

# AS LEGISLATIVE CLOCK

Issues getting Albany attention as June 19 adjournment nears

BY YANCEY ROY

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ALBANY — Laws on marijuana, measles, police shootings and, most pressing, rent control hang in the balance as the 2019 session of the New York State Legislature ticks to a conclusion.

Rent control is the most pressing because, unlike the bulk of the thousands of other bills lawmakers will consider, the law governing about 1 million apartments is set to expire Saturday.

It's the one issue Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, the state Assembly and Senate must address.

But everything else is optional.

With Democrats in control of both houses, the tension this year isn't based on party loyalty but on branch of government: Legislators versus the governor. Cuomo has been highly critical of his fellow Democrats and relations aren't exactly great at the moment.

That's the general landscape as lawmakers head toward the scheduled June 19 adjournment. Here are some of the issues, big and small, they are looking to settle:

## RENT CONTROL

This is primarily a New York City issue, but impacts some Nassau County residents as well. With Democratic lawmakers in control, the issue isn't so much whether to extend the laws, but how far to expand them.

A key issue is whether to make it harder for apartments to transition from controlled rents to market value.

Republicans during the tenure of former Republican Gov. George Pataki had installed conditions to determine when and how apartments moved to market value. Democrats say the playing field has been tilted to-

ward landlords and want to reduce the number of apartments that make the transition; some want to outlaw conversions altogether, ensuring that apartments currently under rent control stay that way.

Others favor giving communities across New York a way to "opt in" to rent control. This idea is being pushed by some of the most liberal Democrats but opposed by moderates.

But Sen. Jim Gaughran (D-Huntington) argued, "What's getting lost in this discussion is Nassau and Suffolk counties are in a completely different place than New York City. We don't have a large volume of rental housing. We have a rental housing crisis, particularly for young people."

Gaughran said officials now can bargain with developers to require a certain share of new apartments be earmarked for low-income renters. Imposing rent control simply could discourage developers from building significant numbers of units on Long Island, he argued.

## MARIJUANA



Part of the reason the issue is stalled is because lawmakers aren't considering the simple question of whether to legalize recreational marijuana. They are rolling up all the associated issues — including taxes, licenses, grower certification, motor vehicle laws and who gets the revenue — into one ball of wax. It's a lot to pull together with just days left in the session.

The primary sticking points, in practical terms, are how to divvy up the revenue and what criminal records related to marijuana offenses should be expunged, lawmakers said.

Beyond that, some Democrats don't want to move ahead at this point. State party chairman Jay Jacobs has advised Democratic senators against voting for marijuana



Rent control is among the pressing issues before the state Senate, above, and the Assembly, now both

and some other proposals, saying they can't push too far left in their first year in control of all the levers of state government.

That New Jersey recently shelved marijuana legislation indefinitely also has removed the urgency for New York to act, many officials said.

The state Assembly probably has the necessary votes to approve marijuana legalization, but the Senate doesn't, said Sen. Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan), lead sponsor of the bill.

Krueger said Cuomo, "has refused to come to the table" for three-way talks with the Senate and Assembly to hash out the details. Cuomo hasn't stepped in and has said it's up to them to get it through their house.

## MEASLES



New York is at the center of the 2019 measles outbreak — the largest in more than 25 years. In response, some Democrats are rallying be-

hind a bill to eliminate any non-medical — primarily religious or philosophical — exemptions to vaccination requirements.

Cuomo suggested initially that the bill might raise "constitutional" questions about freedom of religion. But more than 100 years of case history show state and federal courts repeatedly have upheld laws requiring children to be vaccinated before entering school or day care, saying they don't trample constitutional rights.

Days ago, Cuomo changed

# TICKS DOWN



with Democrats in the majority.

his view, saying: “I think it’s a mandate for public health that we pass that bill.” Legislative officials say the bill is gathering momentum.

