

HIS AGENDA



2 LEGALIZING MARIJUANA

Recreational use of marijuana was a hot issue for Democrats in the November elections and helped them seize the state Senate majority. Cuomo says marijuana sales could raise \$300 million in tax revenue. But huge questions remain, including who could sell it and how much tax could be charged without exceeding the illegal market price. The thorniest issue, however, may be the proposed expunging of past marijuana convictions.

3 EDUCATION

This will be another record year for school aid, but there is an internal fight that should come into focus in Cuomo's budget. Senate Democrats owe much of their newfound majority to teachers unions, which believe schools are still owed billions from a 1995 Court of Appeals decision that found the state had underfunded schools for decades. The money was never paid in full, but while Cuomo will propose more school aid, it will be less than the unions want. Instead, Cuomo wants school districts to spend their state aid more wisely.



4 RAISING REVENUE

The budget will propose how to pay for expensive projects such as a water quality infrastructure project aimed at Long Island and still stay within a 2 percent cap on budget growth. Among the more likely new sources of revenue is sports gambling at the state's casinos, which the U.S. Supreme Court allowed last year. But the biggest impact could be an anticipated new millionaire's tax. Also deep in the voluminous proposed budget documents likely will be fee increases that could be attached to motor vehicles, smoking and other purposes to help pay for a continued middle-class tax cut.



5 HEALTH CARE

Expect more criticism of Republican President Donald Trump. Cuomo wants the state to fund health-care exchanges, so that New Yorkers will continue to be able to choose their own health-care plans that best suit their needs. The exchanges were created under Obamacare but are threatened now because Trump has promised to end them. Cuomo also has wants the state to ensure that pre-existing conditions are covered. Now Cuomo has to say how New Yorkers would pay for it.



Legislature votes to make voting easier

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ALBANY — In their first business day running the state Senate, Democrats on Monday approved sweeping changes in how New Yorkers vote.

Among the bills passed in the Senate and Assembly were measures to legalize early voting, to hold state and federal primaries on the same day and to eliminate a loophole that allowed companies to easily skirt campaign-donation limits.

They also gave first passage to bills that would ask New Yorkers to amend the state constitution to permit same-day voter registration and voting by mail. Such amendment proposals would need to be approved a second time by the State Legislature before going to the voters.

Many of the proposals had been bottled up by a Republican-led state Senate. Democrats won an overwhelming majority in the fall and made voting reforms their first priority. The legislature ceremonially opened last week, but Monday marked the first day bills faced votes.

Ushering in voting changes was a slam dunk for the party. The Democrat-dominated Assembly has long favored the proposals and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo has signed on too, all but assuring the proposals will become law — though there could be tweaks.

"Today, we are saying to New Yorkers we are about tearing barriers down, fixing a broken election system . . . and restoring trust in our government," said Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Yonkers). "We should not fear making it easier for people eligible to vote, to vote."

The measures would allow New Yorkers to begin voting at local polling places up to 10 days ahead of Election Day. It would end New York's unusual method of holding separate congressional (June) and state (September) primaries, consolidating them in June. Another would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-

register to vote.

"These bills will ensure accessibility and encourage participation in our electoral system, while bringing transparency to our campaign finance laws," said Assemb. Charles Lavine (D-Glen Cove), chairman of the Assembly Elections Committee. "Now more than ever, we need to stand up and protect our democratic process."

In taking up the measures Monday, legislators weren't waiting for Cuomo, who typically drives the Albany agenda. "I don't see it as a power play," said Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie (D-Bronx). "We are passing bills that we know people in this state have wanted for years."

Cuomo will deliver his proposed 2019-20 budget Tuesday and will include policy proposals that legislative Democrats embrace. On Monday, he said he wanted to add a bill to the list of proposals that would ban all corporate contributions and make Election Day a state holiday.

Senate Republicans had run the chamber for most of the past five decades. Now in the minority, they attempted to use the Democrats' old parliamentary playbook, unsuccessfully attempting to attach a series of "hostile amendments" — often unrelated to the bill at hand — such as making the property-tax cap permanent.

They also raised questions about whether early voting actually increases turnout and the costs of opening polling places early.

Good-government groups, which have bashed New York's poor voter turnout for years, said Monday that New York is finally catching up to other states' efforts to boost voter participation.

"For years, New Yorkers have been demanding efficient, equitable and accessible elections," Susan Lerner of Common Cause said. "And, finally, on the first full day of the legislative session, both the Assembly and the new Senate majority responded with a robust package of voting reforms."