

Gridlock snarling session

Rent control for New York City linked to governor's support for a property tax cap, gay marriage bill

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ALBANY -- Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#) has a message for lawmakers: Don't pack your bags.

Frustrated by the state Senate's failure Wednesday night to temporarily extend rent control laws, the governor said Thursday he would keep lawmakers in town until rent regulation laws were renewed.

"We could be spending Father's Day in Albany, and beyond," said Cuomo spokesman [Josh Vlasto](#).

The 2011 session is scheduled to end Monday, although the approach of the weekend brought the suspicion that lawmakers and their staff could be occupied through the middle of next week.

The cause is standard-issue Albany gridlock, in which a lack of progress on one issue holds up a host of others. This time around, the extension or expansion of rent control has become inextricably linked to Cuomo's push for a property tax cap, a political swap that essentially fuses the needs of New York City apartment-dwellers with those of suburban homeowners. The issues, in turn, have complicated the issue of whether same-sex marriage should be legalized.

As of late Thursday, none of the issues were buttoned up.

In the lull, [Democrats](#) began squabbling among themselves about the best way to deal with the rent issue after the expiration of the rules at midnight Wednesday.

All parties agreed that the laws can be revived retroactively, but Cuomo and several leading Assembly Democrats tore into their Senate counterparts, who voted against the extension after arguing for a package that would expand the protections -- a set of measures Senate Republicans remain opposed to.

Without an extension, the rent laws are in a legal limbo that has undoubtedly created jitters among the more than 2 million New Yorkers who live in rent-regulated apartments.

"The Senate's failure to act last night was unacceptable," Cuomo said in a statement that lambasted both Republicans and Democrats in the upper chamber.

That sentiment was shared by four Assembly Democrats who put out their own scolding statement. "It is absolutely ridiculous that these senators chose not to extend the current law in order to make a political statement," said the statement, whose signatories included [Keith Wright](#), chairman of the [Manhattan Democratic Party](#).

After Cuomo's blast, the Senate Democrats who had voted against the extension were forced to defend that strategy. "We didn't play chicken. We did what the advocates and constituents asked us to do," said Sen. [Ruth Hassell-Thompson](#), Bronx/Westchester.

Rent regulation advocates say they want stronger laws that make it harder for apartments to become decontrolled when they go vacant.

Cuomo and Assembly Speaker [Sheldon Silver](#) are also pushing for stronger rent laws -- something that Silver has demanded in exchange for Assembly support on the property tax cap.

Despite the sparring statements, the Capitol on Thursday was largely devoid of the throngs of demonstrators who had swept through its halls earlier in the week. Both houses set about the regular passage of relatively non-controversial bills, as is standard for the final days of any session.

There were relatively few protesters calling for stronger rent control, increased education funding, and the success or defeat of same-sex marriage.

The Rev. [Duane Motley](#), who runs New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms, brought in clergymen from the districts of Republican senators who are considered fence-sitters on the gay-rights issue. A group of ultra-Orthodox Jews, who also oppose same-sex marriage, were meeting with numerous senators Thursday.

"We were afraid it was going to come up for a vote," said Solomon Diamant of Rockland County.

At the other end of the Capitol, Assembly members plowed through a laundry list of largely non-controversial bills that needed to get done before the end of session. As has typically been the case in past years, they had already passed the rent extension and same-sex marriage bills.

One Senate staffer in the hallway said even the temperature seemed cooler in the Assembly, where air conditioners kept the room chilled as lawmakers worked into the night.

"Why can't we have that too?" the staffer asked.