

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

----- X

March 21, 2016

Start: 1:57 p.m.

Recess: 2:24 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee
Rm. 14th Fl

B E F O R E: INEZ D. BARRON
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: James Vacca
Fernando Cabrera
Jumaane D. Williams
Laurie A. Cumbo
Ydanis A. Rodriguez
Vanessa L. Gibson

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Barbara Bowen, President
Professional Staff Congress CUNY
CUNY English Professor, CUNY

David Paskin, Associate Director
Research Negotiations
District Council 37

Devin Li, Student
John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Chika Onyejiukwa, Vice Chair
Legislative Affairs, CUNY University Student Senate
President, Undergraduate Student Government
Hunter College

David Dyssegaard Kallick
Senior Fellow
Fiscal Policy Institute.

2 [sound check, pause]

3 [gavel]

4 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Good afternoon. My
5 name is Inez Barron. I'm the Chair of the Committee
6 on Higher Education. Today we will vote on a
7 resolution calling upon the Governor and the State
8 Legislature to increase State funding to the City
9 University of New York, and to reach a fair labor
10 agreement with university faculty and staff in the
11 2016-17 New York State Executive Budget. The
12 Governor has proposed cutting CUNY's State funding by
13 \$485 million, and shifting that burden onto CUNY
14 students and the City. The burden to students is
15 \$300 per student increase in tuition at CUNY's senior
16 colleges. The effect on CUNY would be catastrophic.
17 The Republicans in the New York State Senate have
18 embraced this plan. All this is happening in the
19 midst of contract negotiations with faculty and
20 professional staff who have not had a contract since
21 2010. It's immoral. As the State budget nears
22 completion, today we will vote to recommend that the
23 Council take a formal stand against these proposals
24 and in support of a fair contract for CUNY employees.
25 I will read the Resolution into the record, and then

2 we will have statements for the record and proceed to
3 a vote.

4 Whereas, the City University of New York,
5 CUNY, is a public university City system in New York
6 City serving more than 269,000 degree credit
7 students, and 247,000 adult continuing education and
8 professional education students at 24 campuses across
9 the five boroughs; and

10 Whereas, CUNY has a legislatively
11 mandated mission to be "A vital importance as vehicle
12 for the upward mobility of the disadvantaged in the
13 City of New York ensuring equal access and
14 opportunity" to students, faculty and staff from all
15 ethnic and racial groups; and

16 Whereas, CUNY makes higher education
17 possible for a diverse and underprivileged student
18 body where 76% of undergraduates belong to racial and
19 minority groups, 38% are immigrants and 39% have an
20 annual household income of \$20,000 or less; and

21 Whereas, the State has been CUNY's single
22 greatest funder for decades providing 70--46% of the
23 University's Fiscal 2014 Operating Budget, while
24 tuition revenue financed 44%, and the City financed
25 the remaining 10%; and

2 Whereas, the State's Proposed Executive
3 Budget would require the City to assume a 30% share
4 of CUNY's senior college net operating and debt
5 service expenses totaling \$485 million in 2016-17
6 Fiscal Year; and

7 Whereas, the Executive Budget also
8 proposes to raise tuition by \$300 per year for five
9 years; and

10 Whereas, since 2008, per student
11 investment in CUNY has decreased by 14%; and

12 Whereas, tuition paid by CUNY students
13 has increased by approximately 30.4% from Fall 2011
14 to Spring 2016 so that it now covers almost 50% of
15 the University's budget compared to less than 40%
16 prior to the 2008 recession; and

17 Whereas, CUNY faculty and professional
18 staff have been working under an expired contract
19 since 2010, and employees no longer eligible for step
20 increases in salary under the expired contract have
21 gone without raises for six years; and

22 Whereas, a reduction in the State's
23 financial commitment to CUNY would burden New York
24 City with new and unexpected costs, diminish the
25 quality education at CUNY and destabilize the long-

2 term funding of the University, one of New York's
3 most effective economic engines, and a path to the
4 middle class for hundreds of thousands of New
5 Yorkers; and

6 Whereas, CUNY employees deserve
7 recognition for their hard work and dedication, and
8 it is in the public interest to maintain the
9 accessibility to high quality education--higher
10 quality education for all of the City's residents.

