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Hochul addresses New Yorkers

On Tuesday afternoon, Gov. Kathy Hochul delivered a virtual address to the people of New York. She stated:

On a cold January day nearly seven years ago, I took the oath of office to become your lieutenant governor.

I am humbled that the people of New York twice put their faith in me to fill this role, which required me to be prepared, if necessary, to serve as your governor.

And now, that day has come. At the stroke of midnight, I once again took the oath of office, creating a sacred bond of trust between me and every New Yorker.

And thus, I stand here as the 57th governor of New York.

But I did not get here without the courage and sacrifice of others.

The courage of early suffragettes who began the long march for equality, and the elected women who came before me, paving the way for this day – they taught me resistance.

The courage of my grandparents, as teenagers, fleeing great poverty in Ireland in search of a better life – they taught me perseverance.

The courage of my mother who – despite growing up in an abusive home and losing her own mother at a young age – raised six children in Buffalo, all the while engaging in social and racial justice movements. Together, we founded a home for survivors of domestic violence when she was 70 years old – she taught me empathy.

The courage of my dad to dream big for his family, making steel by day, getting an education at night, and leaving it all to join a tech start up in the early days of computers – he taught me to be a risk-taker.

The courage of my own family, husband Bill, and children Will and Katie – to encourage me to pursue my passion for public service, despite countless hours of my absence – they taught me unconditional love.

I share those influences so you can understand the depth of my commitment to you.

And to those New Yorkers who have yet to meet me. I say this: You may not know me. But I know you.

In my travels to all 62 counties every year, I've walked your streets, met you at diners, supported your small businesses, listened

to farmers, engaged local officials, and worked to revitalize long-neglected downtowns.

I've listened with a broken heart to your stories of loss from opioid abuse, sadly similar to what happened to my nephew.

I've rallied with advocates to pass paid family leave, raise the minimum wage, enact GENDA, protect our strong gun laws, and so much more.

And I've been in the trenches with local health leaders and officials battling the pandemic day after day after day.

As a result of all this, I've embraced and internalized the hopes and dreams of 20 million people who share the name New Yorkers.

I want you to know you are heard, and I'm ready to get to work as your governor to solve the big problems this state faces.

Your priorities are my priorities – and right now that means fighting the delta variant.

None of us want to see a rerun of last year's horrors with COVID-19. Therefore, we will take proactive steps to prevent that from happening.

Priority No. 1: We get children back to school and protect the environment so they can learn, and everyone is safe.

For months, I've been consulting with parents, elected officials, teachers, school boards and superintendents.

As a result, we need to require vaccinations for all school personnel with an option to test out weekly – at least for now.

To accomplish this in New York, we need partnerships with all levels of government, and I am working now on getting this done.

New York is launching a back-to-school COVID-19 testing program to make testing for students and staff widely available and convenient.

I am also immediately directing the Department of Health to institute universal masking for anyone entering our schools.

Later this week, I will announce a series of school-related policies that will be concise and consistent, giving the school districts what they have been asking for.



Gov. Kathy Hochul delivers an address to New Yorkers from the Red Room at the State Capitol. (Photo by Mike Groll/Office of Gov. Kathy Hochul)

Which leads me to No. 2. Increase vaccination rates for New Yorkers. Much progress has been made, but too many are not yet vaccinated putting themselves and their communities at risk.

With the FDA's full approval of the Pfizer vaccine yesterday, New Yorkers can expect new vaccine requirements. More on that soon.

Priority No 3. Prepare for booster shots and make sure they are available and are distributed quickly and reliably.

When I consulted with Dr. Fauci last week, we discussed the urgent need to ensure vaccinated individuals receive a booster dose at eight months.

I am prepared to do whatever is necessary, including reopening mass vax sites so that a booster is available to all New Yorkers who meet that timetable.

These are my day 1 initiatives on COVID. There will be more regular updates and announcements in the near future.

Now let's talk about the COVID assistance for New Yorkers that is long overdue.

President Biden and our federal delegation – led by Sens. Schumer and Gillibrand – worked hard to secure funds for renters, landlords, workers and more.

But, I am not at all satisfied with the pace that this COVID relief is getting out the door.

I want the money out – and I want it out now. No more excuses and delays.

I met with Assembly Speaker Heastie and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins earlier today, and we are unified in our sense of urgency that this money get it out to people in need.

We are launching a new targeted campaign to reach more New Yorkers on rent relief.

We are forming a real partnership with legislators, the City of New York, other cities and counties to get the job done.

I am hiring more staff to process applications immediately. I am also assigning a top team to identify and remove any barriers that remain.

New Yorkers should know, if you apply and qualify for this money, you will be

protected from eviction for a solid year. Let me repeat. If you apply and qualify, you will not be evicted for a year.

We will take the same focused approach to our Excluded Workers Fund.

The money is there, and these people were just as impacted by COVID and need help now.

The final priorities I will outline today are simple – get this state working again – focused and without distractions.

That begins with a dramatic change in culture – with accountability and no tolerance for individuals who cross the line.

Today, I am directing an overhaul of state government's policies on sexual harassment and ethics, starting with requiring all training be done live, instead of allowing people to click their way through a class.

A new era of transparency will be one of the hallmarks of my administration. To me, it's very simple.

We will focus on open, ethical governing that New Yorkers will trust.

I will direct state entities to review their compliance with state transparency laws, and provide a public report on their findings.

I have instructed my counsel to come up with an expedited process to fulfill all FOIL requests as fast as possible – and post completed requests publicly online.

SEE HOCHUL, continued on Page 5

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