



Albany watch: New York State's 2013 Legislative Session

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Much is new in Albany this year, but whether or not it serves to ease legislative gridlock remains to be seen.

When the New York State senate kicked off the 2013 Legislative Session, senate rules were immediately amended to formally recognize an unprecedented bipartisan coalition majority. This third senate conference, made up of senate Republicans and five breakaway Democrats, will be in control of the legislative debate in that chamber for the next two years. Democratic senator Jeff Klein (D-Bronx) and GOP senator Dean Skelos (R-Nassau County) will administer with joint and equal authority over the agenda, budget talks and appointments. Control of the Senate president will shift between the leaders every two weeks. A new senate minority leader, senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Westchester), was elected by the remaining 25 senate Democrats.

In the assembly, the Democrats increased their majority to more than 100 members, which gives speaker Sheldon Silver the two-thirds majority he needs to override any gubernatorial veto in 2013. The retirement of longtime assemblyman Ron Canestrari (D-Cohoes) brings an additional change to the state government, with a new majority leader to be appointed by Speaker Sheldon this session.

In the context of these shifts in legislative control and leadership, the American Council of Engineering Companies of New York (ACEC New York) is hopeful that the changes will result in action on a multitude of issues, and most importantly, a strong bipartisan commitment on the critical issue of infrastructure funding.

Consider what happens when infrastructure fails: A steam pipe explodes near Grand Central Terminal, a levee fails and floods New Orleans, a bridge collapses in Minneapolis. Infrastructure isn't a luxury; it's a matter of life and death.

According to a press release by the state comptroller on Dec. 20, 2012, New York faces a shortfall of up to \$89 billion in funding for critical water, sewer and transportation infrastructure over the next 20 years. Add to this the damage from Super Storm Sandy, estimated at more than \$50 billion in New York State. Consider that every single system—from electrical grids to mass transit—needs a multi-billion dollar fix. Factor in more extreme weather events that are likely to wreak havoc on our area. The need for infrastructure improvement is great; the time is now.

ACEC New York's Agenda

Across the state, there will be competition and pressure as every single dollar is quickly accounted for and budgets fall short. With singleness of purpose, ACEC New York—which represents private sector engineering firms—will continue to push forth its agenda, one that includes rebuilding after Sandy and investing in infrastructure for our future and for the next generation of New Yorkers.

Protect New York's assets by adequately funding critical infrastructure needs: Make capital investments exempt from the property tax cap and allow use of pension funds to support infrastructure improvements.

Support NY Works and job creation: Pass mandate relief measures that will free up funds for public works and put New Yorkers back to work.

Implement Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) and Design-build: Accelerate infrastructure projects, leverage public dollars and reduce costs.

Extend Qualifications-Based Selection (QBS): Allow public authorities and public benefit corporations to use QBS to achieve higher quality design and lower project life-cycle costs.

Deliver infrastructure projects cost effectively: Increase use of private design firms.

Indemnify design professionals: Ensure that design professionals are responsible only for the work they perform.

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