State Budget is Looming

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Legislators say they expect to vote on a state budget by next week making for an extra-early budget. Of course lots could happen between then and now but legislative leaders continue to meet today and have hashed out their spending targets.

The joint budget conference announced they have agreed to $550 million in "table target" spending. Other targets include $60 million for health spending, $70 million for higher education, $40 million for mental hygiene and $35 million for human services.

Other parts of the budget remain elusive. It is unclear whether casino siting and a minimum wage increase will be in the budget. Advocates have swamped Albany online and in the Twitterverse targeting Sens. Dean Skelos and Jeff Klein to raise the minimum wage. Cuomo supports a $8.75 hike, while the Assembly has passed a $9 hike. The Senate budget supports an unspecified wage hike that would be phased in in installments.

A number of advocates have been focusing on Klein specifically because he and the Independent Democrats joined with Republicans to create a coalition while saying they support a minimum wage hike. Republicans have been vocal in their opposition to a wage hike.

“The time for excuses is over. Given the tremendous support by voters, community, faith, labor and business leaders, the minimum wage should have been increased last year," said Mark Dunlea of Hunger Action in a statement. "A majority of State Senators want to join the Assembly in raising the minimum wage to $9 an hour, with indexing. Sen. Klein has to show that his power arrangement agreement is something more than a charade to thwart the democratic will of voters and to distribute patronage to the minority Republicans and their IDC enabler."

Session is over for this week and Cuomo has said he will not issue a message of necessity to circumvent the mandated three-day aging process all bills are supposed to go through.

Sen. Joseph Addabbo headed back to his district this afternoon with a number concerns about the budget including the minimum wage.

"My main concern is is this going to be some watered down version of the minimum wage," said Addabbo who said he felt a budget was extremely near. Addabbo is in the minority in the Senate and his conference has little to know influence over what is finally decided.

Asked if he would vote against a budget with the wrong kind of wage increase or one that didn't have one, Addabo said he would not vote against the budget in either situation. "You know the alternative is shutting down the government and that is just not good for anyone. I think there is a lot of good in this budget and we will get it done." The budget is due by April 1st. Cuomo and legislative leaders could take a major victory lap if they turned in a spending plan a week or so early.

Tags: Tagged in: Gov. Andrew Cuomo Sen. Dean Skelos Sen. Jeff Klein Sen. Joe Addabbo