11 Now, therefore, be it resolved that the
12 City Council of New York calls upon the Governor and
13 the State Legislature to increase the State funding
14 to the City University of New York and to reach fair
15 labor agreement with the University faculty and staff
16 in the 2016-17 New York State Executive Budget.

17 I'd like to recognize the members of the
18 committee who are present, and thank my staff and the
19 committee staff for organizing today's hearing.

20 Council Member or the staff of Council Member
21 Cabrera, Council Member Cumbo, Council Member
22 Rodriguez, Council Member Williams, and Council
23 Member Vacca, and we also have with us Council
24 Members Palma and Council Member Eugene. We want to
25 now call the first panel. Each panel--the panel--

2 there's one panel, and I'm going to ask if you would
3 please condense your remarks to three minutes. We
4 have a lot going on, and we've displaced another
5 committee that's waiting to have their hearing. So
6 we do want to get it into the record that we ask that
7 you please condense your comments. We have Barbara
8 Bowen from Professional Staff Congress--Congress. We
9 have David Paskin from DC 37. We have Devin Li from
10 CUNY USS, and we have Chika Onyejiukwa from USS as
11 well. If you would come forward, and as you come,
12 we'll swear you in. [background comments] Okay, if
13 you would raise your hand, please. Do you affirm to
14 tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
15 truth in your testimony before this committee, and to
16 answer all committee questions honestly?

17 PANEL MEMBERS: [off mic] (in unison) I
18 do.

19 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. You may
20 begin. Give us your name.

21 [pause]

22 BARBARA BOWEN: Good afternoon. There
23 we go. Thank you so much. I'm Barbara Bowen. I'm
24 President of the Professional Staff Congress CUNY.
25 I'm a professor at the City University of New York,

2 an English Professor, and I'm very honored to be here
3 representing the 27,000 members of the PSC. I'm also
4 honored to be here with students and my colleague and
5 comrade representative of DC 37. I thank you first
6 of all so much for developing this resolution, and I
7 urge you to vote yes. It's no surprise. We thank
8 you very much from the PSC, and we hope that the
9 resolution will carry weight and carry the day in
10 Albany. I think it's absolutely essential that
11 you're taking this move. The timing is could not be
12 better. I want to say that the key word in the
13 resolution as far as our union is concerned is in the
14 pen ultimate line just--just before end where you
15 call on--where you call for an increase in State
16 funding. That is the key because so much focus has
17 been on the proposal to do what the Governor calls a
18 cost shift, and what you and I would call a cut. And
19 the drama about restoring the money for that half
20 billion dollars. That has taken almost all the air
21 space and, in fact, the real issue is that, of course
22 that should be restored. There should be no
23 discussion of cutting from CUNY, and what's needed is
24 an increase enough to cover our contracts, and also
25 to support our students. So I just want to read a

2 statement by a department chair in Baruch. She's in
3 the Psychology Department, and she writes about the
4 fact that a professor in the department has felt and
5 has taken another position--she's taken a position in
6 another university because she cannot live on the
7 salary in New York City of CUNY. She said, "The loss
8 of Christian Shockley is felt deeply in our
9 department. First, she's an award winning scholar
10 with such a high profile in her field that she earned
11 early tenure a year ago after receiving her PhD in
12 2010. Indeed, with her prolific publishing record in
13 High Impact Journal--journals, her tenure package was
14 so solid that we've used it as a stellar example for
15 upcoming assistant professors. Second, she
16 contributed to all levels of instruction from
17 undergraduate to Masters to PhD. She mentor--
18 mentored nearly a dozen Masters and PhD students, and
19 was one of the outstanding instructors in the Honors
20 Undergraduate Sections. Third, she shared my hope
21 and desire to build a stronger research culture, to
22 increase accountability for students, faculty and
23 administration alike. Through these measures large
24 and small, and this I think is a key point, we were
25 beginning to shore up morale within the department,

