

PARTIES CLASH AS ALBANY EDGES CLOSER TO SHUTDOWN

Thursday, June 10, 2010

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Published: June 9, 2010

NYTimes: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/10/nyregion/10shutdown.html?nl=nyregion&emc=ura1>

ALBANY — State officials began preparing on Wednesday for what they said would be the first government shutdown in New York history as prospects for the passage of another emergency budget bill grew cloudy.

Democratic and Republican legislative leaders engaged in an acrimonious public meeting in the Capitol with Gov. David A. Paterson. Republicans charged that they had been shut out of negotiations, and Democrats insisted that the Republicans shoulder some responsibility for averting a shutdown.

With no agreement yet reached on a budget for the fiscal year that began April 1, the state has been relying on a series of emergency bills to stay in operation. But Republicans have voted uniformly against the last three bills. After the last vote, two Democratic senators said they would oppose the next emergency bill, suggesting that Senate leaders might not be able to muster enough votes to pass it.

As a result, administration officials have started huddling with their counterparts at the state comptroller's office to work through the consequences of a shutdown, warning that if the Legislature fails to approve the next emergency budget bill, due on Monday, the state would face unprecedented chaos.

"We don't have an answer to many of these questions because we've never shut down the government before," said Robert L. Megna, the state budget director.

Without the ability to pay workers or even guarantee their salaries in the future, officials said, they could be forced to close down state agencies immediately after the last emergency bill expires on Monday. Administration officials said they were still searching for a legal mechanism to continue financing essential public safety services, like prisons and the State Police.

But courtrooms, parks, highway rest stops and even the state terrorism hot line could all close. A shutdown could also affect some county and local workers, like those who administer Medicaid benefits. Though such workers are employed by the counties, they must gain access to state computer systems to process claims.

Since the last budget expired on March 31, the State Senate and the Assembly, both controlled by Democrats, have not come close to reaching a budget deal with Mr. Paterson.

On Monday, with negotiations seemingly at an impasse, [Mr. Paterson inserted sweeping cuts](#) to health care spending in the latest emergency bill, essentially forcing lawmakers to accept a portion of his budget proposal.

Republicans in the Senate voted uniformly against the bill, even though they had publicly favored Medicaid cuts, saying that Mr. Paterson's cuts did not go far enough. On the other side of the aisle, two Democratic state senators — [Rubén Díaz Sr.](#) and [Pedro Espada Jr.](#), both of the Bronx — said they would not vote for any more emergency bills that included major budget cuts.

That move raised the prospect of a shutdown, since without Republican votes, Senate Democrats, who have a 32-to-30 majority in the chamber, must act unanimously to pass legislation.

At the leaders' meeting, Mr. Paterson said he would not give in to "thug activity," which some took as a reference to the two Democratic senators. After the meeting, the governor criticized [Dean G. Skelos](#), the Senate Republican leader, and blamed him for forcing the state to the brink of catastrophe.

"I'm shocked, and I'm appalled," Mr. Paterson said. "Senator Skelos has told us that he and the Republican senators are going to shut down the government, and they would shut down the government over something about meetings they haven't been invited to and process issues."

Pressed on whether his conference would provide any votes to pass the emergency bill, Mr. Skelos insisted that Democratic lawmakers who control both chambers would be to blame for any shutdown. "This is a failure of Democrat leadership in the state," Mr. Skelos said. Regarding a shutdown, he said: "It's an unfortunate way to go, but we are not going to just automatically vote for something because they have failed, as leaders, to put something together."

Mr. Skelos softened his tone later in the day after a private meeting with Mr. Paterson, suggesting that some Republicans might vote for the next emergency bill if the governor included some of the Republicans' proposals to further cut Medicaid and other spending.

But Mr. Díaz did not appear inclined to relent.

"The governor called me a thug," he said. "When I pick a fight, I don't go back. Let's see what a thug can do."