

DiNapoli rips into 'time wa\$ter' pols

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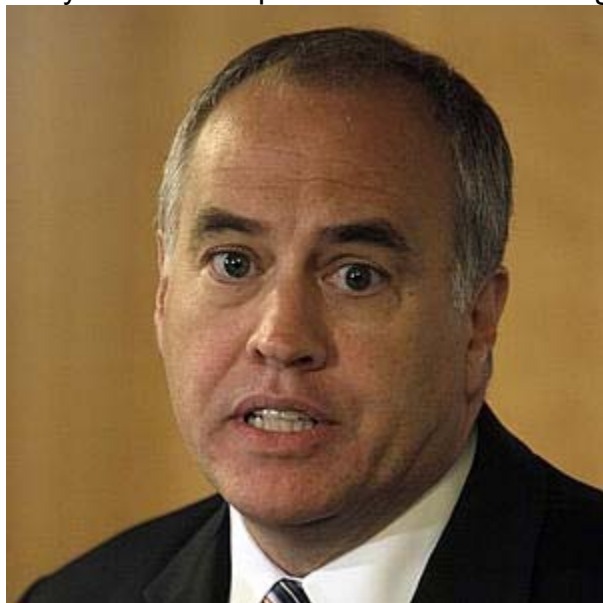
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ALBANY -- State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli yesterday blasted his fellow Democrats for "wasted time" and warned that further delay on the weeks-late budget could devastate schools and local governments.

The comptroller accused Gov. Paterson and legislative bosses of unfairly leaving local leaders "in the dark" as the state drifted into its seventh week without a balanced 2010-11 spending plan.

The leaders have been at loggerheads for weeks despite daily threats of facility closures and service cuts.

"I called last year's budget a 'buy time' budget," DiNapoli said as he released an analysis on the impact of the overdue budget. "This year, it's just wasted time."



"Local governments and school districts are putting together their budgets, and they're doing it in the dark with no clear picture of how much state aid they'll get."

Before entering a meeting with Assembly Democrats, Paterson acknowledged that he believed a no-layoff pledge he gave labor unions last year could be broken.

"Even if there was a signature of mine on it, if there are intervening events that are outside the contemplation of the parties, such as this recession, that could theoretically be a way to lay people off,"

New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli.

AP

Paterson said. "But as I said, it's not a decision I've made. It's more speculation."

Mayor Bloomberg says the lack of a final state budget has left him no choice but to plan for 11,000 city job cuts, which he says are needed to make up for an estimated \$1.3 billion cut in the city's share of state aid. Paterson argues the hit to the city treasury would be closer to \$749 million.

The critique by the state's top auditor came hours before Paterson and top staff huddled behind closed doors with Assembly Democrats in an effort to bridge the budget divide. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan) backs borrowing \$2 billion to fund restorations to education and health-care aide.

Paterson, however, has held out for more cuts and focused instead pressuring public-employee unions to accept \$250 million in contract concessions.

His plan to put 100,000 state workers on furlough, which has been at least temporarily blocked by a federal judge, prompted several Assembly Democrats to stage a "sit-in" in the governor's office last week.

The governor again called on lawmakers to slash state spending and predicted the failure to do so on the local level would lead voters to reject school budgets across the state today.

"People will be very surprised when the public votes down a lot of those plans, saying spend less money, saying you can't spend money that you don't have, saying it's time for us to make the tough decisions," Paterson told reporters.