2 which has been lowered greatly by the general level
3 of uncertainty we feel about our future with the
4 contract. With her loss that morale will take
5 another hit as well as we see further evidence that
6 CUNY is unable to provide the economic support to
7 retain its best faculty. That is a clear example of
8 somebody who is living for one reason only, that's
9 economic. [bell] She is very devoted to CUNY and
10 she's not along. So I would just say to all of you
11 that that's what's at stake in this contract. New
12 York City is in danger of losing these spectacular
13 faculty and staff we have at CUNY and what does that
14 mean? That means that our students won't have that
15 faculty and staff, and this is an institution that
16 educates half a million students, 500,000. I believe
17 that our students should have the very best faculty
18 and staff, and I think it's very important to see
19 that people who are devoted to CUNY, devoted to these
20 students, and want them to succeed are finding that
21 they cannot stay of CUNY because of the contract, the
22 failure to have a contract. And the only reason
23 that's not happening is because of Stated funding.
24 Nothing else. So we support your strong support and
25 we thank you tremendously for that. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: The next panelist.

3 DAVID PASKIN: Good afternoon. My name
4 is David Paskin, Associate--Associate Director of
5 Research Negotiations at District Council 37. I've
6 provided testimony. Copies of the testimony are
7 available, but I--I'll go off the testimony in the
8 interest of time, and--and restate that--that--that
9 we are strongly in support of the resolution that's
10 being proposed. We think that at this moment it--is
11 very timely that the Council goes on record to
12 prevent the cuts to CUNY and that we believe very
13 strongly that these cuts are fundamental, and that if
14 they're allowed to go through the entire basis for
15 the funding and future of the City University are, in
16 fact, in jeopardy. This is not simply the--the
17 moving of money from one source to the other--

18 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: [interposing] Uh-
19 huh.

20 DAVID PASKIN: --from New York State to
21 New York City. It is, in fact, a cut to the City
22 University, and that would--would destabilize the
23 long-term relationship that has existed since the
24 fiscal crisis, and to do that without discussion with
25 the City, without the input of the citizens, without

2 consultation with the university, the elected
3 representatives and Mayor, is--is, in fact,
4 unconscionable. And that--that it will have
5 consequences to the City Budget that we're all aware
6 of. \$485 million blows a hole in the budget. The
7 Medicaid cuts blow a hole in the budget, and it
8 smacks from our perspective of a political vendetta
9 that, in fact, create a situation where the
10 university, which we all believe in is, in fact, in
11 jeopardy regarding its--its--its funding. There is
12 also an additional piece in the--in the Governor's
13 proposal that's--that's not there, and that's the \$15
14 an hour. That \$15 an hour as the basis, he's--he's
15 calling the signature piece of--of where he would
16 like to go. There are thousands and thousands of our
17 members at District Council 37 represented
18 particularly in the title of college assistance that
19 do not earn \$15 an hour. In fact, the starting
20 salary for a college assistant is--I actually wrote
21 it down because it's so striking--is \$9--is \$9.72.
22 After two years it goes to \$10.99. So that for those
23 first two years, it will below what--what went into
24 effect on December for the--for the \$10.50. To
25 exclude those employees at the City University while

2 at the same time saying that State employees and that
3 SUNY will pay that is wrong. It's wrong and that the
4 Governor who's an advocate for this should certainly
5 find a way to fund the \$15 an hour for the City
6 University, and not take it out of the backs of the
7 rest of the package. Because we do know what would
8 happen. We'd say okay we'll fund \$15, but then
9 where's the rest of the money going to come from? If
10 \$15 an hour is the basis for funding, and the basis
11 for a living wage in New York City then, in fact, the
12 State should make an effort to make sure that that is
13 funded in addition to re--restoring the \$485 million
14 as well as the \$240 million necessary for us to come
15 to a fair collective bargaining agreement.

