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## News Coverage on Budget

### Lawmakers may gain from on-time budget

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<http://www.newsday.com/news/region-state/lawmakers-may-gain-from-on-time-budget-...> <sup>[3]</sup>

Political leaders took bows last week as [New York](#) <sup>[4]</sup> adopted a \$132.6 billion budget before the deadline for the second straight year. Leaders said they achieved the feat because of a new spirit of cooperation permeating the Capitol.

But the reality is, rank-and-file legislators said Friday, that the legislature's loss of power over the last decade has all but ended the days of long stalemates with the governor's office.

Once, legislators' best budget strategy was to make demands, stall and wait out a governor. Now, because of a court decision and new budget tactics, if lawmakers get to April 1 without a spending plan, a governor can put forth his own budget -- without the lawmakers' input -- and force them to either accept his plan or shut down the government, a "nuclear" option no lawmaker wants. These days, the little leverage they have is to negotiate early and get credit for meeting the deadline.

"The thing that's new is that the governor has a Sword of Damocles hanging over the legislative leaders' heads -- and they know it," said Assemb. Philip Boyle (R-[Bay Shore](#) <sup>[5]</sup>), in his 17th year in that house. "They realize if they don't cut deals and pass the budget on time, then it's possible they get nothing and the governor gets everything he wants."

New York might never again see the 100-day stalemates that marked the Pataki years, lawmakers said.

"Now, we're politically stronger when we negotiate [the budget] early," said Assembly Majority Leader [Ronald Canestrari](#) <sup>[6]</sup> (D-Cohoes). "The dynamic has changed. No question."

For years, New York's late state budgets triggered public criticism, embarrassing headlines and hand-wringing by creditors, local governments and school districts awaiting the outcome. Beginning in 1985, the state went 21 straight years without making the April 1 start-of-the-fiscal-

year deadline. Three times under [Republican](#) <sup>[7]</sup> Gov. [George Pataki](#) <sup>[8]</sup> the standoff wasn't settled until August.

The game changed in 2010 under then-Gov. [David A. Paterson](#) <sup>[9]</sup>. That August, with the budget way overdue, he decided not to send legislators a typical emergency spending bill to keep government running. Instead, he submitted his entire budget proposal, forcing them to accept it or shut down state government. Legislators didn't challenge it in court, making the governor the winner.

Since then, Gov. Andrew M. [Cuomo](#) <sup>[10]</sup> has achieved on-time budgets in each of his first two years in office. He's bargained to give [Republicans](#) <sup>[7]</sup> and [Democrats](#) <sup>[11]</sup> things they can cheer in the budget. And, not to be underplayed, he paved the way for this year's budget by reaching agreements on hikes to school aid, Medicaid and taxes months ago, lawmakers noted.

But he's also used the April 1 deadline as a threat -- and benefited from it, analysts said. He's also helped by a legal victory -- a 2001 ruling by the state Court of Appeals -- Pataki scored that greatly limited the legislature's ability to amend a governor's budget.

"Those factors basically have eliminated any incentives for waiting" to bargain, [Baruch College](#) <sup>[12]</sup> political science professor Doug Muzzio said. "Even if you have a weak governor, you probably won't have very late budgets" in the future.

That said, Muzzio added that "you can't rule out the personal in budget negotiations" and in Cuomo "you've got a very powerful institution occupied by a very strategically savvy governor."

Cuomo has forged a working relationship with [Senate](#) <sup>[13]</sup> Majority Leader [Dean Skelos](#) <sup>[14]</sup> (R-Rockville Centre), who has supported the governor's spending cuts, and Assembly Speaker [Sheldon Silver](#) <sup>[15]</sup> (D-Manhattan), who championed tax hikes on the rich.

"This has been the best two years I've had in [Albany](#) <sup>[16]</sup>. The best," said Skelos, a senator since 1985 when the streak of late budgets began. "The three of us agree this is the way we should be governing."

At a news conference wrapping up the budget, Cuomo declared: "This state government has come a very long way in a very short time."

Jeffrey Stonecash, a [Syracuse University](#) <sup>[17]</sup> professor and former Assembly staffer, said Cuomo used the combination of the economic [recession](#) <sup>[18]</sup> and gridlock in [Washington, D.C.](#) <sup>[19]</sup>, to prod lawmakers to work cooperatively.

"The big test is will they be as compliant when the economy improves?" Stonecash said. "I don't think we've seen the last of late state budgets."

Even if they can't always beat the deadline, lawmakers said they believe that timely budgets will become the rule.

"I think we're setting a standard where this becomes the norm," said Assemb. [Joseph Morelle](#) [20] (D-Irondequoit), who has been in office since 1991. "The dynamics of the discussion have changed. Newer [legislators] are asking why wouldn't we always do it this way?"

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