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Early reviews dismal for Gov. Paterson's attempt to rally

By The Associated Press

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William B. Plowman / "Meet the Press" via AP

New York Gov. David Paterson and moderator David Gregory appear Sunday on "Meet the Press."

ALBANY, N.Y. — As Gov. David Paterson tries to make a huge comeback, political observers say his latest, best shot at a new beginning didn't exactly propel him forward.

Paterson's appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press" Sunday is being viewed by commentators and independent pollsters as too little, too late to counter the Democrat's low popularity and job approval numbers as he seeks election to a full term next year.

But Paterson is, against odds and opposition, planning a legislative agenda that could result in the legalization of same-sex marriage. He also is planning more on what is becoming his signature issue, saving the state's fiscal life. He and the Legislature have so far closed a two-year, \$20.1 billion budget gap during the recession.

He hopes his new and well-respected lieutenant governor, Richard Ravitch, who has resolved fiscal crises with New York City and its transit system, will help whip a new deficit approaching \$3 billion during a special session of the Legislature. A surprise addition to that agenda, bolstered by quiet talks in Albany and New York, could be another attempt to win approval of a same-sex marriage bill he promised to make law.

That would play strongly to Paterson's base and boost his low poll numbers, a key to a political resurgence that could help fend off his chief potential rival for the Democratic nomination, popular Attorney General Andrew Cuomo.

"Marriage equality is certainly under consideration as well as other high priorities," said Austin Shafran, spokesman for the Senate's Democratic majority.

More than a year ago, when Paterson had just ascended to the job after Eliot Spitzer resigned, he drew national attention for calling same-sex marriage a civil right, and one that he would deliver. The measure passed in the Democrat-led Assembly, but was derailed this summer amid a power struggle in the Democrat-led Senate. It will require nearly a half-dozen Republican votes to pass.

Sunday's interview, a golden opportunity to loudly and prominently deliver his message, apparently didn't help much.

Monday's reviews included the New York Post reporting some Democrats refer to Paterson as "Dead Meat Dave" and a New York Daily News headline over Mike Lupica's column that said "Writing's on the wall, Paterson just playing out the string."

Lee Miringoff of the Marist College poll, said the interview wasn't the "game-changer" Paterson needed to boost his approval rating. "You never say never," said Maurice Carroll of the Quinnipiac University poll, "but I would be hard pressed to see any way that he could come back."

But Paterson's performance won praise from professor James E. Campbell, chairman of the political science department at the University at Buffalo. Campbell said Paterson sounded diplomatic as he faced calls from New York Democrats and the White House to withdraw from the race.

"It looks like he's being picked on by some bullies," Campbell said. "I doubt that will be enough to convert many people, but he has been in a tough situation and I think people might give him a second look.

"That said, with a 20 percent in approval rating, that's a pretty deep hole to climb out of," he said.

"Governors don't get many chances on 'Meet the Press,'" said Steven Greenberg of the Siena College poll. "He did give voters a reason to keep watching him. He didn't give voters reason to reverse their opinions of him."

Greenberg noted the election is still 14 months away, so it's too early to write Paterson's political obituary.

"If anything, New York politics have shown us over the years that people who make predictions are generally wrong," he said.

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