

# Cuomo: 'I came to listen'

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More than 40 Staten Islanders stood last night to confront and plead with Gov. Mario M. Cuomo in a marathon four-hour public forum on the state budget for the fiscal year beginning next April 1.

At its early-evening peak, the forum — one of a series planned weeks ago to precede Cuomo's "state of the state" address Jan. 9 — drew 350 to the Williamson Theater at the College of Staten Island, Sunnyside.

Cuomo, without using the exact phrase, repeated a basic theme sounded before audiences statewide since he took office nearly two years ago — the budget as a "book of hard choices."

Asked, for instance, about a state subsidy for prescription drugs for senior citizens, he asked back whether all the elderly should be eligible. He gave similar responses about city university tuition and, while making supportive remarks about tax cuts, pushed those who demanded them about what services to forego rather than fund.

Cuomo told one speaker dur-

ing the forum, which lasted two hours longer than scheduled, "I came to listen to you."

The last of the speakers, Frances Dory of the New York City Self-Help Clearinghouse, completed her statement on state duplication of private services at 11:29 p.m.

But Cuomo did not escape Staten Island without some promises, if veiled.

Luke Nasta, executive director of the Camelot drug abuse program, told the governor that recent budget cuts had forced a 50-percent reduction in Camelot's staff. Nasta suggested the state "tax the hell out of 'head shops,'" which sell equipment for drug abuse, to help fund drug abuse programs.

"I like that," the governor said. "I think we'll use that one and claim it as our idea."

"We've discussed the whole constitutionality of banning the head shops," the governor continued, adding that it never occurred to state officials to tax the shops.

"I think you made a real con-

tribution ... I'll ask you to speak to (state substance abuse service chief) Julio Martinez here, because you certainly impressed me," Cuomo told Nasta.

Cuomo also indicated support for \$250,000 to further study the ill effects of air pollution on Staten Islanders. The issue was raised by Donna Gerstel, a College of Staten Island researcher who earlier this year presented what is believed to be a milestone report on the problem.

"That doesn't sound like a lot," Cuomo said after Ms. Gerstel told him how much the next step in the CSI research would cost. To Environmental Commissioner Henry Williams, seated in the front row of the auditorium, Cuomo said, "Look into it, because you look soft to me on that."

At another point, Cuomo said he plans to continue dialogue with Gov. Thomas Kean of New Jersey, noting that while New Yorkers suffer the effects of such facilities as chemical plants in New Jersey, the shores of the latter state receive untreated sewage dumped in area waterways from city outfalls.

"I can't frankly tell you solutions are a short way off and all the pollution will go away if you wait a little while longer," he said, after a statement linking acid rain and the need for resource recovery which "is still a long way off." Better monitoring of air pollution and restoration of cuts in inspectors positions were advocated by a few speakers.

Two-and-a-half-minute time constraints went out the window as the forum progressed, with both the moderator, Borough President Ralph Lamberti, and Cuomo seeming to make only the most minimal effort to limit comment.

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