

## EDITORIAL

# Time to govern for Albany Dems

They need to deliver a serious budget

It sure was a fun celebration in November.

Democrats, flush with victory, stood on stages across New York, heralding the dawn of one-party control of state government and the progressive energy about to be unleashed. And there was a rash of sensible legislation long bottled up by Senate Republicans finally approved and signed into law. But the first warning sign of trouble was the failure of Long Island Democrats to leverage their new strength to get a permanent tax cap.

Then the Senate fumbled the Amazon deal. Now it's March and just like you can't get to spring until you get through this interminable dreary month, you can't prove you have a functioning majority until you produce a budget in the crucible that carries an April 1 deadline. Democrats are firing on all cylinders — at each other.

The Senate and Assembly are at odds. Senate Democrats argue among themselves. Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo says the new Senate majority is not used to governing and must step up. Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins says Cuomo suffers from SDDS — Senate Democratic Derangement Syndrome. Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie says Cuomo's comments about his members doing the bidding of teachers unions were "inflammatory" and "unacceptable."

The result is that the budgets offered by Cuomo and the two chambers are \$1 billion or more apart and leave too many big issues unresolved; there's really no bandwidth to solve all of them in the next 18 days. And some new legislators, including on Long Island, don't fully understand the consequences of the matters before them.

Here's what's clear:

The permanent property tax cap must be passed. It's time the Assembly realizes that taxpayers need that relief. Our senators must refuse to vote on any budget bill unless they are assured the cap will pass the Assembly. Otherwise, they would be better off heading for the Canadian border.

School aid is guaranteed to increase, but it should be done in a fiscally prudent way. The economy is slowing. As revenues tighten, teachers unions — to which the Assembly is indeed tethered — have not shown that more funding leads to better results rather than merely padding payrolls. Getting short shrift are clean water, transportation and climate change programs.

It is disappointing that the Assembly didn't bother to include a plan to toll drivers entering Manhattan's business district; the money is needed for subways and commuter railroads. A pied-à-terre tax on multimillion-dollar second homes in the city would help. So could online sports gambling. But legalizing recreational marijuana can't be rushed into place; licensing and safety can't be responsibly resolved by March 31. Expanding prevailing wage requirements is best left out of the budget, too. It's time for New York to reform bail and trial procedures, but such changes must include a way to confine defendants who are a danger to witnesses or victims. Public campaign financing must be instituted, with a ban on fusion voting to make it affordable to taxpayers. Democrats got the control they wanted. Now it's time for them to disarm, discuss and deliver.

— *The editorial board*



Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

AP/HANS PENNING

## MATT DAVIES



NEWSDAY/MATT DAVIES

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## LETTERS

### Old data belie LIRR progress since May

Long Island Rail Road customers have stopped me on trains and emailed to say they appreciate the major improvements we have made to customer communications in the 11 months I've been president of the LIRR. I'm humbled by that support and pleased to hear it, because improving the information we give customers — providing actionable information earlier, at the point of decision-making — has been a top priority under the LIRR Forward program I initiated in May.

So I was disappointed that Newsday published a misleading front-page headline, "State comptroller audit: Info lacking for LIRR riders" [News, March 12], based on a state comptroller's audit that used old data to leave the impression that the communications challenges we have

made great progress in fixing are ongoing. To be clear, the state audit and your headline used data collected between 2015 and 2017.

In fact, the improvements we've made to customer communication since May are attracting notice. Customers have told me how much they love our new online train finder, myLIRR.org, which enables one to see the exact position and length of upcoming trains in real time, powered by newly installed GPS devices. We've also launched countdown clocks, displaying how many minutes until the next train will arrive, and updated procedures for our service alerts to relay news of events *before* delays begin to occur, not merely describing delays after they've begun. This approach earned us praise for timely, robust communications to customers on all channels during the Feb. 26 grade-crossing collision that

caused Main Line service to be limited for several rush hours.

We're proud of these achievements and we know there's a lot more work to be done. It's important to know that decades' worth of challenges caused by historic underinvestment in the LIRR won't be solved overnight. The real story here is that the LIRR is listening, and making changes based on our customers' concerns.

Phillip Eng,  
Jamaica

### Two perspectives on cross-endorsements

Newsday's editorial board should be applauded for again expressing its belief that the practice of cross-endorsements in elections in New York State should be stopped ["Restore integrity to the ballot," Editorial, March 10]. This opinion has