
THIS WEEK IN TRENTON



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214th Legislature Organizes

The 214th Legislature organized at noon today. Democrats continue to control the Assembly by a margin of 47-33 and the Senate by a margin of 23-17. The Assembly Speaker is now Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver and the Assembly Majority Leader is Assemblyman Joseph Cryan. Assemblyman Alex DeCroce continues to serve as Assembly Minority Leader. Assemblyman Gerald Green will continue to serve as Speaker Pro Tempore. The Senate President is now Senator Stephen Sweeney Senator Barbara Buono is the Senate Majority Leader. Senator Thomas Kean, Jr. will continue to serve as Senate Minority Leader. Senator Nia Gill will serve as Senate President Pro Tempore.

Senator Paul Sarlo will serve as Chairman of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee and Assemblyman Louis Greenwald will continue to serve as Chairman of the Assembly Budget Committee. Senator Nicholas Scutari is the new Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. We expect additional changes in Committee Chairmanships and memberships to be announced shortly.

Seven new members of the Assembly were sworn in this afternoon: Anthony Bucco, Jr. (R-25), Craig Coughlin (D-19), Domenick DiCicco (R-4), Angel Fuentes (D-5), Charles Mainor (D-31), Donald Norcross (D-5) and Robert Schroeder (R-39).

At a press conference held before the official Assembly swearing in ceremonies, Oliver, Cryan and DeCroce vowed to put partisan differences aside in order to address the state's problems. Speaker Oliver said she expects the budget, jobs and property taxes to be the Assembly's singular focus in the coming months.

Oliver and Cryan also announced:

- Public budget hearings will begin months earlier this year, with the first hearing scheduled for Jan. 25th;
- The Assembly Tourism and Gaming Committee will be renamed the Assembly Tourism and Arts Committee and will focus more attention on the arts;

- The Assembly Regulatory Oversight Committee will focus on "reducing burdensome regulations on New Jersey's business communities." Gaming issues will be handled by this committee.

Corzine Delivers Final State of the State Address

Governor Jon Corzine delivered his final State of the State address to a joint session of the Legislature this afternoon. In a speech lasting close to 35 minutes, Corzine congratulated Governor-elect Chris Christie and encouraged the new Governor and Legislature to work together to solve New Jersey's problems. Corzine spoke of the continuing economic challenges facing New Jersey and of how the national recession continues to impact the state. He acknowledged that property taxes everywhere in the state are too high and said that until the antiquated home rule system of providing local services is reformed real property tax relief will be impossible to achieve. He ticked off a list of accomplishments, including an energy master plan; tighter safety laws on the roads; the groundbreaking of a rail tunnel under the Hudson River; more women judges; halting the practice of raiding the unemployment insurance trust fund that pays unemployment benefits; putting new crime-fighting strategies in place. He closed his speech by discussing what he clearly views as his legacy – improving the lives of New Jersey's children. Corzine spoke of revamping the state's education formula, increasing investment to build new schools, expanding preschool, reforming the child welfare system and improving access to health care for children and their families.

Corzine's term officially ends at noon on January 19 when Governor-elect Chris Christie and Lieutenant Governor-elect Kim Guadagno take office.

PSI senior partner Roger Bodman once again provided commentary on the speech on New Jersey Network and will appear on NJN's nightly news show this evening.

Oliver Announces Assembly Schedule

Speaker Sheila Oliver announced the following meeting schedule for January – April

January 25	Group A and B Committees
February 4	Group C and D Committees
February 8	Group A and B Committees
February 18	Group C and D Committees
February 25	Voting Session
March 4	Group A and B Committees
March 8	Group C and D Committees
March 11	Committees at the Call of the Speaker/Quorum
March 15	Voting Session