

Cuomo trying to channel 'member \$\$'

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ADVANCE ALBANY BUREAU

ALBANY — Gov. Mario M. Cuomo said yesterday his budget proposal before the Legislature sets aside no fund for scores of millions of dollars' worth of allocations that annually come at the request of legislative members.

So-called "members' items," such as annual state funds that support Staten Island social and cultural programs, were quietly accounted for in past Cuomo budget proposals but not this year's, according to the governor.

The amount set aside is never explicitly identified in actual budget documents, however, according to Cuomo aides.

"We didn't do it this year," Cuomo said. "The money is not there."

Cuomo and budget aides were careful to add that this did not mean many "worthy" programs funded by the Legislature should be excluded — but that they should come under prior review and not separate additions.

"I think everyone knows we've had problems with accountability" with "member items" before, Cuomo said, citing past newspaper articles. But when pressed by the Advance at a news conference to elaborate, he refused.

Cuomo and aides left open the possibility that money that goes to programs at the discretion of lawmakers could still come out of what budget-makers call "move" money.

So-called "move" money is the funding requested for criminal justice, education and other purposes that gets "moved" into areas other than those Cuomo suggested, once the overall size of the fiscal plan has been decided.

How much of this non-member-item "move" money was actually apportioned by Cuomo budget officials was not immediately clear.

Cuomo used as an example a theoretical project proposed by Assembly Mental Health Committee Chairman Elizabeth Connelly, D-West Brighton.

If she asked for special funding for a pilot project for the retarded, it should not necessarily go in Staten Island because she happens to represent that area, Cuomo said.

Explaining how he thought the funding should work instead, he stated: "Somebody will say 'I have a special project for Staten Island — Betty Connelly — I think it's wonderful — it's for the retarded children.'"

"You sit down with the commissioner (for

retarded and developmentally disabled), Art Webb, you sit down with the budget person. 'Art Webb, what do you think of this project?'

"He says 'it's an unnecessary project, we have one exactly like it only it's across the water in Brooklyn.'

"Or, he could say 'It's a terrific project' and you sit down with Wayne's guys and say 'Where you gonna get the money,' (answer that and say) 'Okay, done.'"

Under the current system, Mrs. Connelly could simply prevail on the Assembly speaker's office to include the money under the members' items funding and have it approved without an active role by Webb's agency.

Cuomo, a Democrat, and his budget director, Wayne Diesel, last spring fought with the Republican-controlled Senate Finance Committee, complaining they added \$40 million more in "members items" than earlier agreed.

Senate Republicans denied any such agreement took place. Cuomo aides said that as a result, they have in the 1986-87 fiscal year imposed more stringent standards of review than before in a bid to limit the actual spending.

Cuomo's proposal would apply to the 1987-88 fiscal year due to begin April 1.

Sen. John J. Marchi, R-Staten Island, who heads the Finance Committee, has offered a contrasting view on member items.

Marchi, in a budget analysis released last week, said the governor has included \$300 million of his own "member item" type funding.

To yesterday's statements from the governor, Marchi spokesman Gerald McLaughlin said: "We're not saying they're good or bad ... but if he didn't like the legislative initiatives, maybe he ought to look at his own list."

Marchi's analysis shows Cuomo providing aid to such programs as the Flatbush Development Corp., boating access sites, Riverbank state Park Aesthetic Treatment grants, Voter Awareness Campaign and the Wildcat Service Corp.