

Buckling under budget crunch

"There is a scheme where the special interests control the budget process in Albany and get more money for their industries. That's the whole game."
— Gov. Andrew Cuomo, speaking at Wagner College about the state budget



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE/JAN SOMMA-HAMMEL

Times are tough all over and Gov. Cuomo brought that message home in a speech delivered yesterday at Wagner College. To address a \$10 billion state deficit, the governor proposes a 2.7 percent general spending cut — including 7.3 percent for schools and raises the specter of as many as 9,800 state layoffs.

He also would increase patients' copayment for various Medicaid-funded medical services.

Also, Island hospitals, nursing homes and other health care providers would be hurt by Cuomo's proposed 2-percent cut in Medicaid funding.

City Councilman James Oddo said the governor gets to the "root causes" of the state's economic problems, adding, "The day of reckoning is here, and there will be pain."

For the story on Cuomo's austerity plan, see Page A 9.

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LOCAL NEWS



"We spend too much money. You cannot spend more money than you make in life."
— GOV. ANDREW CUOMO ON THE STATE'S FISCAL PREDICAMENT

Governor's Rx: Slash state spending

Cuomo preaches austerity in appearance at Wagner College; Dem rips special interest 'puppet-masters'

By TOM WROBLESKI
ADVANCE POLITICAL EDITOR

Saying that the state is at an economic "crossroads," Gov. Andrew Cuomo yesterday delivered a message of fiscal austerity that he said would affect the lives of every New Yorker.

Speaking to about 350 people at Wagner College's Main Hall Theatre, Cuomo said the state's budget woes have a simple cause.

"We spend too much money," he said. "You cannot spend more money than you make in life."

Displaying some of the silver-tongued flash and humor that is a hallmark of his father, former Gov. Mario Cuomo, the governor said that only two groups don't understand that rule: The leaders of the state Legislature and "my three daughters."

"The good news," Cuomo said, "is that my daughters are making progress."

Cuomo, who unveiled his budget last month, has been visiting communities across the state in a bid to drum up support for his plan.

The speech yesterday drew borough elected officials and members of the business and civic communities, as well as students from Wagner College and Staten Island Technical High School.

\$10 BILLION GAP

Cuomo said he would look to close a \$10 billion budget gap by cutting education spending by about \$1.5 billion and Medicaid spending by about \$1 billion.

He said that proposed 13 percent increases in spending in both areas are "unsustainable, unnecessary and unjustifiable."

Cuomo said that those sought-after increases were driven by lobbying from special interests, whom he compared to "puppet masters."

"There is a scheme where the special interests control the budget process in Albany and get more money for their industries," he said. "That's the whole game."

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has said the education cut will force him to lay off more than 4,000 teachers, but Cuomo has disputed that layoffs are necessary.

Cuomo contends that cuts to education can be blunted by raiding money set in reserve; tapping unspent federal funds; freezing wages for teachers and management, and cutting salaries for superintendents.

He said the state could save \$500 to \$600 million if those in education paid the same for health care benefits as state workers, and said that school districts could also be consolidated.

Cuomo said that families across the country have been



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE PHOTOS/JAN SOMMA-HAMMEL



ABOVE: Students at Wagner College applaud Gov. Andrew Cuomo during his speech on the Grymes Hill campus yesterday. LEFT: Gov. Cuomo reflects before delivering his budget plan.



Lynn Kelly, new president and CEO of Snug Harbor Cultural Center, listens as Gov. Andrew Cuomo speaks about the state budget.

doing more with less during the recession.

"It's time that government goes through the same exercise," he said.

Pledging to lead by example, Cuomo said he would reduce state agency spending by 10 percent, including wage, salary and pension savings. He said he would lay off 9,800 workers only under a "worst-case scenario."

Cuomo also said he would look to eliminate 3,500 prison beds and reform the juvenile justice system.

With New York the highest-taxed state in the nation, Cuomo said tough decisions need to be made now to ensure the state's future.

"On one side, you have the road to ruin," he said. "On the other side, you have the road to success."

Speaking to reporters afterward, Cuomo defended his bill to create a merit-based system for evaluating teachers.

AT ODDS WITH MAYOR

The bill has put Cuomo at odds with Bloomberg, who wants to change the law mandating that teacher firings be based on seniority only.

While the two have put competing bills before lawmakers, Cuomo said the two are not so far apart.

"This is a very complicated, heated topic that is very important to the labor movement across the state and all over the country," he said.

The Island press conference was Cuomo's first in

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For highlights on Cuomo's presentation, go to silive.com/video.

New York City as governor, aides said.

Borough President James P. Molinaro said there was nothing in the speech he disagreed with.

"He realizes what has to be done," he said.

Introducing Cuomo to the crowd, Assemblyman Matthew Titone (D-North Shore) said, "There is no doubt this budget will promote growth in our economy."

City Councilman James Oddo (R-Mid-Island/Brooklyn) said Cuomo would attack the "root causes" of the state's economic problems.

"The day of reckoning is here, and there will be pain," he said.

Staten Island Technical High School students praised Cuomo for being straightforward, and said his speech left them optimistic about the future. They said Cuomo was successfully restoring their faith in government.

Tech senior Andrew Weisberg said he hoped that any layoffs would come only "as a last resort."

— Advance staff writer
Nicole Cusolito contributed to this report.

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