

Weingarten, Reid & McNally

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STEVE WEINGARTEN, ESQ. | ROBERT REID | SHAUNEEN MCNALLY | MARCY SAVAGE | PADRAIC B

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The first public leaders meeting in more than two months occurred this morning with all five leaders at the table. In his opening statement, Governor Paterson opened by stating that the deep spending cuts to education, health care and a host of other areas is something he is forced to do as a result of the state's ongoing fiscal crisis.

"However, it is what it is," Paterson said. "We're in the situation that we're in. Other states have confronted it. Many states have not confronted it. Because of that, five to 10 states are in jeopardy of going in default...No state has gone into default since Nevada did in 1930. But that's where America is right now. [...] To this point, New York is not on the list of the top 20 states whose deficit is a significant portion of their GDP, but we could get there in a heartbeat if we don't act and we don't act swiftly."

Senate Democratic Conference Leader John Sampson reiterated his conference's desire for property tax relief, saying the issue is "not just about checks" to be sent to senior in an election year, but "some sort of structural reform." Sampson called for the State to move to GAAP budgeting which would, among other things, move the end of the fiscal year to June.

Regarding ongoing budget negotiations, Sampson said he'll be naming members to the budget conference subcommittees today.

Speaker Silver then took the floor and stressed the parties should end their engagement in "political theater" and get something done. He then said the Assembly Democrats won't agree to anything they feel puts a disproportionate share of pain onto "working men and woman". Speaker Silver has yet to commit to budget conference committees due to the lack of a fiscal plan but indicated that he would be willing to have a general conference committee.

Senate Minority Leader Dean Skelos railed against the fact that there have been no conference committee meetings and insisting the GOP has been "left out of the process." Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb condemned the entire budget process, saying it has been a "disaster," adding: "We've wasted 50 days since April 1."

Following the opening statements, Minority Leader Skelos went toe to toe with Speaker Silver regarding cuts to Medicaid and the Speaker's reluctance to begin the conference committee process.

Governor Paterson has called another leaders meeting for next Tuesday and has asked that conference committees get underway as soon as possible. Paterson also stated that he will call special session next Thursday and Friday so "all conventioners might want to think about staying in Albany next week." The Democratic State Convention begins next week in Westchester.