

# Senate bills spur talking

Measures intended as "negotiating points"

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ALBANY -- It's unclear when they'll return to session, but Democrats who control the state Senate introduced two bills designed to be "negotiating points" as they work toward passing the last piece of the state budget.

Senators left the Capitol two weeks ago without passing the final revenue bill -- which would reinstate the tax on clothing under \$110 and reduce charitable deductions for high-income earners -- that passed the Assembly. Several senators in the Democrats' 32-30 majority have refused to publicly commit to voting for the revenue plan until a deal is worked out authorizing greater flexibility for SUNY and CUNY campuses to raise tuition and enter into public-private partnerships.

Another bill would create a contingency plan in case \$1.06 billion in Medicaid assistance expected from the federal government does not materialize.

Austin Shafran, a spokesman for the Senate Democrats, said the bills will allow senators to continue to negotiate and amounts to "working to resolve the outstanding issues" with members of the Assembly and Gov. David Paterson.

The bills were introduced late Sunday night, which means they could be voted on by senators as early as Wednesday. Senators last week were told of a "tentative" plan to return to Albany tomorrow, but Shafran said late Monday that "no final determination" about a return date has been reached.

The university bill would allow individual campuses to raise their tuitions as much as 4 percent each year without the Legislature's approval. It would also increase awards from the Tuition Assistance Program for low-income students.

Members of the Assembly's Democratic conference have resisted similar proposals -- made earlier this year by Paterson -- on grounds that they reduce access to higher education. Sisa Moyo, a spokesman for Assembly Democrats, said the Medicaid contingency bill was "very similar to what we proposed," although there was "no agreement" on the higher education bill.

Sen. Bill Stachowski, D-Buffalo, remains one of the holdouts on the revenue bill as he pushes for a SUNY/CUNY plan. He has been a champion of similar proposals, saying they are key to allowing the University at Buffalo to grow as part of a larger economic revitalization plan for the city.