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Oh, \$hoot! Scandals snag Albany raises

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The latest round of scandals in the Legislature involving state Sen. Shirley Huntley — expected to be arrested today — and Assembly members Vito Lopez (found to have sexually harassed two employees) and Naomi Rivera (probed for the misuse of state funds) may have killed chances for lawmakers to get a raise later this year.

“My God, here we go again! Another round of scandal and they [legislators] expect to get a pay raise? This will make it very difficult if not impossible for it to happen,” a senior legislative staffer told The Post.

“The public is already dead set against a raise, and this will just make it even harder,” the staffer continued.

State lawmakers, with Gov. Cuomo’s backing, have been expected to return for a special post-Election Day session to take up several matters, including the first pay raise in 14 years.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan) has strongly backed hiking lawmakers’ salaries, which now start at \$79,500 a year, contending that the Legislature has taken significant steps to end the corruption and dysfunction that had become its trademarks over the past decade. A base salary of just over \$100,000 is under consideration.

But the announcement by Huntley (D-Queens) Saturday that she expects to be indicted, most likely for fraud involving a state-funded local group, Friday’s finding by Silver that Assembly Housing Committee Chairman Lopez, the Brooklyn Democratic chairman, was guilty of sexual harassment, and several ongoing

probes involving the alleged use of a state-funded not-for-profit group to provide a job for the boyfriend of Rivera (D-Bronx) have once again put a dark cloud over Albany's image.

"We're all just shocked by what's just unfolded. It's like back to the future," was how a second senior legislative staff member put it.

Cuomo strongly suggested in recent months that he's open to increasing the Legislature's pay because he wants salary hikes for his own state commissioners, whose salaries are tied to those given lawmakers. State law prohibits legislators from hiking their own salaries during their two-year terms in office. That means a pay hike approved in November wouldn't take effect until Jan. 1, when a new Legislature is seated. If a pay hike isn't approved this year, then one approved next year or in 2014 couldn't take effect until Jan. 1, 2015, at the earliest.

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Senate Republicans, who hold a bare two-vote majority, are publicly mum but privately gleeful about Huntley's announcement, convinced that the publicity surrounding her arrest will refocus attention on a series of scandals involving Senate Democrats.

"This is just the latest episode involving the Senate Democrats, who have not made a compelling case for being in the majority — either with their history of raising taxes, overspending and dysfunction or their criminal missteps," said a GOP insider.

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Bumbling two-term Albany County District Attorney David Soares, who has been heavily funded by left-wing billionaire George Soros, stands a "very good chance of being defeated" in next month's Democratic primary, one of the county's top Democrats has told The Post.

Soares — who was caught trying to help then-Gov. Eliot Spitzer cover up the "Troopergate" scandal five years ago, has botched several recent criminal cases, has been censured by the court system for intemperate comments, and has been personally involved in a relationship with at least one of his subordinates — is facing a tough challenge from Lee Kindlon, a defense lawyer.

"I think Kindlon is going to go all the way," the local Democrat predicted.

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