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Students hope to draw Pataki's attention about budget

By Lindsay Marlenga

Governor George E. Pataki will be greeted by protesters today as students attempt to sway his opinion about the value of funding higher education programs.

Students from both Syracuse University and the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry will be protesting the proposed increase in tuition at SUNY schools and the cut in the Tuition Assistance Program funding when Pataki speaks at the Wyndham Hotel in East Syracuse, said Sean Vormwald, project coordinator for the New York Public Interest Group at ESF and SU.

ESF and SU students will be joined by other colleges in the area such as SUNY Oswego and SUNY Cortland, Vormwald said. Protesters will be urging Pataki not to include the tuition increase or the TAP cut in the upcoming state budget.

"Pataki and the New York State Legislatures should have to make higher education a priority," he said.

Geri Weinstein, a senior history, education and political science major, understands the importance of TAP for a college student. Although she is graduating this year, she wants to dedicate some of her time to helping her friends who may have to face the tuition hike and TAP cut next year.

"Education has to be accessible and affordable for everyone," Weinstein said. "I don't want anyone I know to have to take a leave of absence from either SU or ESF because they cannot pay for tuition."

In the past few weeks, NYPIRG has made other attempts to sway the opinion of Pataki and the Legislature, Vormwald said. The organization started a campaign to urge New York state students to state their opinion on the proposed budget changes by sending postcards to Pataki's office. So far, about 45,000 postcards have been delivered to the office.

NYPIRG has also lobbied with the Pataki's executive staff and with Syracuse Assemblywoman Joan Christensen.

Matt Martucci, a freshman broadcast major, approves of NYPIRG's activities but suggested that students create a petition to be sent to Pataki. The petition would contain not only their signatures, but also suggestions on alternate ways of dealing with the budget deficit, he said.

When the New York state executive budget is released Wednesday, it may include a 41percent increase in SUNY tuition and a 50 percent cut in TAP funding to offset the state's \$10 billion to \$12 billion deficit, said Vormwald.

Currently, about 2,700 undergraduate students receive TAP and 150 graduate students receive the state issued funding, Vormwald said. These cuts could have devastating effects for both SU and ESF students.

Martucci agreed the cut in TAP funding would have a negative effect on students.

"It's going to make paying for college more difficult than it already is for students and their families," said

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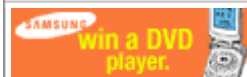
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Martucci. "I don't think the government realizes how this will effect people."



Vormwald thinks the tuition hike and the TAP cut will cause a "job killing tax hike" within the state. Job killing taxes would prevent job growth in the area and contribute to the economic problems in New York, he said.

The proposed changes to education funding will also decrease the amount of educated individuals in the work force.

"Educating the population makes for a more qualified work force," Vormwald said. "Students should be able to go to school to get a higher education and the government should not hinder this."

While she understands there is a need for money within New York state, Weinstein does not think that students should have to deal with the government's burden.

"The government shouldn't be putting tax issues on the students," she said.

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