

Unions spared worst

- **Experts: NY locals fare better** in budget fights
- **But Cuomo layoff threat** remains for LI workers

BY MICHAEL AMON
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ALBANY — New York is no Wisconsin.

While unions have been target No. 1 in state-budget fights across the country, they fared better here in Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's first budget, union officials and experts said. While losing major battles on school aid and a tax on the wealthy, unions were not forced to fight for their basic right to bargain — and they even managed some victories.

Home health aides in New York City and its suburbs secured a pay raise. The state resumed funding of development centers for New York City teachers. Perhaps the unions' biggest victory came when Cuomo, a Democrat, did not move against New York's Triborough Amendment, which prevents a wage cut after a union contract expires.

"Cuomo is playing by the established rules, not trying to change them," said E.J. McMahon of the conservative Empire State Center for New York State Policy.

Richard Iannuzzi, president of New York State United Teachers, said: "Sometimes victories are just holding on to what you have."

As he tried to close a \$10-billion budget deficit, observers say, Cuomo found a middle ground in the country's most unionized state, where almost a quarter of the workforce was represented by organized labor

in 2010, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.

But union losses were still decisive and painful.

Teachers face layoffs as school districts grapple with a \$1.2-billion loss in aid. Cuomo is threatening 9,800 layoffs as he negotiates \$450 million in budgeted workforce savings with about 100,000 state workers, including 16,500 Long Islanders.

And a union effort to extend a personal income tax on the wealthy was rebuffed by Cuomo and Senate Republicans.

But Cuomo has said he disagrees with legislation in Wisconsin and Ohio stripping state workers of some collective bargaining rights. He did not support a Senate effort to roll back city teacher seniority rules.

"While Andrew Cuomo might be conservative, he's not as conservative as Scott Walker," Frank Mauro, executive director of the liberal Fiscal Policy Institute, said of Wisconsin's Republican governor.

For the deals he cut, Cuomo exacted a high price.

Home health aides will get a "living wage," long sought by their union, 1199/SEIU, whose workers aren't employed by the state but get much of their wages indirectly from Medicaid. In return, the union supported Cuomo's deep Medicaid cuts, and the pay raise for home health workers was delayed on Long Island and in Westchester.

Alison Murray of Uniondale has worked as a home health aide in Nassau for 28 years, making a little more than minimum wage for bathing, cleaning house and cooking for disabled patients. On most jobs, she makes \$8 an hour, working seven days a week with no vacation or health benefits. Under the state budget, she would get \$9 an hour starting in 2013.

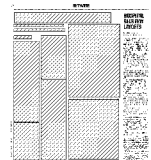
"It's a long time coming," Murray, 53, said. "It isn't right for us to take minimum wage."

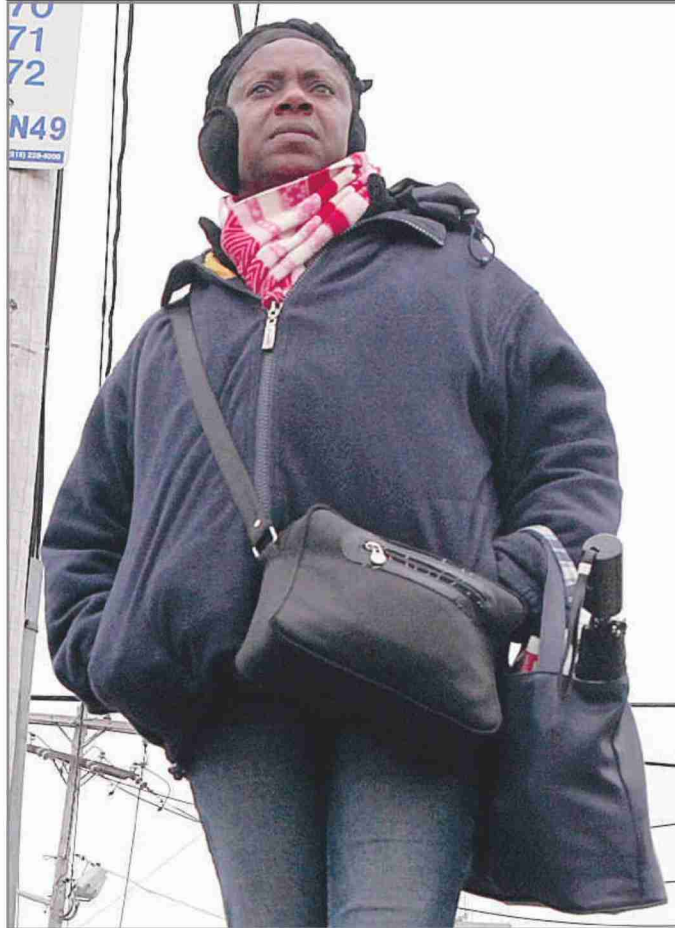
Cuomo has used a carrot-and-stick approach with unions as he did with the legislature, which bolstered its tattered reputation by passing an on-time budget — but only under threat of Cuomo inserting his budget request into emergency spending bills that the legislature would vote on.

In ongoing negotiations with the Civil Service Employees Association and the Public Employees Federation — which both had contracts expire April 1 — Cuomo has warned of 9,800 possible layoffs. But he's largely refrained from anti-union rhetoric and allowed \$140 million in step wage increases to take effect without a fight.

Asked Wednesday about labor talks, Cuomo repeated the threat without sounding threatening. "We are hopeful that if those discussions go well, we wouldn't have to lay off anybody," he said.

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Alison Murray, a home health aide for nearly three decades, is one of 16,500 Liers who could be affected by state cutbacks.

WHAT'S AHEAD

How big employee unions will fare in the 2011-12 state budget

1199/SEIU

WON A "living wage" for home health aides, costing private agencies \$400 million a year. The industry estimates it will drive agencies out of business; the union disputes the cost estimate but says the agencies can easily absorb the costs.

LOST More than \$2 billion in Medicaid savings could cause program closures and layoffs at health institutions where the union has workers.

New York state teachers union

WON \$14.3 million in restored funding for professional development centers for New York City teachers

LOST More than \$1.2 billion in state school aid cuts could cause teacher layoffs.

Civil Service Employees Association and the Public Employees Federation

WON More than \$140 million in negotiated step increases. The pay hikes were negotiated years ago, but Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo decided to not contest them in labor talks.

LOST The budget includes \$450 million in workforce savings, which Cuomo is trying to achieve in contract talks with CSEA and PEF now. If the talks break down, Cuomo has threatened 9,800 layoffs.

— COMPILED BY MICHAEL AMON