



# Drinking water at risk?

■ **Group: Budget** puts NY in jeopardy to toxic spills

■ **DEC officials** say report premature, agency vigilant

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As the state budget deadline looms, an Albany conservation group has warned that environmental spending cuts proposed by Gov. David A. Paterson would put drinking water at risk and leave the state largely reliant on polluters to self-report toxic spills.

A report by Environmental Advocates of New York said the governor's budget would

cut state responses to oil spills by more than half and reduce inspections of chemical and petroleum storage tanks. The cuts would also eliminate inspections at some hazardous waste cleanup sites, it said.

Those predictions — based on internal memos from the state Department of Environmental Conservation — could be bad news for Long Island's drinking water if they come to pass. Much of the pollution fouling local groundwater stems from spills and leaking tanks. Last year 2,306 oil and chemical spills were reported here, DEC records show.

"Fewer staff and fewer resources mean fewer inspections and greater chances for our drinking water supplies to be contaminated," said Alison Jen-

kins, Environmental Advocates' fiscal policy director.

DEC spokeswoman Maureen Wren said it was "premature" to forecast how proposed cuts would affect particular programs at the agency. "Like all state agencies, DEC is continuing to evaluate the options available to meet the required budget reductions," Wren said.

Budget resolutions passed this week by the Senate and the Assembly would restore some of the cuts. But Jenkins said it was unclear whether the increases would survive the budget process.

The governor wants to reduce DEC appropriations to \$1.01 billion — down from \$1.5 billion last year, although that money included several millions in federal stim-

ulus grants. Those grants aside, Paterson's 2010-11 budget would cut DEC resources by 15 percent from last year, the group said.

The Senate and Assembly budget resolutions would increase DEC funding to \$1.23 billion and \$1.037 billion, respectively. A three-way agreement must be reached before the April 1 budget deadline.

Environmental Advocates' report, released last week, was based on DEC memos written earlier this year on the agency's response to the governor's budget, Jenkins said. Wren did not address the specific plans described in the report but said, "We are committed to continuing to respond and address oil spills to protect public health and the environment."

## Poll: Lazio well ahead of Levy

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ALBANY — Former Rep. Rick Lazio would handily beat Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy in a Republican primary for governor, according to a poll released Friday.

The Marist College Poll found 53 percent of Republicans back Lazio while 21 percent support Levy. Twenty-six percent were undecided.

The survey of 775 registered voters is the first conducted since Levy left the Democratic Party for the Republicans on March 19 and declared his candidacy for the GOP nomination for governor. Marist questioned voters on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Lazio led Levy among men and women and all age groups. However, Lazio, of Brightwaters, and Levy, of Bayport, both would be trounced in a contest against Attorney General Andrew Cuomo, the presumptive Democratic nominee, according to the poll. Lazio would lose to Cuomo 61 percent to 30 percent, while Levy would lose 65 percent to 26 percent.

Lazio spokesman Barney Keller said the results show that "the more the voters get to know Steve Levy, the more they reject his liberal policies."

Levy strategist Michael Dawidziak shot back that the Marist poll reveals Lazio's soft support among Republicans.

Dawidziak pointed to a Siena Research Institute poll taken days before Levy entered the race showing Lazio defeating Levy 60 percent to 19 percent, among Republicans. That response, however, was to a question that identified Levy as a Democratic county executive and Lazio as a former Republican congressman. Another question with no political affiliations produced a 45-16 margin between Lazio and Levy.

Marist also found that 66 percent of voters believe Cuomo will help overhaul Albany, while 22 percent said his election wouldn't improve matters.

## A bubbly farewell

Fellow aviators douse Chief Warrant Officer Herb A. Dargue with champagne in Ronkonkoma as he returns from his final military flight Friday. Dargue ends a military career that began in Vietnam in the 1960s. He also flew in Iraq in 2005.



PHOTO BY CHARLES ECKERT

# Budget deadline nears without accord

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ALBANY — Legislative leaders vowed Friday to work through the weekend to bridge differences over a state budget, though prospects dimmed for meeting the April 1 adoption deadline.

State Sen. John Sampson of Brooklyn, the Democratic chief, and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan) insisted rank-and-file lawmakers would remain in the Capitol to participate in budget

talks. However, some Assembly members and senators told Newsday they planned to be home Saturday and Sunday.

The Assembly on Friday night adopted spending bills, totaling \$4.6 billion, to ensure state government keeps running early next month if a new budget isn't in place. The Senate didn't convene Friday and will take up the bills on Monday.

Both houses were scheduled to recess Friday for an 11-day break to mark the Passover and Easter holidays.

Asked if the Assembly would

stay in Albany over the weekend, Silver told reporters, "I intend to... I'm staying around."

Under pressure from Senate Republicans about the secrecy surrounding budget deliberations, Sampson pushed for starting conference committees where lawmakers publicly attempt to reach compromise on divergent fiscal plans. These meetings have yet to occur, but Sampson, Silver and 12 others convened a public leaders' session Friday night. The last time such a meeting took place was 2008, though law requires it.

Senate Republicans noted there were no scheduled sessions for rank-and-file lawmakers to hash out differences on school aid, environmental protection and other areas. The leaders usually announce meeting times at this point in budget talks. "This is a bluff," said state Sen. Thomas Libous (R-Binghamton).

Sampson and Silver blamed Gov. David A. Paterson, saying talks couldn't occur until he sends an updated fiscal plan to the legislature. But Paterson aide Morgan Hook said there was nothing preventing the sessions.