16 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. Next
17 panelist.

18 JOHN LI: [off mic] Good morning.
19 [background comments] [on mic] Thank you. First I
20 would just say good afternoon to Chairwoman Inez
21 Barron, and the Committee. My name is Devin Li, and
22 I'm currently a student of John Jay College of
23 Criminal Justice, and I'm also proud to say that I am
24 on several positions. I am on the Student Council of
25 John Jay College as well as the Senator for the

2 University Student Center a CUNY. As a
3 representative at my college, I've been faced with
4 asking questions to the students, and I've received
5 several hundred questions and concerns across the
6 board. Some of them related to John Jay as where our
7 campus is heading after we lose one of our main
8 buildings on the campus. The others are asking why
9 dorms are not really accessible--accessible, and is
10 very limited and costs two to three times amount of
11 in-state tuition per year. But the most that they're
12 asking is why their voices are not being heard, but I
13 hope that their voices are going to be heard today.
14 As a student of John Jay College, I cannot afford to
15 pay even partial tuition with the use of financial
16 aid or students loans, and this is across the board.
17 I'm also the child of a mother who before I went to
18 college suffered a stroke that left her partially
19 paralyzed. I was also on the verge of homelessness,
20 and yet I'm still here today to ensure that the
21 students are heard. Fifteen thousand students at my
22 respective campus are being told and expect to ignore
23 the fact that spaces, departments and event spaces
24 including classrooms as well, are going to be
25 completely shut down, and they're expected to be

2 grateful that they have access to higher education,
3 but even that access now is going to be limited.

4 With the proposed budget cuts, and tuition increases
5 not only would the students suffer, but the faculty
6 as well. CUNY as whole is designed to be affordable,
7 and even though we picked CUNY as an institution the
8 students know that we can excel at any other
9 institution. However, it is most affordable at CUNY
10 and we need to keep it that way. CUNY represents
11 something that in--universities and institutions do
12 not and that's diversity. That's diversity in all
13 types of ways. Diversity of opinions and diversity of
14 economic standing, diversity racially, and diversity
15 of perspective. Governor Cuomo and the Senate needs
16 to understand that without the students and the
17 faculty sitting here within CUNY all 500,000 students
18 and faculty and staff. Without them, CUNY cannot be
19 what it is today. CUNY is an amazing institution
20 unlike any other institution or university in the
21 nation, but that comes from the students and the
22 faculty that attend, that learn, and that seek to
23 know everything that they can. Not because they need
24 to, but because they want to and they deserve a
25 higher education. Thank you. [bell]

2 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you and our
3 final panelist.

4 CHIKA ONYEJIUKWA: Thank you. Greetings
5 Councilwoman Barron and Committee on Higher
6 Education. My name is Chika Onyejiukwa and I serve
7 as the Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs to the CUNY
8 University Student Senate, and as the President of
9 the Undergraduate Student Government at Hunter
10 College. I am a resident of the City Council
11 District 27 in Jamaica, Queens. I am here to express
12 the USS leadership of Resolution No. 732-A, which
13 calls for the Governor and the State Legislature to
14 increase the State funding to CUNY and to reach a
15 fair labor agreement with the University faculty and
16 staff. First, I would like to thank the New York
17 State Assembly Speaker Carl Hasty, and the Committee
18 on Higher Education Chair Deborah Glick for their
19 strong one-house budget that includes increased
20 funding for CUNY, rejects the Governor's proposed
21 cost shifts from the State to the City, which is in
22 essence a cut to state aid, and freezes tuition at
23 CUNY for two academic years. Although the Senate's
24 One-House Budget Bill also freezes tuition, it
25 accepts the Governor's proposed cuts to CUNY. Our

