

July 7, 2010

## Paterson's vetoes take effect; budget still not in place

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ALBANY -- Gov. David Paterson's office delivered about 6,700 vetoes to the Legislature Wednesday --- officially cutting millions in education aid and funding to nonprofit groups that lawmakers will have a difficult time restoring.

The vetoes, completed last week, formally take effect now that they have been sent to the Legislature.

The vetoes were also delivered to the secretary of state's office, in accordance with state law.

A parade of staff members from the governor's chief counsel's office delivered the large stacks of vetoes shortly after 2 p.m., two days before the July 9 deadline.

Paterson eliminated an estimated 6,709 spending items out of budget bills approved by lawmakers in June. Many of them were for "member items" commonly derided as pork-barrel projects.

The member items being cut by Paterson is money that was approved in prior budget years, but had been re-appropriated in the 2010-11 spending plan. There were no new member items in the 2010-11 budget. Member items may only be used for non-profit organizations.

The governor also axed \$600 million in education aid, half of which would have been used by wealthy school districts to lower school taxes.

Also cut was an additional \$95 million that would have been used for community colleges and other higher-education projects around the state.

His office installed a live Internet feed of a marathon signing session last week. Paterson spokesman Morgan Hook said Paterson either initialed or signed his full signature to all veto messages -- a process that took seven hours over two days.

Hook also said that the vetoes were not being used as a negotiating tool in order to compel lawmakers to take up proposals such as a contingency plan in case up to \$1 billion in federal Medicaid funding doesn't come to the state or allow state university campuses to set their own tuition rates and undertake economic-development projects.

"They should be doing FMAP (the Medicaid plan) because it's the right thing to do," Hook said. "We're not negotiating on those points."

More work remains to be done on the 2010-11 budget, which was due on April 1.

Approval for the year's spending has been completed, but the Senate must return to Albany to pass revenue bills that include eliminating the \$110 sales-tax cap on clothing and footwear and expanding the hours that video-lottery terminals may be used.

The Assembly passed the revenue bill last week.

Several Democratic senators are holding out on approving the budget until a version of the state

university overhaul plan -- opposed by key lawmakers in the Assembly -- is in place.

Paterson's office believes that without the revenue bill, the state would face at least a \$1 billion deficit.

Elizabeth Lynam, the deputy research director at nonpartisan Citizens Budget Commission, said the lack of action will become a serious problem for the state.

"They've got to go back and do that revenue bill otherwise there will be a serious deficit later," she said.

Lawmakers have not been paid since April 1 and will not receive their back pay until the revenue bill is approved. It remains unclear when the Senate will return to take up the revenue measure.

The Legislature has until Dec. 31 to override Paterson's vetoes, although doing so would be difficult, if not impossible.

Democrats, who hold a 32-30 advantage over Republicans, narrowly lead the Senate. An override would require a two-thirds vote, or at least 10 Republican senators breaking ranks.

Reaction to the vetoes from lawmakers was mixed.

"I applaud the governor for slowing the growth of spending in state government - by his extenders and by standing up to his colleagues in both houses," said Sen. John Bonacic, R-Mt. Hope, Orange County, referring to Paterson's use of emergency-appropriation bills to pass large portions of the budget.

"He is being courageous and yet has been thrown under the bus by the leadership in both houses."

Assemblywoman Amy Paulin said she was hopeful some of the cuts would be restored.

"The budget isn't done yet, there's still opportunity for negotiation and compromise," said Paulin, D-Scarsdale, Westchester County. "Vetoes shouldn't be indiscriminate like they are. There should be some rhyme or reason to them."

Paulin added, however, that she understood the need to make cuts during a difficult budget year.

Sen. Joseph Robach, R-Greece, Monroe County, knocked the budget process for lacking openness, but said the spending had to be tightened.

"So many people in my district are asking that we tighten our belts just like businesses and working families and people on a fixed income," Robach said. "So I may not like every individual veto, but I think that's better than continuing excessive spending and chasing people out of New York state."

In statement, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, D-Manhattan, said the vetoes were "disappointing."

"We are saddened that the governor also chose to renege on commitments of funding support from prior years to non-profits and community-based organizations that run free clinics, care for children and the elderly, offer counseling for crime victims and provide other vital services to New Yorkers throughout the state," he said.

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