



Democratic leaders oppose their own

Opening day of the Nevada Legislature

was full of celebration, promises and predictions of bi-partisanship while the season's biggest blizzard raged in the Sierra and bad road conditions sent state workers home early. Inside the building, families watched as beaming legislators were sworn in and their leaders pledged to cooperate, collaborate and set aside personal animosities in order to get the people's work done.

We actually could see less bluster in the legislature this year, with seasoned leadership in place and Democrats in firm control of both houses and the governor's office. The absence of former Senate Republican Leader Michael Roberson, flamethrower extraordinaire, will undoubtedly help.

Progressives are expecting policy advancements in 2019, despite enduring regrettable words from Senate Majority Leader Kelvin Atkinson in the state's largest newspaper. Atkinson told the Las Vegas Review-Journal, "I do believe we'll have to do a yeoman's job to temper some of our allies. Some have this mentality that we

have all three chambers, so let's go after everything we haven't been able to do in the last 25 years."

While it's obvious that 25 years of bottled up Democratic priorities can't be satisfied in one legislature, his quote conjured up memories of the 2013 session, when Democrats controlled both houses but not the governorship. That session Senate leaders suddenly decided to kill a sex education bill that had deep support in both houses on the premise that they had "done enough for progressives." As I wrote in 2013:

"This was after months of careful preparation, personally difficult testimony, and a door-to-door canvass during the session by a coalition of progressives who decided it was past time Nevada youth had the opportunity to access comprehensive, medically accurate sex education in public schools. Despite the all-out effort by the Democratic base, and an affirmative vote by every Democrat in the Assembly, the bill was unceremoniously killed by the Senate Democratic caucus on deadline day, with little warning and

a mangled message. ... The absence of a reasonable explanation enraged young progressives in particular, with an eruption of a rare intra-party firestorm on Twitter. As a furious Sin City Siren tweeted: "By the way, if you are worried that voting on progressive issues will hurt your reelection, you may be in the wrong party.'"

In the bi-annual Progressive State of the State speech, given this year by Laura Martin, the executive director of the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, themes from the 2018 campaign were reiterated and expounded upon as a reminder of what progressives want: economic justice featuring a significant increase in the minimum wage, affordable and accessible health care, immigrant rights, criminal justice reform, environmental justice, adequate funding for public education and enforcement of the background checks initiative passed by voters in 2016. Martin also emphasized the need to reel in predatory payday lenders who charge an average of 652 percent in interest for a short-term

loan, noting "There are more payday lenders in Nevada than McDonalds and Starbucks combined."

Despite Governor Sisolak's lack of enthusiasm for rate caps, a solution other states have found effective, legislators need to ignore the obscene amount of campaign money these companies spread around and get something done. As a wise Speaker once told me, "If you can't vote against them, don't take their money."

Democrats must exercise caution about overreaching this session, but that shouldn't prohibit them from building a solid record of progressive achievements. Instead of "tempering" allies, Democratic leaders should include them in ongoing discussions of potential policy changes and avoid the type of back-room secret deal-making that killed the sex education bill in 2013.

Progressives know massive change doesn't magically happen in just a few months. But we've also watched for years as business interests have rarely been "tempered." Don't dismiss us so easily. □

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