2 students have been very clear, a tuition freeze and
3 increased funding are not mutually exclusive. Both
4 can be realized. In the same budget. Recently, USS
5 Chairperson Joseph Awadjie wrote in a an op-ed
6 published in the New York Daily News that Cuomo's
7 proposed tuition hike and a \$485 million budget cut
8 to CUNY attacked the American dream we embody. If
9 Cuomo and legislative leaders don't reverse the
10 decline in CUNY's funding and fund a contract for our
11 professors and staff, the state will advocate its
12 responsibilities and threaten CUNY's Muni Commission.
13 Student support a fair and equitable contract for our
14 faculty and staff. We should not be pitted in the
15 budget [bell] against them. We are all part of the
16 same CUNY community, and we will continue to stand
17 together to put pressure on our State representatives
18 and the Governor. We have marched side by side. We
19 have collected petitions together, and we have faced
20 the effects or austrosy--of austerity together. It
21 is not too late for the--for Governor Cuomo and the
22 Senate to the tide of austerity currently sweeping
23 the nation and drowning students in debt and tuition
24 hikes. Now is the time for the investment to ensure
25 equality and affordable higher education. We truly

2 hope the Council will support the Resolution 732-A.
3 Lastly, I have attached a press release from our
4 March in March on Sunday, March 13th. We thank the
5 City Council Black, Latino and Asian Caucus,
6 Chairwoman Inez Barron, Brooklyn Borough President
7 Eric Adams, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer,
8 Assembly Members Diana Richardson, Michael Blake,
9 Richard Godfrey and Rimi Vachat (sp?), Joanne Simmons
10 and Charles Barron, and the faculty and staff for
11 supporting our rally and marching with us across the
12 Brooklyn Bridge to call on the Governor to increase
13 state funding for CUNY. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you so much.
15 We have one additional person so this panel can be
16 excused, and at this time I will call David Kallick
17 and have him sworn in, and remember that we are on
18 the clock.

19 [[background comments, pause]

20 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Would you raise your
21 right hand, please. Do you affirm to tell the truth,
22 the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your
23 testimony before this committee, and to answer
24 committee questions honestly?

25 I do.

2 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: You have three
3 minutes, sir.

4 DAVID DYSSEGAARD: Thank you. Thank you
5 for the opportunity to testify today. I'm David
6 Dyssegaard Kallick. I'm a Senior Fellow at the
7 Fiscal Policy Institute. So Director of Immigration
8 and Research Initiative. It would be hard to
9 overstate the importance of CUNY to New York City to
10 the economy, to the prospects for a social mobility,
11 to richness of life in our city. It's no
12 exaggeration that in practically any crowded room in
13 New York City if you ask for a show of hands for who
14 directly gained from the CUNY education, you get an
15 impressive number. I won't ask you to do that here
16 today, but I'm sure you've done the exercise before.
17 CUNY graduates are everywhere. Maintaining a system
18 of quality, affordable public higher education is
19 critical to the City's well being. What I happily
20 may be able to add today is a little context about
21 the State Budget. When Governor Cuomo announced in
22 his Executive Budget that he intended to shift \$485
23 million from the State budget to the City, it sent a
24 little shock waves around the offices of fiscal
25 analysts. Did the Governor negotiate with city

