

Session showcases dysfunction

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ALBANY -- It was the Legislature's version of "Who's on First?"

Not only were lawmakers not in agreement on the policy content of bills needed to finish up the 2010-11 budget, some appeared to lose track of where those measures were in the legislative process.

As the Senate went into extraordinary session Wednesday night, members of the Democratic majority asserted that they hadn't received the bills that Gov. [David Paterson](#) said he was sending them, including a revenue measure to cap off the budget which was due April 1.

"We won't be acting on any bills tonight," said Deputy Democratic Leader [Jeff Klein](#) of the Bronx.

He was right on that count. But as it turned out, the governor's bills actually had been sent to the Senate earlier in the day -- but were once again rejected, left in a pile in the hallway.

Without the bills, the Senate adjourned after about 10 minutes in which Republican members peppered presiding [Democrat Neil Breslin](#) of Bethlehem with questions about the status of the bills.

When it was over, majority [Democrats](#) hustled off to a closed-door conference as Republicans fumed.

"Bills or no bills -- they don't even know," said [Roy McDonald](#), R-Saratoga Springs. "Let's vote already."

Over in the Assembly, majority Democrats followed a similar script, gaveling in and out before heading into a closed-door conference. Assembly members had at least accepted all of Paterson's bills, except his revenue measure. Unlike the Senate, the Assembly passed a revenue bill agreed upon by the Legislature almost a month ago. It remains stalled in the Senate.

Still, there was halting progress.

Minutes after adjourning, Senate Democrats relented and accepted the governor's bills - except, once again, his revenue measure. That means they might at least debate issues offered by Paterson, including a proposed property tax cap, a Medicaid shortfall contingency plan and variable tuition for SUNY and CUNY campuses.

Lawmakers were scheduled to return this morning. There was, however, another problem: At least four Senate Democrats -- [Tom Duane](#), [Joseph Addabbo](#), [George Onorato](#) and [Malcolm Smith](#), who was on vacation -- were missing.

Democrats have a narrow 32-30-seat majority, and Republicans have been voting "no" on almost all budget measures, meaning the Democrats need all 32 to pass a budget. Buffalo-area GOP Assemblyman [Jack Quinn](#) summed up Wednesday's action: "This gives 'dysfunctional' a bad name."