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Pennsylvania General Assembly Opens 2023-2024 Legislative Session

The Pennsylvania Senate and House kicked off a new legislative session on Jan. 3. Over a quarter of the legislature is new in 2023, along with potentially split control of the two chambers for the first time in more than a decade.

As Pennsylvania enters this historic session, many people in the political sphere are anticipating how the two chambers will get along, if at all, given that Democrats are expected to have 102 seats once special elections are completed in early February, while the Senate is firmly controlled by the Republican caucus.

The House of Representatives has had a shakier beginning to its legislative session than the Senate. The House currently has three vacancies, with Republicans holding 101 seats to 99 for Democrats. Heading into the first day of session, questions swirled if the chamber could elect a speaker and open session. After weeks of speculation, the House did elect a speaker in a surprise to many in Harrisburg. Rep. Mark Rozzi (D-Berks) was nominated by a Republican to serve as speaker of the House and won election after all 99 Democrats and a couple dozen of Republicans voted for Rozzi, including all of the House Republican leadership. Rozzi, who has been in the legislature since 2012, won the speakership thanks to an alleged deal made with Republican leadership. The contours of the deal are the subject of debate among legislators.

However, this show of bipartisanship seems to already be failing. Both caucuses have publicly stated conflicting versions of the deal and the chamber has yet to pass rules for the session in order to consider legislation or appoint committee chairs and members of committees.

These internal conflicts came to light this week when the House returned to Harrisburg to convene a special session called for by Gov. Tom Wolf. Wolf called the special session to consider legislation that would allow the creation of a constitutional amendment surrounding the statute of limitations to file sexual abuse lawsuits. This issue has been at the center of Speaker Rozzi's career, and he has been clear that no other business will be considered until the House resolves this issue. On Jan. 9, the first of three days of the special session, conversations broke down and session was ostensibly canceled for the remainder of the week. It is unclear when the House will return to session.

On the other side of the Capitol, the Senate also kicked off their two-year legislative session on Jan. 3 and they returned to Harrisburg on Jan. 9 to convene their special session.

The Senate had previously elected their leadership teams for the new session in late 2022. Kim Ward (R-Westmoreland) was elected the first ever female president pro tempore of the Senate. On the Republican side, here are the following leadership members:

- Floor Leader – Joe Pittman (R-Indiana)
- Whip – Ryan Aument (R-Lancaster)
- Caucus Chair – Kristin Phillips-Hill (R-York)
- Caucus Secretary – Camera Bartolotta (R-Washington)
- Appropriations Committee Chair – Scott Martin (R-Lancaster)
- Caucus Administrator – Lisa Baker (R-Wyoming)
- Policy Committee Chair – Daniel Laughlin (R-Erie)

The Democrats elected a very similar leadership team to last session. Their elected officers include:

- Floor Leader – Jay Costa (D-Allegheny)
- Whip – Christine Tartaglione (D-Philadelphia)
- Caucus Chair – Wayne Fontana (D-Allegheny)
- Caucus Secretary – Maria Collett (D-Montgomery)
- Appropriations Committee Chair – Vincent Hughes (D-Philadelphia)
- Caucus Administrator – Judy Schwank (D-Berks)
- Policy Committee Chair – Katie Muth (D-Montgomery)

The Senate also announced all committee chairs and assignments last week. Of note, Sens. Pat Stefano (R-Fayette) and Lisa Boscola (D-Northampton) are set to chair the Consumer Protection & Professional Licensure Committee. Newly elected Sen. Frank Farry (R-Bucks) is set to become the chairman of the Urban Affairs & Housing Committee alongside Sen. Nikil Saval (D-Philadelphia).