2 officials? Where did this idea come from? As you
3 know, the answer is the Governor proposed this on his
4 own seemingly without input from anyone, certainly
5 without discussions with the Mayor or City Council.
6 We've heard shifting rationales for the proposed
7 cuts. The City appoints a third of the trustees so
8 it should be a third a of the cost, the Governor
9 said. Although no SUNY school has remotely
10 comparable contributions, or the real aim is reduce
11 administrative costs, and the reduction won't cost
12 the city a penny. It's hard to imagine anything
13 remotely like a half billion dollar savings in
14 administrative costs, but well, we're still waiting
15 for an explanation of how that would work. Most
16 recently the State Senate stunned many of us by
17 suggesting that one of the reasons for the folding
18 funds is into semitism at CUNY campuses. Being
19 Jewish myself, I found that really heart wrenching.
20 What are they talking about? CUNY like campuses
21 around the country has had protests and student
22 groups are doing about Middle-Eastern politics. The
23 students on all sides of the question, as you would
24 expect and as you would want on the great--the great
25 university. The Zionist Organization of America

2 accused some groups of antisemitism, and the CUNY
3 administration was praised by the Anti-Defamation
4 League for its exemplary investigation and a
5 response. The Administration clearly said that CUNY
6 condemns all forms of bigotry and discrimination
7 putting this into the next reasons for withholding
8 funding for CUNY is just unconscionable. I guess
9 it's so obvious it sounds strange to say it, but \$485
10 million is a lot of money. The proposed offloading
11 of State responsibility for CUNY is one of the
12 biggest stories of this year's budget negotiations.
13 The proposed shift in funding from the State to the
14 City is irresponsible, unilateral and it just doesn't
15 make any sense for the City to go--to--to--to accept
16 that. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. I want
18 to thank all the panelists for coming, and at this
19 time we're going to ask the Clerk to call the roll.

20 CLERK: William Martin, Committee Clerk,
21 roll call vote Committee on Higher Education.
22 Resolution 732-A, Chair Barron. [mic squealing]

23 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I vote aye, and I
24 encourage all of my colleagues to vote aye.

25 CLERK: Vacca.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I vote aye.

3 CLERK: Rodriguez.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Aye and I want
5 to say thank to Barbara and all the members of the
6 PSC for always being a strong voice. The main reason
7 why we are here is only because we got the degree,
8 and also because we have great mentors who made the
9 PSC. So thank you and I vote aye.

10 CLERK: Cabrera.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Aye

12 CLERK: Williams.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I vote aye as
14 well, but I'm hoping that the Governor will keep
15 political beefs and political realm where they
16 belong, and stop taking it out on people in the City
17 of New York where it's very, very harmful. Having
18 been--have being a CUNY grad, this is really touching
19 me in a--in a personal space that we might be
20 making it even more unaffordable for people to get a--
21 -a quality education. So I stand with Barbara Bowen
22 and the PSC in fighting whatever I can do. Thank
23 you. I vote aye.

24 CLERK: Cumbo.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I just want to
3 thank Chair Barron for continuing to be vocal about
4 this whether it's in City Hall or if it's on the
5 streets or the Brooklyn Bridge, she has continued to
6 be a voice that has is an incredible and powerful
7 voice on this particular issue, which is still
8 shocking that one of the major budget items would be
9 the education of young people particularly of color
10 who are our future. And it continues to baffle me as
11 well as disappoint that we continue to not only
12 support students in that way, but the critical role
13 that our professors play in nurturing and guiding
14 young people all throughout that process. And they
15 should not have not to make decisions about whether
16 they can afford to stay at CUNY or to help a young
17 person with their thesis. These are the hard choices
18 that many young people have to make, and these are
19 decisions--the hard decisions that our professors
20 have to make. So I proudly vote aye and will
21 continue to stand with you Chair Barron. Thank you.

22 CLERK: By a vote of 6 in the
23 affirmative, 0 in the negative and no abstentions,
24 the item is adopted.

2 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you and I want
3 to thank my can--my Counsel Jeff Campagna. I want to
4 thank Chloe Rivera and I want to thank my staffer
5 Ndigo Washington, and this is very--a very important
6 resolution and we look forward to the full body
7 adopting at tomorrow's meeting, the Stated Meeting.
8 Thank you and this hearing is adjourned.

9 [gavel]

10 [background comments]

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date April 7, 2016