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Silver hit over budget

Rudy rips him for not getting more from state

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DAILY NEWS ALBANY BUREAU CHIEF

ALBANY — If anyone is in a position to be a rainmaker for New York City in a time of need, it's Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, the state's most powerful Democrat.

But when the Legislature passed an $84.3 billion budget last week that many saw as a slap to the city, Mayor Giuliani castigated one man — Silver, a son of Manhattan's lower East Side — for failing to ensure that the city got its fair share.

For starters, though Silver railed in January that Gov. Pataki's proposed budget "turns its back on our children and our schools," the speaker signed off on a final spending plan that provided city schools with a meager 21% of a $677 million increase in state school aid. The city typically gets 38%, in line with its enrollment of the state's students.

There were other slights. Although the final spending plan provided an economic boost upstate in the form of six new Indian casinos, no comparable economic stimulants were offered to the city as it struggles to rebuild from the devastation of the Sept. 11 terrorist attack.

No casinos for city

When Giuliani complained he was never consulted about the casino plans, Silver said he feared gambling in the city would spawn "social ills." At the same time, Silver promoted gambling halls for the Catskills and western New York.

Instead of fighting for the city, Silver, Giuliani asserted, was "nothing like a tiger." Silver also was criticized by one of his usual allies, teachers union President Randi Weingarten.

Silver did not talk publicly about the flap, but issued a statement in which he let it be known he that he, too, was unhappy with the budget.

Republicans have no sympathy for Silver, contending he deliberately prolonged the budget fight this year by agreeing to a so-called bare-bones budget in August with the intention of turning up the pressure on Pataki to increase spending later in a supplemental budget.

Then two hijacked jets slammed into the World Trade Center and everything changed as the city and state struggled with a devastated economy.



PAT CARROLL DAILY NEWS

TOP DEM Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver of Manhattan has been taking criticism since passage last week of the state's $84.3 billion budget, which Mayor Giuliani says shortchanges New York City.

"I think what the mayor was saying is that this has become a pattern with the speaker," said Assemblyman John Ravitz (R-Manhattan). He asserted that Silver often ignores the needs of the city as he tries to appease upstate Democrats whose support he depends on.

Commuter tax repeal

Silver, whose aides said he would not be available for an interview for this story, outraged some city Democrats two years ago when he joined Republican Pataki and Senate GOP Leader Joe Bruno (R-Rensselaer) in pushing through an end to the commuter tax — a move that cost the city $360 million a year.

Though Democrats are reluctant to criticize Silver, Republicans who wanted to keep the tax are more direct.

"We would not have had the commuter tax repealed if Shelly had tried to stop it," Ravitz said.

Silver's defenders say Giuliani does not appreciate the balancing act the speaker must perform to maintain a united front among the 99-member coalition he leads, of Democrats from Bridgehampton to Buffalo who often clash over regional interests.

"We are in a tricky business because if we do something to help New York City, we have to do it without acknowledging it because there would be problems upstate," said Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chairman Herman (Denny) Farrell (D-Manhattan).

When Democrats clamored in January for a budget that was more generous to the city than Pataki's proposal, "We never heard a peep from the mayor," said Assemblyman Pete Grannis (D-Manhattan).

No rebellion

Although sources say Silver's private conferences with Assembly Democrats have not always been placid, he faces none of the leadership challenges that threatened him last year when his then-right-hand man, former Majority Leader Michael Bragman (D-Syracuse), waged a failed bid to topple him as speaker.

Indeed, most Democrats dismiss Giuliani's complaints. "The mayor is just playing politics," said Assemblywoman Deborah Glick (D-Manhattan).

Giuliani, she contended, has been stingy with praise when Democrats bring home the bacon yet is reluctant to squawk about the Republican governor or the GOP-led Senate when the budget comes up short.

Silver plans to head to Washington this week with Bruno to generate support for billions of dollars in federal aid to help the city recover from the Sept. 11 disaster. So far, the feds have committed to just $20 billion of Pataki's $54 billion request.

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