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TOP STORIES



The New York state Capitol. Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said he is no longer including revenue from marijuana taxation in his budget.

Cuomo drops legal pot from proposed budget

BY MICHAEL GORMLEY
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ALBANY — Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said Tuesday he was dropping his proposal to legalize marijuana from the proposed state budget.

Cuomo had warned legislative leaders that revenues from legalization of marijuana were needed to help balance a budget with a deficit of more than \$3 billion, caused in part by declining revenues. Cuomo estimated a marijuana tax could bring in \$300 million over three years.

But the governor said Tuesday he was unable to arrive at a quick resolution of the marijuana issue with state lawmakers.

Cuomo said he no longer is including in his budget proposal revenue from the taxation of marijuana — which was to be dedicated to repair and improvements at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

He said he has replaced it with revenue from a proposed pied-à-terre tax. If approved by the legislature, the surcharge would be applied to New York City condominiums and cooperative apartments worth more than \$5 million, most of them owned by residents of other countries that use them for business and pleasure trips.

Cuomo and legislative leaders



Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo

get, that it was complicated and it will take time. But, after the budget, I'm hopeful in the legislative session that it passes."

Attention now turns to whether a bill to legalize marijuana can be agreed upon by the end of the legislative session.

The issue was popular in the fall elections for Democrats, who won majority control of the State Senate. A poll released Monday by the Siena Research Institute found 53 percent of voters support legalizing marijuana, compared with 44 percent who were opposed.

Some key counties, including Nassau and Suffolk, however, have taken advantage of an "opt-out" provision that could keep manufacturing and retail shops out of them. Others are considering the same.

"Is it a complication? Yes," Cuomo said. "But I don't think it's deterministic."

On Tuesday, the New York Medical Society, the New York State PTA, the state Sheriff's Association and other groups lobbied to slow or stop the whole measure. Law enforcement officials said there is a need for more laws and technology to detect driving while high. Educators say more programs are needed in schools for youths who will be around more marijuana at home. Addiction spe-

cialists fear more marijuana use would lead to an increase in opioid abuse.

In the budget, agreements are struck by leaders behind closed doors under a long-standing practice that combines many measures into a massive budget bill. Outside the budget process, public hearings and debates in committees and on the Senate and Assembly floor require votes by each legislator on each bill.

"The budget is often the easiest vehicle for a Legislature to do something that is controversial," Cuomo said. "When it's not done in the budget, then it is, in my opinion, harder to do as a stand-alone bill because it's now just marijuana . . . and it's a more difficult vote because it's clear what the vote is about. The budget [vote] swallows many issues."

Legislative leaders have said legalizing marijuana would be a complex, difficult task to pass in the budget. On Tuesday, Heastie and Stewart-Cousins said policy issues must be given time to evolve into good legislation, even if that means approving them after the budget.

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