## DRIVER’S LICENSES

One of the most controversial issues is whether to permit people who are in the country illegally to obtain driver’s licenses.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie (D-Bronx) has said ex-

tending driver’s licenses would ensure drivers have insurance, which could reduce hit-and-run accidents, and make it easier for farm laborers to get to work. The state’s largest business lobby and some insurance companies also have come out in favor.

Republicans say the proposal shows “blatant disregard” for taxpayers and the rule of law. The key will be whether Long Island and upstate Democrats in the Senate support the bill or want to hold off for now.

## POLICE SHOOTINGS



Cuomo wants a law designating the state attorney general, instead of local district attorneys, to handle any cases involving civilians shot by police. Advocates of the approach say local prosecutors work daily with police, and therefore, face too many conflicts of interest in such cases.

Cuomo issued an executive order four years ago giving the AG’s office authority to handle such cases, although he said the move was temporary and could change with a new administration. He wants the concept enshrined in law.

## FARM LABOR



Labor activists and some legislators are pushing for a “farmworkers’ bill of rights,” which would include a 40-hour workweek, an eight-hour work day and a day off per week. The New York Farm Bureau says the terms aren’t workable during harvest and other busy parts of the growing season.

Labor received a significant boost in late May when a state appellate court ruled farmworkers should have collective bargaining rights like other workers. Some dairy groups are proposing a compromise: a 60-65 hour workweek and no strikes during certain months.

## CHARTER SCHOOLS



Cuomo is a champion of expanding the number of charter schools, while a majority of Democratic legislators is opposed. That would appear to make expansion unlikely. But if lawmakers decide to take up an omnibus bill that combines all sorts of unrelated issues, don’t count out charter schools. That’s how they were authorized in the first place 20 years ago.

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In the suburbs, legalizing marijuana was supported 55-39 percent.

## Poll: NYers favor legalized marijuana

BY MICHAEL GORMLEY  
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ALBANY — Most New York voters want marijuana legalized for recreational use and oppose allowing immigrants in the country illegally to obtain driver’s licenses, according to a poll released Monday.

The findings in the Siena Research Institute poll don’t align with politics in Albany, where the bill to legalize marijuana is foundering and Democrats are trying to find a way to authorize driver’s licenses for immigrants in the United States illegally.

Legalizing marijuana was supported by a 55-40 percent margin, including 61 percent of Democrats. Fifty-five percent of Republicans oppose the measure, according to the poll.

The poll found voters opposed the driver’s license measure by 55 to 41, although 53 percent of Democrats support it. Eighty-two percent of Republicans oppose the measure.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and progressive Democratic majority leaders of the State Senate and Assembly support legalizing marijuana beyond medicinal uses, but the more moderate contingent of Long Island senators stands in the way. Similarly, the coalition of six Long Island senators so far is not supporting the authorization of driver’s licenses for immigrants in the country illegally, citing opposition from their constituents, law enforcement and medical professionals.

In the New York City suburbs, including Long Island,

providing driver’s licenses to immigrants not in the country legally was opposed 52-40 percent. Supporters say the bill would make the roads safer and allow immigrants to get to work and to day care without threatening public safety. Since 2007, when then-Gov. Eliot Spitzer tried to adopt a license measure, opponents have feared that driver’s licenses would be used by terrorists to gain access to sensitive areas.

Legalizing marijuana was supported in the suburbs 55-39 percent.

Both issues are major goals of the progressives who won control of the Senate in November’s elections and who continue to rule the Assembly.

A majority of New Yorkers continues to oppose the licenses measure, said Steven Greenberg of the Siena poll. It is “supported by Democrats, as well as black, Latino and younger voters . . . white voters and voters 55 and older oppose it, while New York City voters are evenly divided.”

The poll also found strong support for eliminating the religious exemption for vaccinating children, another major issue with which the legislature and Cuomo are wrestling in the waning session, scheduled to end June 19.

The poll interviewed 812 voters by telephone from June 2 to 6 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

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