

Island untouched as Cuomo vetoes budget items

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Staten Island was unscathed yesterday when Gov. Andrew Cuomo vetoed \$640,000 in what he said were "new member items" in the state budget.

But some Senate Democrats weren't so lucky.

No member items from Island lawmakers were among the items Cuomo struck from the \$132.6 billion budget.

Cuomo removed a total of 129 member items from the spending plan.

Member items are grants given by lawmakers to non-profit organizations in their districts.

Cuomo's vetoes were aimed at putting a stop the practice of lawmakers taking previously approved but unspent funds and redirecting them to other organizations.

Under Cuomo's definition, that amounts to "new" member-item spending.

"I understand the concept that there were past dollars allocated to member items by past governors in past budget agreements, and that is what it is," Cuomo said during a radio interview yesterday. "I believe these are new member items, however."

No new funds for member items have been included in the last three budgets, but the spending plans maintained grants that were previously pledged.

Members of the Senate Democratic minority, who have battled Cuomo, took the brunt of the cuts.

A published report said 99 vetoes eliminated money for Democratic initiatives. Only 12 of the vetoes, totaling \$152,000, were aimed at Senate Republicans.

The vetoed items include grants to Little Leagues, veterans groups, libraries, museums and historical organizations.

"The question is, were Democrats being hurt for partisan political reasons for not supporting certain things?" said former Democratic state Sen. Seymour Lachman, director of the Hugh L. Carey Institute for Government Reform at Wagner College. "For being the minority party?"

"It's nothing nefarious," said state Sen. Diane Savino (D-North Shore/Brooklyn), who is part of the breakaway Independent Democratic Conference that has also locked horns with the Democratic leadership. "The governor said 'no new member items.' I guess it depends on what you consider new."

Ms. Savino, who said none of her items were cut, said it was now up to lawmakers to convince Cuomo that the spending he vetoed should be restored to the budget.

But Lachman, author of "Three Men in a Room," a book that examined Albany dysfunction, said that member items themselves were

the problem.

"There is no formula to make them fair, equitable and transparent," said Lachman, who represented part of the Island in the Senate. "There is not today a fair way of allocating them."

Lachman said member items are doled out based on lawmaker seniority or which

party is in the majority, be it the Senate or the Assembly.

He said member-item spending should be based on the needs of different organizations, with an evaluation process put in place to see if the money spent actually addresses the problems it's meant to solve.

A spokesman for Assem-

bly Speaker Sheldon Silver said Cuomos vetoes affected 13 Assembly grants totaling \$55,000.

— *Associated Press material was used in this report.*

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CUOMO: Strikes down "new member items" dear to Dems