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The Defenders Fight for a Fair Budget: Join the Effort by Contacting your Legislators!

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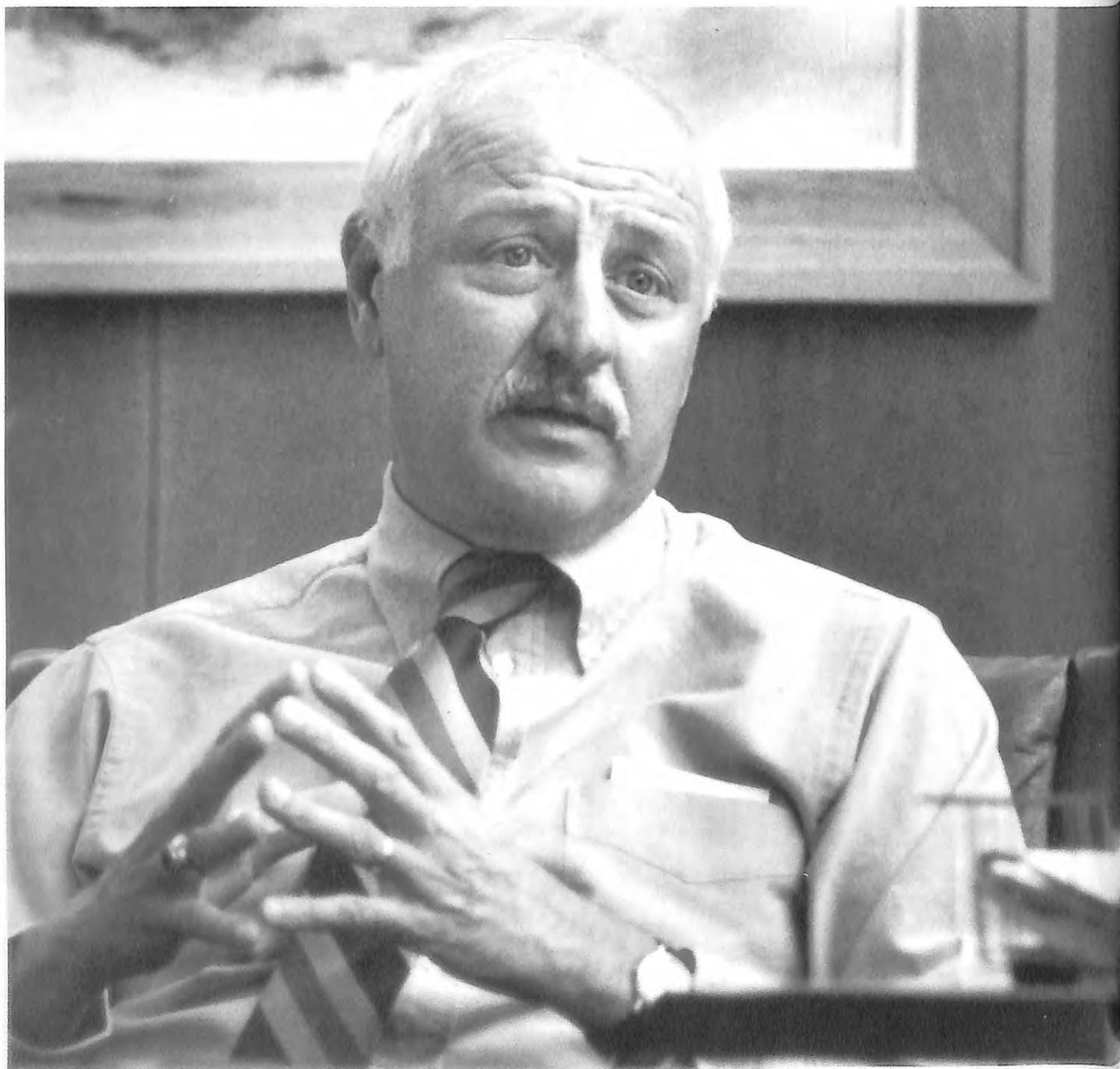
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Alumni Association

The Defenders Fight for a Fair Budget

Join the effort by contacting your legislators!



UB LAW

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For those concerned about the future of the Law School, the University at Buffalo and the State University of New York, the last round of state budget cuts was devastating — and this year more cuts are expected.

As we go to press, a preliminary analysis estimates that in the 1996-97

Executive Budget for SUNY, UB's share of the reduction is \$9 million. This massive reduction underscores the smaller-government philosophy of Gov. George Pataki. But advocates for the Law School, UB and SUNY are redoubling their efforts to remind legislators that nothing is more important to the future of the state than high quality education.

"We are trying to make people aware of all the wonderful things that UB is doing," says Judith A. Schwendler, a 1982 graduate of the Law School who is an assistant director in UB's Office of Alumni Relations. She heads the 18-member UB Legislative Action Committee, a volunteer group that works to heighten UB's and SUNY's profile among legislators and throughout the community. Not surprisingly, many members of the committee are graduates of UB Law.

