

EDITORIAL

A third term's ambitious start

School aid, MTA among top challenges

You ain't seen nothing yet.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo made that vow early in his State of the State and budget address. These events always are vessels of optimism, brimming with the possibilities of a new year.

But Cuomo went further as his third term starts, evoking a new era of total Democratic control, which he said could lead to the most productive first 100 days in state history. There will be intraparty fighting and a suburban-urban divide, but already the State Legislature has set the pace in its first two days, passing a spate of bills on voting reforms and gender discrimination, its quickest break from the gate in many years.

Cuomo's timetable is tight, but a lot can get done in that time. And there is plenty in his ambitious agenda. But some things should not be rushed, and the governor and lawmakers would be wise to understand that. Hopefully, this era includes open dialogue and public hearings.

The legalization of recreational marijuana, for example, seems inevitable, but we are encouraged that Cuomo projects no tax revenue from it until 2021. The complicated business, taxation, safety and health issues will take time to reconcile. But Cuomo is right to go full speed ahead on a permanent property tax cap. The challenges to his \$175.2 billion budget also are bracing. The state has a record-high number of jobs and record-low unemployment, but the "buts" are big. Tax receipts are off. Federal government actions have hiked health care costs. There's the looming effect of the new federal cap on state and local tax deductions on the housing market and, by extension, the economy. Wisely, Cuomo did not mention single-payer health care; it might be the future, but this is not the time for that conversation.

Budget goodies include a middle-class tax cut for two brackets of earners; a ban on plastic bags, which must include a fee on paper bags to work; and a long list of social and criminal justice issues. Thankfully, there is another \$2.5 billion for clean-water infrastructure, critical for Long Island. A school aid hike of 3.6 percent is a decent starting point, but the cage match over its final total and distribution between poorer and wealthier systems will probably be the defining fight of this session. Cuomo's plan also includes an overdue ban on unsafe remanufactured limousines of the type involved in deadly crashes in October in Schoharie County and in Cutchogue in 2015.

Some previous positions morphed, for the better — like restoring the power of the state comptroller to preapprove state contracts greater than \$250,000. In acknowledging recent ethics scandals and advocating for ethics changes, Cuomo's slide presentation featured headlines dealing with the conviction of a former top aide, but real ethics reform must go beyond recognizing the problem.

Cuomo also hit his favorite piñata — the dysfunctional Metropolitan Transportation Authority. He lambasted its processes and structure, and no one is going to disagree with him on that, but he stopped short of providing a solution. If the governor wants total control, he needs to produce a plan on how he would do so. Then he can blow it up just as he did with the old Tappan Zee Bridge earlier in the day.

Cuomo's third-term agenda is promising. Now he and lawmakers have to deliver.

— *The editorial board*



Gov. Cuomo delivers State of the State address Tuesday in Albany.

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MATT DAVIES



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LETTERS

Blame commuters for messy trains

Commuters complaining about the filthy conditions on Long Island Rail Road trains is the epitome of chutzpah ["Trash on the train," News, Jan. 14]. Do the motormen and conductors create this problem? Don't think so. Those trains wouldn't be so filthy if commuters had respect for public property.

Jerome J. Levenberg,
Cedarhurst

Folks want to blame the LIRR and its management for delayed and late trains? Check.

Blame the LIRR and management for switch problems? Check.

Blame the LIRR for insufficiently heated or cooled cars? You bet.

Terrible communication while commuting? Nailed it.

But to blame the LIRR and staff for the disgusting habits of the commuters who pay exorbitant fees to ride the LIRR? You have to be kidding me!

The finger-pointing should go in one direction — toward the riders who use the LIRR as their primary mode of transport to and from New York City. As a railroad commuter for 30-plus years, I have seen slob from all walks of life leave garbage. I guess behaving in a courteous manner gets forgotten about in the parking lot.

Spare me the indignation and outrage about the state of disgusting trains. Commuters should just look around at fellow riders. But try saying something to that slob who just left the paper or bagel remnants? Nah, that's someone else's job.

Kevin J. McLaughlin,
East Norwich

Your front-page picture raised an interesting question: Does a ticket entitle riders to leave their garbage for the railroad to pick up? How do the complainers think the trains got that messy? What a sad commentary on Long Island riders. I rode the trains for 29 years; if I had garbage, I took it off the train and threw it in a trash can.

Phil Cicciari,
Port Washington

I read this article with disgust. I see garbage left on the trains as yet another example of the decline of morals in our society.

Apparently, too many people have a sense of entitlement that they believe justifies behaving like pigs, with no obligation to act with deference toward others or take responsibility for their actions. The fact that this mentality is even prevalent in the simple