

State of Rhode Island

JOURNAL

-OF THE-

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY SESSION of the General Assembly begun and held at the State House in the City of Providence on Tuesday, the fourth day of January in the year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty-two.

Volume 149, No. 1

Tuesday, January 4, 2022

First Day

The House of Representatives meets at the State House in Providence, Tuesday, January 4, 2022, and is called to order at 4:04 o'clock P.M., by the Honorable K. Joseph Shekarchi, Speaker.

The roll is called and a quorum is declared present with 62 members present and 13 members absent as follows:

PRESENT – 62: The Honorable Speaker Shekarchi and Representatives Abney, Ackerman, Ajello, Alzate, Amore, Azzinaro, Barros, Batista, Bennett, Biah, Blazejewski, Caldwell, Carson, Casey, Casimiro, Cassar, Cortvriend, Corvese, Costantino, Craven, Donovan, Edwards, Fellela, Fenton-Fung, Filippi, Fogarty, Giraldo, Henries, Hull, Kazarian, Kennedy, Kislak, Knight, Lima C., Lombardi, Marszalkowski, McEntee, McGaw, McLaughlin, McNamara, Messier, Morales, Nardone, Newberry, Noret, O'Brien, Phillips, Place, Potter, Price, Quattrocchi, Ruggiero, Serpa, Shallcross Smith, Shanley, Slater, Solomon, Speakman, Tanzi, Tobon, Vella-Wilkinson.

ABSENT – 13: Representatives Baginski, Cardillo, Chippendale, Diaz, Felix, Handy, Hawkins, Lima S., Morgan, Perez, Ranglin-Vassell, Roberts and Williams.

COMMUNICATIONS

Representative Marcia Ranglin-Vassell is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 4, 2022.

Representative Ramon Perez is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 4, 2022.

Representative Bernard Hawkins is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 4, 2022.

Representative Edward T. Cardillo is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 4, 2022.

Representative Arthur Handy is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 4, 2022.

Representative Leonela Felix is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 4, 2022.

Representative Grace Diaz is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 4, 2022.

OPENING DAY ADDRESS

The Honorable Speaker Shekarchi addresses the members of the House.

(For Speaker's Address see appendix of Journal)

By unanimous consent, the House returns to:

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Majority Leader Blazejewski thanks the Speaker, for his remarks and for welcoming everyone back to begin the 2022 legislative session.

Happy New Year, ladies and gentleman, and welcome back. I want to echo the Speaker's sentiments, and thank you for all your work to make the session last year so successful under extraordinary circumstances – the passage moments ago of \$119 million in federal rescue funds to support affordable housing, child care, small business assistance, and services for children and families.

As we remain focused on responding to the continued hardships and challenges brought on by the pandemic, we renew here our commitment to making this a member-driven chamber as we work to improve the lives of all Rhode Islanders.

Sadly, since we left this chamber in July, many of us have lost people who meant a great deal to us: family members, friends, loved ones, constituents, community leaders, and former colleagues. On Thursday, we will handle several resolutions that will pay tribute to their lives.

Lastly, regarding scheduling we will be meeting on Thursday here in the chamber beginning at 4 p.m. We plan to meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays for the immediate future, though committees will likely be meeting on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays as well. We will also be monitoring the COVID situation on a daily and weekly basis.

We will keep you all informed as we move forward during these uncertain times. Thank you Mr. Speaker and again, ladies and gentlemen, welcome back.

Minority Leader Filippi addresses the House.

Floor Manager Edwards wishes Speaker Pro Tempore Kennedy a belated Happy Birthday!

DESK HELD OPEN

The Honorable Speaker Shekarchi announces that the desk will be held open.

ADJOURNMENT

At 4:21 o'clock P.M. on motion of Majority Leader Blazejewski seconded by Minority Leader Filippi the House adjourns, on a voice vote.

Diane M. DePina
Recording Clerk

APPENDIX**OPENING DAY REMARKS****BY SPEAKER SHEKARCHI****TUESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2022**

My Friends.... welcome to the official start of the 2022 session.

We did great work together last year under historic circumstances, rising to the occasion again and again. In fact, we only just completed that work today with the passage of the first investment of the American Rescue Plan funding.

Just moments ago, Governor McKee signed that legislation into law.

This historic investment of \$119 million dollars is the first down-payment on \$1.1 billion dollars in federal funds that will boost our economy and assist families and businesses.

