

## Ethics reform dies on Senate floor

Failure to override essentially kills legislation that passed both houses last month

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ALBANY -- The state Capitol's status-quo system of ethics enforcement -- sometimes flouted, often derided -- remains intact.

State senators voted Monday against an override of Gov. David Paterson's veto of a bill strengthening ethics enforcement. The 35-26 vote -- seven shy of the two-thirds majority required to override the veto -- essentially kills legislation that passed in both legislative houses last month with broad bipartisan support.

All but four of 29 Republicans in the chamber Monday voted to sustain the veto. One Democrat, Sen. Ruben Diaz Sr. of the Bronx, voted with the majority of Republicans. (Sen. Tom Morahan, a Republican, was excused for medical reasons.)

The override effort had passed the Assembly 136-2 before heading off to its doom in the other chamber.

On the Senate floor, Democrats who drafted the legislation attacked the GOP senators, who, while expressing concerns about elements of the bill, voted unanimously for the legislation when it first appeared before them last month.

"Everyone concedes -- including the governor, who I've spoken to about this quite a few times -- that everything in this bill is a positive step," said Sen. Eric Schneiderman, a Manhattan Democrat who sponsored the bill. "If you're voting against this override, you're voting against a bill that would require, for the first time, the reporting of independent expenditures. You're voting against a bill that would stop the redacting of our income categories so the public can see how much we make. You're voting against a bill that for the first time would require that any lobbyist or client of a lobbyist who pays money to one of us would have to disclose that.

"You're voting against a lot of good stuff," Schneiderman said.

Republicans said their votes would pave the way for the crafting of a stronger bill to be negotiated with Paterson and other legislative leaders. On Saturday, the governor called for negotiation, while his aide Larry Schwartz panned the legislative bill as "make-believe." Paterson had previously outlined a more stringent set of ethics reforms; over the weekend, he introduced a less expansive compromise bill and noted that it reflected the concerns of some Senate Republicans.

They, in turn, pledged a willingness to work with the governor.

"He's hurting politically, so (Democrats) are just going to give it to him a little bit more," Minority Leader Dean Skelos, R-Long Island. " ... We should sit down in a bipartisan way and make it a stronger bill."

It's unclear when negotiations might continue. Paterson's office had no immediate comment on the Senate vote.

Two of the four Republican senators who voted for the override represent the Capital Region: Sens. Hugh Farley, R-Schenectady and Roy McDonald, R-Wilton. "Something's better than nothing," McDonald said.

"It's not the perfect bill, but I think that we need some ethics," Farley said. "And let's hope we can get a better bill."

Many good government advocates who had embraced the legislative bill expressed disappointment.

"Let's be clear: A no vote today was a vote against ethics reform," said Blair Horner of the New York Public Interest Research Group.

He said it was too soon to predict if the issue would play a major role in the all-important fall elections, where control of the Senate hangs in the balance for both parties. "I can't believe that a vote to kill ethics reform is going to turn out to be a popular vote," Horner said.

"It leads you to believe that they would really rather have the status quo," said Barbara Bartoletti, legislative director for the League of Women Voters.