said earlier this year that Downstate is losing \$8 million a year and needs over \$150 million to survive another year.

Parker introduced a hostile amendment to the budget health bill that would have given Downstate \$150 million and required the legislature have oversight over any restructuring plan. The amendment was ruled out of order and Democrats did not have enough votes to overrule.

The current budget language requires SUNY to submit a sustainability plan by June and implement it in two weeks. It also loosens up the bidding process on contracts so the school can save money.

Sen. Gustavo Rivera questioned Sen. John DeFrancisco at length about the budget language on SUNY Downstate. Sen. Daniel Squadron also spoke passionately about preserving the hospital.

Parker, Rivera and Squadron voted against the budget bill. But perhaps the most impactful statement against the bill came from a legislator who voted for it.

Sen. Marty Golden who is a member of the Republican majority read a statement decrying the budget, saying, "I do not consider these budget negotiations over." Golden noted there was more work to be done on SUNY Downstate and talked about needing to find a solution to help

the institution.

Golden's colleagues Sens. John DeFrancisco and Sen. Kenneth LaValle both mentioned that Golden was on top of them regarding the hospital LaValle went so far as to compare Golden to a tick on the issue which drew some laughter from the generally tired and cranky crowd. Golden said that the budget, could "break up families" and "destroy homes," and then he voted for it.

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