
REMAPPING DEBATE

Asking "Why" and "Why Not"

Cuomo to gay couples: get married with my blessing, but don't expect to find an affordable apartment

Leads | By Craig Gurian | Housing, NYC, Politics

Jun. 29, 2011 — New York's Governor Andrew Cuomo is already being referred to as a [presidential contender in 2016](#), and is being touted as an ["aggressive pragmatist" or "dynamic centrist."](#) Why won't the press pin him down on what specific outcome he sought in the battle pitting the need of millions of New Yorkers for affordable and secure housing against the desire of landlords and free market ideologues to continue to dismantle the rent regulation system?

From an editorial viewpoint, Remapping Debate applauds Cuomo's successful campaign for marriage equality. But neither we nor others should ignore the fact that he resolutely refused to articulate the specifics on his position on how to strengthen rent regulation, an issue that determines whether gay and straight families will be able to afford to live in New York City.

So what did Governor Cuomo want? It may be in his political *self-interest* not to say, but it is surely a matter of strong *public* interest.

Cuomo was notably silent on the merits of ending the radical "vacancy decontrol" and "luxury decontrol" system that conservative governor George Pataki had imposed in 1997. That system, including numerous other landlord-friendly provisions, has caused, by some estimates, the loss of more than 100,000 units from regulated status.

Not only does deregulation mean higher rent, but tenants in unregulated apartments do not live securely — they know that, unlike both homeowners and rent-regulated tenants, a landlord can always decide not to renew their leases and instead throw them out.

It's no secret that the deal that Cuomo reached with Republican State Senators was a [poor one for tenants](#). Indeed, the Real Estate Board, the leading landlord advocacy group New York, was happy: ["There are some things we didn't get, but overall, we got a number of things we wanted...The rent deal itself is pretty close to what we thought it would end up being."](#)

And the New York Daily News, long an editorial opponent of rent regulation, was pleased that the Governor had resisted the effort of Assembly Democrats for a major strengthening of the rent regulation system, agreeing to only ["modest changes"](#) that would allow a transition to an unregulated system to go forward.

But the Governor characterized the bill as “pretty good,” indeed “the best bill [for tenants] in decades” (he apparently was ignoring the regulatory regime that had been in place continuously from 1974 to 1997, a system that rejected vacancy decontrol as a failed experiment of the early 1970s).

It was left to Gotham Gazette to note the point that a tenant advocacy group had made: “Cuomo refused during the year to explain his stance on rent, saying only that he wanted ‘stronger’ laws. Apparently, the statement continues, he made such vague statements to ‘set the bar low.’”

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Questions for the Governor

- In what ways does Cuomo think that the current system inadequately protects tenants?
- What is the system that Cuomo would like to see in place?
- Does Cuomo believe that it makes sense to deregulate the system over time?
- Does Cuomo acknowledge that, adjusting for inflation, apartments can be deregulated at lower rent levels under his deal than when Governor Pataki introduced the decontrol system in 1997?
- What changes, if any, will Cuomo commit to pushing for before the extension to rent regulation expires in 2015?

The answers to these questions have a profound effect on the lives of a tremendous number of New Yorkers. Shouldn't the questions be asked until they are answered, and the responses (or lack of responsiveness) reported?

Timing is Everything

It is no coincidence that the extension to 2015 allows this deal to have faded from memory by the time Cuomo runs for reelection in 2014 and spares him the ordeal of facing voters in a year when the next extension of regulation is being debated.

As surely as day follows night, Cuomo will include in his campaign an appeal to tenants that only he stands between them and a Republican opponent committed to the ending of rent regulation. He will argue that tenants need an advocate like him to push for the strengthening of the system.

And perhaps the press will allow him to duck the specifics once more.

This content originally appeared at <http://remappingdebate.org/article/cuomo-gay-couples-get-married-my-blessing-don%E2%80%99t-expect-find-affordable-apartment>