Now, there's much more to do – more investments to be made, challenges to overcome, and historic opportunities to seize.

Beginning today, we will do all these things together.

A good deal of our work - as was the case last year - will focus on the health and economic issues related to the pandemic, which still has us in its grip.

A major goal for this session is to build on what we achieved together last year, when we essentially passed two years' worth of legislation in only six months.

We will maintain that momentum - with the proper precautions in place - and meet regularly in 2022.

We will continue our work to find ways to protect and honor the dignity inherent in every human being. Through all of your efforts, let me cite a few laws that made last year so outstanding:

We finally achieved long overdue pay equity, and committed to a path towards a \$15 dollar an hour minimum wage.

We tackled the complex, multi-layered issues of affordable housing like no other General Assembly in history. We did this by creating both a permanent funding stream for housing and a housing production fund. We addressed discrimination in housing, initiated a permanent supportive housing program to assist the homeless, and created the position of housing czar to coordinate all of these efforts.

We addressed critical environmental concerns with the passage of the Act on Climate, the most significant piece of environmental legislation in decades.

With an understanding that higher education is truly the pathway to success, we made the College Promise Program at CCRI permanent, offering a brighter future for the next generation.

We made certain that two of our largest companies, IGT and Twin River - now Bally's - will remain in Rhode Island for the next 20 years, expanding their workforce and providing good-paying jobs - a commitment they have already begun to keep.

We enacted significant advances in health care - from extending insurance coverage for doulas and the screening of colon cancer to lowering the cost of insulin.

We took steps to strengthen trust between law enforcement and our communities by making body cameras available to every police department in the state, along with \$15 million dollars in funding.

And we adopted not one, but two budgets with no tax increases. These budgets assisted small businesses, provided services for the most vulnerable, and included \$10 million dollars more than the Governor requested to hire more staff at DCYF.

Those are just a few of the highlights of what was truly a remarkable session, where my good faith commitment to collaboration and your energy and hard work produced real results for Rhode Islanders. You should be proud of what we achieved together.

Now, as we begin this new session, we rededicate ourselves to finding long-term sustainable solutions for many of the problems we continue to face.

And just like last year, these challenges will be met through the creativity in this room.

When Leader Blazejewski and I earned your confidence one year ago, we pledged to make this House a Member-Driven body. Today, we renew that pledge as we embark upon the 2022 session. Bringing people together - to get things done!

In fact, we've already begun.

Since we were last in this room, ten different committees and commissions have held dozens of bipartisan hearings, preparing the way for many of the bills we will address this year.

There is no such thing as an "off-session" anymore.

I also want to acknowledge the service of the members of the Reapportionment Commission. This group has held 16 meetings throughout the state and will continue their work over the next few weeks to bring their recommendations to us.

Also, we have also spent months analyzing the complex issue of marijuana legalization. The House and Senate intend to soon have draft legislation ready which will serve as a framework to begin a robust public hearing process. We may not be the first state to legalize marijuana, but our goal is to do it in the way that is best for all Rhode Islanders.

Our most important responsibility in the House, and one we don't take lightly, is the adoption of the state budget. Governor McKee will begin that process later this month with his budget proposal. From there, we will get to work adopting a budget that meets the needs of Rhode Islanders in these difficult times.

At the same time, we will turn our attention to other issues, such as the staffing shortages straining our hospitals and the entire field of health care.

We will continue to listen to the concerns of the business community struggling with the pandemic and meeting the challenges before us in education.

We are ready to make the appropriate investments with federal funding through ARPA and other federal programs.

Already, we have made certain that immediate needs, like Early Intervention and child care, are being addressed - and we're ready to do more.

We are presented with an historic opportunity to make critical long-term investments to ensure our state is in a better place for everyone. Including businesses, workers, families, children and seniors -- for decades to come.

To achieve these goals, we welcome input from all stake-holders. In fact, our legislative website already has more than 40 proposals presented to us by groups like the Rhode Island Foundation, the AFL-CIO and many more. Finance Committee hearings will soon be scheduled as we address these potentially transformative proposals.

Through the emergencies of 2021, there was an emergence of solidarity and collaboration in this chamber.

We must continue that effort as we face the choices and challenges ahead. So, let's get to work!

As I stand here looking out at the tremendous talent and expertise in this room, I have great confidence that our 2022 session, like the one before it, will truly be historic!

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the people of Rhode Island.