



## Cuomo stands by progressive agenda

By: Michael Gormley – January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013

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ALBANY — Gov. Andrew Cuomo is trying to counter reactions that the agenda he set for 2013 in his State of the State speech last week was a hard left turn, or an early exit to pursue a 2016 presidential campaign.

He called for the strictest gun control measures in the country, raising the minimum wage, decriminalizing small amounts of marijuana, a \$1 billion bank for environmentally friendly energy development, another \$1 billion fund for affordable housing, expansion of abortion rights and public financing of campaigns among the 300 pages of proposals big and small, likely and improbable.

The speech was praised as groundbreaking and a landmark by progressives who fretted for two years that they were fooled by the son of liberal icon Mario Cuomo. Andrew Cuomo, they thought, had fashioned himself a new kind of Democrat focused on holding the line on spending and taxes.

“We are a community based on progressive principles,” Cuomo said in Wednesday’s often fiery speech. “We must remain that progressive capital of the nation.” Cuomo, who has remained highly popular among Republicans and independents critical to any presidential run, denied a liberal lean.

“I don’t see it,” Cuomo said the day after the speech. “Last year, they wrote I made a right turn. This year, they wrote I made a left turn. I think I’ve been going straight all along. And I think we’ve been remarkably consistent here.”

That, he said, is being “socially progressive and fiscally responsible.”

Not everybody agreed.

“New York already has the worst business climate in the nation and increasing the minimum wage at this time would only make it more toxic,” said Brian Sampson, executive director of the Unshackle Upstate business group, which this fall helped beat back a 45 percent increase in Thruway tolls for tractor-trailers.

In his speech, Cuomo painted a far different view of the economy after two years in office, noting he’s capped property tax growth and established a business-friendly public image. “Gone is the tax capital mentality. ... Gone is the anti-business mentality ... replaced with a government that puts politics aside,” Cuomo said.

In the fall of 2010, Cuomo campaigned for a cap on the growth of some of the nation's highest taxes. But, he said, tax cuts were only feasible after the fiscal house was in order. Despite declaring that it is, his speech not only promised no tax cuts, it called for billions of dollars in more spending, while offering only three upstate casinos as sources of new revenue.

The speech also included another promise of no new taxes, as he has said since the 2010 campaign. Cuomo broke that pledge in 2011. He raised \$1.9 billion in an income tax increase for millionaires while providing a middle-class tax break.

"It was nice that he said he wasn't going to raise taxes, but he said that before," state Conservative Party Chairman Michael Long said. "So you can't really get away with that every year when you break your word ... and if you add up all the big government initiatives he talked about, it's unsustainable."

Meanwhile, state unemployment remains at 7.9 per-cent, above the national average. The libertarian Cato Institute gave Cuomo a "D" for tax and spending policies over the past two years. The national Tax Foundation ranked New York 49th in its business tax climate index and projected it would be No. 50 in 2013.

Cuomo also didn't talk about easing the strain on local governments and their taxpayers who are still waiting for the relief from state mandates he has promised for two years.

Further, Cuomo neglected to mention the deficit of at least \$1 billion, and prospects that Congress could fall short by billions of dollars in relief for Superstorm Sandy. State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli warned this month that New York's massive debt is on track to approach the legal limit in early 2014.

Also unsaid: a Cuomo mention on whether he would allow drilling for natural gas, which supporters say could finally turn around the upstate economy.

The final complication could be Senate Republicans who have worked with Cuomo for two years but lost their clear majority last fall, losing three members who voted for gay marriage. They might now be wary of riling their more conservative base again.

In Albany, State of State addresses are fun. But reality will come in Cuomo's Jan. 22 budget proposal, and in the closed-door politics that follow.