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## LETTERS

# Expanding a School and Protecting Groundwater

January 18, 2002

Here's the simple answer to what has become a complex issue: The environment at the State University of New York College at Old Westbury will be cared for. If pending legislation that would preserve about 300 acres is signed into law, we at Old Westbury will abide by it. If that legislation does not receive the governor's ultimate approval, our college will do what is right, both for the college's future, and that of our Long Island neighbors.

We are committed to expanding our college. Adding new facilities is a key ingredient in that growth. However, the careful, respectful treatment of the beautiful ecology of our campus is also key. The current administration of this college is, and has always been, committed to ensuring the least amount of disruption to the environment, including having all projects evaluated under the State Environmental Quality Review Act.

Further, your editorial "Pataki Should Approve Plan for SUNY Old Westbury" [Jan. 7] claims that Old Westbury "needs a lot of work, academically and cosmetically." Yes, some of our campus facilities require upgrades, the issue being addressed by new and planned construction and rehabilitation projects.

As to academic quality, however, I submit that no such work needs to be done. Our faculty of more than 200 full- and part-time professors is comprised of men and women respected both for their teaching skills and their scholarly and research efforts. These learned professionals have educated more than 14,000 students since this college's founding. Alumni of Old Westbury have gone on to be leaders in the business and civic communities of Long Island, New York City and our nation. I believe that each and every one of these successful faculty members and alumni would, like me, disagree with Newsday's concerns about the academic quality of this institution.

Calvin O. Butts III

Editor's Note: The writer is president of the College at Old Westbury.

Old Westbury

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Newsday's editorial "Pataki Should Approve Plan for SUNY Old Westbury" highlighted the reasons for Gov. George Pataki to sign the initiative unanimously passed by the State Legislature this past fall.

Newsday's excellent series on the Old Westbury land deals focused on private deals and insider politics,

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which arose from the original law. The new legislation would not interfere with needed development at the college while at the same time protecting land already owned by New York State located in a state-designated special groundwater protection area.

New York State, Suffolk County and local governments in Suffolk have been preserving open space to protect the county's underground drinking water supply. The governor's failure to sign this measure will result in state-owned land in Nassau County being made available for development.

This is contrary to Pataki's previous support, in Suffolk County, when the state participated in acquiring similar land for drinking-water protection. Considering no money was allocated by the state for open-space acquisitions in the Environmental Protection Fund in 2001 and Nassau County did not receive a dime from the 1996 clean-water, clean-air bond act for open-space preservation, signing this measure into law is a "no brainer."

By preserving a minimum of 300 acres and allowing other, less sensitive acres to be available for possible future school use, the state would protect its environment at no cost, while it enhances public education.

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Editor's Note: The writer is executive director of the Long Island Drinking Water Coalition.

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## Pataki Should Approve Plan for SUNY Old Westbury

The campus at SUNY Old Westbury needs a lot of work, academically and cosmetically, if students are to get the quality of education that they have been deprived of through past mismanagement. New leadership has promoted a sense of optimism that the college's problems can be solved and its potential as Nassau's only four-year state campus realized.

That's why it's time for Gov. George Pataki to sign the bipartisan initiative, approved last fall by the State Legislature, that would set clear guidelines for the development of college property to generate badly needed funds.

Pataki has demurred because the plan would permanently set aside 300 of the cam-

pus' 600 acres for conservation. Although the entire campus sits atop a special state groundwater protection area, Pataki and SUNY Chancellor Robert King believe the set-aside is too big and would stifle campus growth — and set a precedent for legislative meddling.

Newsday has been sympathetic with their concerns. But the sponsoring lawmakers, Assemb. Thomas DiNapoli (D-Thomaston) and state Sen. Carl Marcellino (R-Syosset), make a compelling case for their bill:

- State law already demands that substantial acreage be protected.
- Old Westbury would still have 300 acres, including its current 100-acre footprint — more than

several local private colleges that have many more students and aggressive expansion plans.

- The college itself would decide which acreage to protect. Old Westbury President Calvi Butts Jr. has already drawn a map.

- Without the new legislation, which Pataki must sign by the end of the month if it is to become law, plans for a college-related foundation to develop a day-care center and money-making equestrian facility might collapse.

Pataki, whose previous appointees took part in what can only be described as a pillaging of the campus, should put that sorry episode behind him and do what is right for the college: Let it move forward to a better future.