



The pieces come together

Nevadans are eager to see if an election

really does make a difference. It sure seemed that way last week as Gov. Steve Sisolak gave his first State of the State address. It's been 20 years since Nevada last had a Democratic governor, and this year he'll be working with a Democratic super-majority in the Assembly and a majority in the Senate. When combined, the two houses boast a majority of representatives who are women, presumably more interested in the health and welfare of Nevada's residents and more willing to collaborate than their majority male colleagues from sessions past.

We shall see. Republicans rejoiced when they were in the same position of majority control in 2015, with a Republican governor across the courtyard, and that session ended in acrimony. Governor Sandoval succeeded in several of his initiatives by courting Democrats who agreed with his emphasis on education and taxing corporate Nevada, tiny as the new tax was. For

much of the Republican base, however, the red wave that brought them governing power was wasted.

Democrats are much more unified in 2019. There will be battles between the progressive and the conservative wings of the party, of course, and new legislators will have to learn that you rarely get everything you want, even when your party is in control. But it was refreshing to hear Sisolak endorse many policies that are near and dear to the Democratic base. The starting line for policy debate on issues such as collective bargaining for state workers, renewable energy, voter registration and gun safety measures was moved considerably forward.

The devil's in the details, though, and the next few months will demonstrate just how progressive the new legislature and governor are. For example, Sisolak endorsed an increase in the minimum wage in his speech last week but offered no details regarding the amount he would accept. Presumably he will work with the

legislature to come up with something, though, in contrast to the vetoes of the Sandoval era.

Struggling to remain relevant, Republicans will hang their hat on a battle over the sunset of previous payroll tax rates, which Sisolak needs to fund his budget priorities, arguing that a two-thirds vote is necessary to renew the existing tax rate. If they provoke a stalemate over the issue, they may find themselves sinking further into oblivion in Nevada, as a new poll shows that 70 percent of Generation Z (those born after 1996) will join the 64 percent of Millennials in their views that government should do more to solve the nation's problems.

These young people realize they will be the ones to grapple with the ravages of climate change. Sisolak's statement that he won't "spend a single second debating the reality of climate change" sends a clear message that the anti-science Republicans are no longer in charge and reason can

return to the public dialogue of how best to mitigate its worst effects.

There were also small-ticket items included in the new budget that will be tremendously important to affected Nevadans who have felt left behind in prior years. Wages will be increased for home health aides who work with people with disabilities and the number of seniors served through the Meals on Wheels program will increase. Additional funding was set aside for family planning and kids with autism. And providing positions in Parole and Probation to work specifically on the mental health and substance abuse treatment needs of people exiting the criminal justice system could potentially do more good than anything else proposed in the expanded mental health budget.

As Democrats take the helm in Carson City, they need to deliver a budget and policy priorities that will help average Nevadans instead of subsidizing the corporate sector with tax breaks and other gifts. We'll be watching. □



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