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Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and N.Y. state lawmakers fume over proposed Medicaid cuts amid coronavirus crisis

Andrea Stewart-Cousins Wont Allow Cuomo Pull Back On Medicaid Spending During Pandemic

By BRIAN HARROD

Governor Andrew Cuomo desires to cut spending in the state's Medicaid program is being called out by Yonkers' Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

Yonkers, Westchester County and New York City hospitals already being asked to shoulder the heavy burden of the novel coronavirus pandemic and state lawmakers are fuming over proposed Medicaid cuts that

could slash funds to hospitals in the midst of a pandemic.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo convened a commission of hospital official and health care union representatives to assess ways of slowing spending amid a multi-billion dollar budget gap in the program.

The commission ultimately recommended \$400 million in hospital spending savings.

Privately, one other Yonkers legislator told this reporter that the Cuomo cuts were "cruel and inhumane" given the growing coronavirus crisis.

This month, usually reserved for state budget talks in Albany, the coronavirus pandemic hit in the state.

Many Yonkers residents think that for Gov. Andrew Cuomo to even consider cuts in the midst of an unprecedented public health crisis is really unconscionable.

During a Spectrum News interview, Yonkers senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins said those proposals

and the creation of the Medicaid commission "was from a different world."

"Now we have to look at everything very, very closely," she said.

Andrew Cuomo convened the so-called Medicaid Redesign Team to help the state find ways to scale back Medicaid spending and close a projected \$4 billion budget gap.

But that was before New York became the center of the coronavirus epidemic.

The panel unveiled a blueprint last week that included cutting some \$400 million to hospitals over the next year.

Governor Cuomo on Tuesday announced new projections will require as many as 140,000 hospital beds to meet the expected crush of patients.

The state has ordered St Joseph's And St. John's Hospitals hospitals to expand their capacity by at least 50 percent and the governor wants them to set the goal of doubling bed space.

The budget, meanwhile, is expected date in three days and it's

likely the Legislature and Governor will carry those hospital funding discussion to the March 31 due date.

The discussions may become heated as legislators seek out the press to reach their constituents with a message that the issue is about saving lives at this point, not budget cutting efficiencies.

But, Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins has been repeatedly quoted as saying that she thinks a budget will be finalized by deadline the March 31st deadline.

The conventional wisdom is the Legislature will wrap up work on the budget whatever shape that spending

plan takes and leave Albany for the rest of the year.

The session was scheduled to end in early June.

But the Yonkers majority leader did not rule out lawmakers coming back for a post-budget session.

Could lawmakers vote remotely?

It's being looked at.

Lawmakers and the governor agree, though, that federal intervention will be needed, most likely billions of dollars in bailed out aid.

New York operates one of the costliest Medicaid programs in the country, and health care overall makes up the largest share of the

state budget each year.

While the state was already dealing with a significant budget gap, new projections from Cuomo budget director Robert Mujica show the state facing a potential \$15 billion shortfall due to the coronavirus's crippling impact on the economy.

Governor Cuomo, meanwhile, has railed against a proposal inserted in a federal coronavirus relief bill that would prohibit cost shifting in the Medicaid program to local governments a provision that would hamstring budget efforts.