

Marchi warns he may veto CUNY funds

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Unhappy that money to consolidate the College of Staten Island has been omitted from the package, state Sen. John Marchi yesterday said he threatened to veto a proposal to authorize public borrowing for \$583 million in city university construction.

The Public Authorities Control Board, of which Marchi is a member, initially planned to meet in Albany yesterday to discuss construction plans for 12 campuses of the City University of New York (CUNY). But Marchi said he spoke with the board's two other members by telephone yesterday, telling them he couldn't support the massive proposal without the \$20 million initially set aside to develop a CSI campus in Willowbrook.

CSI buildings are now dispersed on two campuses, in St. George and Sunnyside.

The authority, which requires a unanimous vote to pass funding proposals, decided to postpone its meeting at least until today. A statement issued by the senator's office late yesterday said Marchi

had "effectively blocked" the measure.

"I told them that (if) you put that up to a vote now it will go down. I'm prepared to veto it," Marchi said by telephone last night. "We're not going to be frozen out on this."

A control board meeting could be called as early as today or as late as Monday or Tuesday, the senator said.

The borrowing plan, which included funding for CSI, was signed into law Tuesday by Gov. Mario M. Cuomo. But Marchi said the state Dormitory Authority omitted the CSI funding from the latest list it submitted to the control board, explaining that a required environmental impact statement hadn't been submitted.

Marchi said his threatened veto may pressure the Dormitory Authority and CUNY into giving a higher priority to CSI's plan to move into grounds of the Staten Island Developmental Center, which is scheduled to close next year. "I don't think I'm going to have to resort to a veto," the senator said.

In the statement from his office, Marchi said the city in February insisted on taking the lead in preparing the environmental study for CSI, but since "has made no meaningful effort to date" to produce such documentation.

He said the Dormitory Authority usually handles such studies and questioned why the city insisted on becoming involved. Marchi said the city's delay in

producing the study "can only be interpreted as a means of frustrating the desirable relocation of the College of Staten Island to the Willowbrook site."

"It appears with respect to Willowbrook ... that private sector and/or other undisclosed interests are attempting to prevail over the public good," Marchi said in the statement.

Marchi didn't elaborate last night on who or what he thinks those interests might be.

"I regret that it has become necessary for me to frustrate the construction plans of CUNY to assure that the College of Staten Island receives its just share," Marchi said in the statement, later adding, "but I insist, nonetheless, that Staten Island receive just treatment."

A CUNY spokesman, Rita Rodin, expressed surprise late yesterday when informed of the senator's remarks. She said CUNY believes that CSI is still a part of the \$583 million package and called the environmental statement "a technicality" that "should not hold up the approval of the bond."

Likewise, William D. Hassett Jr., chairman of the Dormitory Authority, said last night he has directed his staff to work with CUNY officials to address Marchi's concerns. He attributed the delay in completing the environmental study to "an unfortunate bureaucratic mixup."

"The Dormitory Authority is absolutely not opposed to furthering the Staten Island project. However, we can't issue some-

thing that isn't legally and technically in shape," Hassett said.

Marchi, though, has his doubts. If completing an environmental study is a technicality, Marchi said he wonders why its absence compelled the Dormitory Authority to remove the CSI funding.

He said offered support for re-financing \$320 million that Marchi said could save CUNY more than \$30 million in debt service costs. He said the Dormitory rejected the offer.