"Anyone who has been a part of the University appreciates all that the University offers. We know from surveys that alumni have a great sense of pride in UB."

Schwendler says each committee member is assigned a mem-

ber of the Western New York legislative delegation, and pleads UB's case with personal visits, letters, phone calls — anything short of sending up a hot-air balloon. The committee also arranges visits from legislators to its monthly meetings, and sponsors an annual breakfast for Western New York's legislative delegation.

It's that personal touch — telling how a UB education has made a difference in their own lives, for example — that seems to make the strongest connection, she says.

That is one reason why, in September, Dean Barry B. Boyer and Law Alumni President Garry M. Graber invited two members of the New York State Senate's Higher Education Committee, Senator Kenneth P. LaValle, (R-Long Island Region District 1) who serves as chairman, and Senator Mary Lou Rath, (R-Western Region District 60), to meet with members of the Law School administration and the Law Alumni Association.

Many alumni spoke movingly to the senators of how grateful they were for the opportunity to receive a high quality legal education, at an affordable tuition. Some were the first generation in their families to graduate from college.

They also discussed the need for greater financial flexibility for the campuses and the unique role UB Law plays as the state's only law school. Dean Boyer spoke of the Law School's commitment to public service and Paul C. Weaver '61, president of the Bar Association of Erie County and past president of the Law Alumni Association, stressed the importance of state support for the Law School's innovative, practice-oriented curriculum, "which will help to raise the level of professionalism."

"The dialogue was very fruitful and the feedback from the senators will greatly assist us in developing strategies in the future," says Graber.



Senator Kenneth P. LaValle

Educating legislators, however, is not solely a job for members of the Law Alumni Association Board or the Legislative Action Committee. All alumni can greatly aid the effort in their own contacts with movers and shakers across the state.

"There are a heck of a lot of UB alumni out there," notes Walter R. Pacer Jr. '73, a member of the committee for three years who is an attorney with the firm Hurst, Brothman & Yusick, in Angola, N.Y.

"I've been asked in the past to write my congressman, and I wasn't sure whether it was worth the effort. But somebody apparently does read those letters. And if we do it in large numbers, they're going to take the time to respond."

Letters of advocacy can be as simple as, say, "I support UB and ask that you keep any proposed tuition increase to a minimum."

"I hear all the time that the private colleges do this, and do it quite well and efficiently," Pacer says, "and our state legislators stand up and take notice."

UB Law alumna Marybeth Cullinan '91, who practices with the Buffalo firm Davis, Augello, Matteliano & Gersten, and is active on the committee, says, "It can be as simple as picking up the phone and calling a legislator and saying, 'Look, I went to UB and if you continue to cut the funding to SUNY it's going to have a detrimental effect on the school's reputation, and in turn that will have a detrimental effect on the value of my degree.'"

That threat to UB's and the Law School's reputation is very real, says Jean Powers '79, a past president of the UB Law School Alumni Association and a member of the UB Legislative Action Committee.

"Our goal for the Law School must be excellence. To move up in national rankings requires investments in the school and its programs," says

Judith A. Schwendler '82, assistant director of UB Alumni Relations, and William J. Evitts, director, ride the alumni bus to Albany.



Powers, a partner in the Buffalo law firm Jaeckle, Fleischmann & Mugel. "The national surveys are based on quantitative criteria, like how many volumes are in the library. That's where the state funding cuts can really hurt.

"We all tend to think that we support the school by paying our taxes and by making contributions to the annual

fund drive, but I think we have to do more than that. We must communicate with community leaders, our fellow citizens and especially anybody in the Legislature with whom we come into contact, and tell them how vital it is for those dollars get to the University.

"We must stress the necessity for the campus to have more control over their expenditures. Key decisions about



cuts should be made by people with hands-on knowledge of what is involved. The presidents, vice presidents and deans are best equipped to properly allocate funds at their own institutions," says Powers.

"It is important that legislators across the state be told that many attorneys in their district attended UB law and care about its future," notes Alan

S. Carrel '67, the Law School's vice dean for administration. "Alumni who live within New York should communicate our message to their legislators."

Molly McKeown, deputy to the president for university relations at UB, calls interested alumni "my hidden weapon."

"I realize the strength the alumni can have when they walk into a legisla-

"I've been asked in the past to write my congressman, and I wasn't sure whether it was worth the effort. But somebody apparently does read those letters. And if we do it in large numbers, they're going to take the time to respond."

tor's office," McKeown says. "They do not have a vested interest, except for their respect for the institution and the value of their degree. I think the alumni have a lot of clout. They add a vital dimension to our advocacy efforts."

As well, she said, the alumni are "my eyes and ears in this area," attending political fund-raisers and other networking events where legislators appear.

Every February, members of the Legislative Action Committee get up at 4 a.m. to catch a bus to Albany for a full day of lobbying at the Capitol. The bus pulls back into Buffalo around 10 p.m.

"It's a long, arduous day," says Marybeth Cullinan, "but it has proven to be very effective and worthwhile." ■

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