

Cuomo outlines new reality

Removal of barriers reflects goal of getting the public to embrace his programs

By JIMMY VIELKIND Capitol Bureau

Monday, January 3, 2011 – Albany Times Union

ALBANY -- A crew of men in hard hats started working at the Capitol just after dawn Saturday -- about two hours before Gov. Andrew Cuomo arrived to launch an administration he says will "rebuild this government" with integrity, performance and the trust of the people.

The work crew attached chains to the cement barriers that have lined State Street for nearly a decade. A piece of machinery was positioned, and the reinforced barriers between the public plaza and the Capitol were carted away.

"This Capitol has become a physical metaphor for the isolation and alienation of our people," Cuomo said later in the day. "To get into this Capitol is now like running an obstacle course, and it shouldn't be. People refer to the Capitol as a fort or as a bunker. It is anything but."

And so the first act of New York's 56th governor was to change one small part of State Street by executive order. In the afternoon, he walked out to thank the Department of Transportation workers as they lifted away the last segment of the wall.

There were immediate changes inside the Capitol, as well. Cuomo cut a red ribbon across the doors to the "Hall of Governors," the passageway connecting the offices of top administration officials. Although it's adorned by historic portraits of earlier chief executives, the corridor was closed to the public by Gov. George Pataki in 1995.

Cuomo's first day as governor began with a Cabinet meeting that his secretary, Steve Cohen, described as primarily a chance for the new team to get together in one room for the first time.

The day's main event was the noontime swearing-in ceremony in the Capitol's War Room, where Court of Appeals Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman administered the oath of office to Cuomo as well as Lt. Gov. Bob Duffy, Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and incumbent Comptroller Tom DiNapoli.

Cuomo's 27-minute address hit on themes familiar from his campaign, including his belief that popular participation would be the "silver bullet" to set New York's state government -- so broken it has "become a national punchline" -- on the proper course.

"First, we have to start with a new attitude that reflects a new reality. We need to correct decades of declines and billions of dollars in overspending," he said. " ... My attitude will be constructive impatience with the status quo of Albany."

Cuomo pledged to work with Republicans, and challenged them to join him. Indeed, many points of the fiscally conservative agenda on which he campaigned are more closely in synch with Republican rhetoric.

Even Cuomo's more liberal rhetoric came couched in the language of effective management: He described how deserving citizens in need of state assistance "find a government that has been part of the problem rather than being part of the solution."

He was more explicit as he urged the passage of a cap on local property tax increases this year, and reiterated the need to consolidate and "right-size" government. He promised to unveil an "emergency financial reinvention plan" in Wednesday's State of the State address.

Reaction to the inaugural speech was generally positive. "The people are looking for results right now, and that's what we have to do," said Senate Republican Leader Dean Skelos, " ... We've got to get our fiscal house in order now, and that's going to take some tough decisions. The governor has laid out the blueprint to do it and we're going to be supportive of it."

"I was impressed that he hit all the high notes," said Assembly Majority Leader Ron Canestrari, D-Cohoes. "He's not looking to blame anybody, but reaching out to both parties, both houses, and to the public to achieve his agenda, and that's an important symbol and an important first step as well."

But lawmakers were mostly absent from Saturday's ceremony -- another symbol for those interpreting the tightly scripted affair. The festivities were austere by design: Cuomo wanted no extravagance in light of a projected deficit of at least \$9 billion in the coming fiscal year, and the estimated \$40,000 tab was paid for with funds left over from Cuomo's campaign.

Skelos and Canestrari sat with minority conference leaders Sen. [John Sampson](#) and Assemblyman [Brian Kolb](#) in the front row among 175 guests.

Cuomo's campaign helped staff the event, no state [Democratic Party](#) leaders were present. Gov. [David Paterson](#) sat in the first row near the central aisle, closest to the podium, beneath murals enshrining New York's military history.

And there was, of course, the Cuomo family, whose members made an emotional return to the Executive Mansion on Eagle Street on Friday evening for a family dinner and intimate swearing-in.

The family lived there from 1983 to 1994, during Mario Cuomo's three terms as governor. To end Saturday's public events, Cuomo retreated with Lee and Duffy to greet around 320

visitors -- including [Kevin Carey](#), son of former-Gov. [Hugh Carey](#) -- at an open house on the ground floor of the mansion.

The elder Gov. Cuomo, seated at the inaugural next to his wife Matilda, was honored early in his son's speech as "a man who has taught us all very much ... and who has taught me everything I know."

Looking at his parents, siblings, partner [Sandra Lee](#) and three daughters, Andrew Cuomo at first betrayed a nervousness not seen in stump speeches around the state.

"I think that Mario Cuomo ... has to be beaming," Paterson said after the speech. "I think he's got to be beating his chest right now."

"I love being back," Mario Cuomo told reporters after the ceremony had ended. "I especially love seeing him here as governor."

Is 'right-size' code for new layoffs?

Gov. Andrew Cuomo pledged he would "right-size this state government for today" during his inaugural speech, which could be interpreted as a sign that more state workers may be laid off in 2011.

"When I say 'right-size,' I'm focusing more on the function, because one thing you'll hear in the State of the State (speech on Wednesday): The numbers that we're talking about are so large that you can't do this exercise as a budget-cutting exercise," Cuomo told reporters after his swearing-in. "You're going to have to ... redesign and reinvent the programs. You can't do these things the same way with that much less money."

Cuomo also said the layoffs of 891 state workers, effective Friday, would stand. As attorney general, he promised to defend the layoffs in court if necessary. In the waning days of his campaign, Cuomo spoke of the need for state agencies to "do more with less."

"Rightsizing -- thank God he didn't say layoffs, but who knows what it means?" said Assembly Majority Leader Ron Canestrari, D-Cohoes. "I would hate to see layoffs among the state work force. ... I hope there are other ways to right-size and not inflict pain on people in a very difficult economic environment."