

Beat: Local

DEAL REACHED ON NEW YORK STATE BUDGET

ETHICS MEASURES ARE INCLUDED

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USPA NEWS - Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and legislative leaders on Sunday night reached an agreement on the next state budget, capping weeks of deliberations over issues like deterring public corruption and improving public schools.

The pact includes education reforms as well as several new ethics measures that Mr. Cuomo proposed in response to the seemingly never-ending series of scandals in Albany. The marathon of malfeasance was punctuated in January by the arrest of Assemblyman Sheldon Silver, who at the time was the Assembly speaker, on federal corruption charges.

The budget, which still needs the formal approval of lawmakers, would be the state's fifth in a row passed by the April 1 deadline. All of those spending plans were crafted by Mr. Cuomo, who has proudly boasted of his perennial punctuality in a capital where budgets had been chronically late.

"With this agreement, we address intractable problems that have vexed our state for generations," Mr. Cuomo said in a statement. Mr. Cuomo had proposed a \$150 billion spending plan. The fine print of the full budget had not been completed by late Sunday night, and details were scarce on much of its contents.

But Mr. Cuomo, who tried to persuade lawmakers to approve big policy changes as part of the annual spending plan, made large concessions to secure what would most likely be an on-time budget. He dropped a proposal to raise the minimum wage and a plan to offer state tuition aid to undocumented students, called the Dream Act. Both were opposed by Republicans, who control the State Senate.

Mr. Cuomo also jettisoned a proposal to create new oversight for cases when unarmed civilians are killed by the police; a tax credit meant to ease the burden of high property taxes; and new policies on sexual assault that would apply to all of the state's colleges and universities.

One component of the governor's budget proposal that did survive was doling out a \$5.4 billion windfall resulting from settlements the state reached with financial institutions. The governor's office said \$1.5 billion of that money would go toward an upstate economic development program; another \$500 million would go toward expanding broadband access.

In the final days of budget talks, Mr. Cuomo worked to overcome disagreements over two particularly contentious policy areas he wanted to address in his budget: education and government ethics.

The governor had dangled a \$1.1 billion increase in education aid in exchange for the Legislature agreeing to pass a series of reforms, including tying teacher evaluations more closely to students' state test scores, making it more difficult for teachers to receive tenure and allowing the state to take over low-performing schools.

Teachers' unions energetically opposed the governor's proposals. School administrators and parents objected to the proposal on teacher evaluations, saying that it would increase the focus on testing. Lawmakers criticized his effort to tie school funding with the approval of policy changes.

In the end, the budget will include an even larger increase in education aid "“ about \$1.6 billion, according to Assembly Democrats. Cuomo administration officials said the budget would establish parameters for teacher evaluations that would result in a more rigorous evaluation system; the changes would be left to the State Education Department to work out.

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