

## 'Secret' Rowan merger plan blasted

### Foes: 'Fix was in' for union with Rutgers

*By Jim Walsh*

Critics of a planned merger between Rutgers-Camden and Rowan University on Monday lambasted a "secret report" prepared for Rowan officials, saying it advises against public discussion of the controversial proposal.

"This secret report shows that the fix was in long before the merger was even presented to the public," asserted Sen. Frank R. Lautenberg, D-N.J. "It's sad that a \$30,000 report was commissioned by proponents of the merger to advise them on how to avoid the facts and mislead the public."

A Rowan spokesman rejected that view, saying the Glassboro school had merely hired a consulting firm to help plan for a possible merger. The resulting document suggests strategies toward creation of a combined institution called "New Rowan University," including an emphasis on upbeat forecasts and a willingness to outlast opponents.

"There's no secret report," said school spokesman Joe Cardona. "All this is, is us doing our due diligence."

Cardona said the report was commissioned by Rowan and Cooper University Hospital in Camden, its partner in a medical school to open this fall.

The consultant's report advises merger advocates to express optimism over the combined school's future, suggesting a priority should be the hiring of a university president "with a broad national reputation" to serve as "principal spokesman and cheerleader."

While acknowledging the planned merger will stir protests, the report urges supporters to "spend as little time as possible explaining how and why the protests have missed the point." Instead, it says, proponents "should spend the great majority of their time describing the opportunities (a merger) makes possible."

## New Rowan U

The report also says supporters should push toward a July 2012 start date for "New Rowan University," even if Rutgers-Camden employees slow or stall the process with court challenges.

"If Rowan, Cooper University Hospital and the State of New Jersey make clear their intention to establish a major research university in South Jersey, we believe that sooner or later the great majority of faculty at Rutgers-Camden will ask to join," the report says.

That view drew a scathing response from Adam Scales, a law professor at the Rutgers-Camden campus.

"Rather than spend money actually studying (whether) eliminating Rutgers from South Jersey was a good idea, the document focuses significant attention on how to "sell" this half-baked proposal to the public, and cram it down the throat of Rutgers-Camden" he

said.

At the same time, the report called for the development of two budget strategies for New Rowan University — with one assuming that operations might begin “at least initially” without Rutgers-Camden’s campus.

The 15-page report is dated Jan. 26, one day after Christie announced plans to merge the South Jersey schools. Cardona said it was commissioned in November, when word first circulated that a merger was under consideration by a Christie-appointed commission. The report was prepared by The Learning Alliance for Higher Education, a Philadelphia-based consulting firm.

## **Poll results**

Meanwhile, a new survey shows voters statewide remain opposed to the planned merger. A Rutgers-Eagleton Poll of registered voters found 59 percent oppose the merger, with 19 percent in support and 22 percent undecided. An earlier poll in February found 57 percent against the plan and 22 percent in favor

The poll found opposition has grown among Democrats to 77 percent, even though that party’s South Jersey leadership is strongly supporting the merger.

“Those working toward the merger have apparently not made their case to New Jerseyans over the past six weeks,” said poll director David Redlawsk, a professor of political science at Rutgers.

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