

NEWS:

House Republican Leaders Have Mixed Feelings Regarding Governor's Vision

January 18, 2019 -- Governor John Carney outlined his vision for the year ahead on Thursday, delivering his 2019 State of the State Address to a joint session of the 150th General Assembly.

House Republican leaders had mixed reactions to the chief executive's remarks, which included calls for fiscal prudence and targeted spending to help low-income students, but also renewed support for gun control and voting bills that have been divisive in past sessions.

State House Minority Whip Tim Dukes, R-Laurel, said he was glad the governor reaffirmed his commitment to eliminating "broadband deserts" -- areas of rural Delaware where residents do not have high-speed internet access -- by the end of next year.

"It is a huge issue in western Sussex," Rep. Dukes said. "People cannot get [high-speed] internet access to their homes. That has a direct impact on education when kids cannot get online to do projects, so I'm excited to see that roll-out."

The governor also called for funding to help schools with students requiring more attention.

"Next week, when I release my budget, I will propose a new Opportunity Funding program -- Delaware's first real weighted funding plan," Gov. Carney said. "It will direct \$60 million over the next three years to low-income students, and English learners across our state. The funding will pay for the type of help disadvantaged students need: more reading and math supports, counselors, smaller class sizes, and after-school programs."

Rep. Dukes said in conversations he has had with local school district superintendents; they have regularly asked for "flexible funding to deal with the special needs of low-come students and English Language Learners."



State Rep. Tim Dukes

State House Minority Leader Danny Short, R-Seaford, said he was glad the governor continued to support the creation of a Budget Stabilization Fund -- something key House and Senate Democratic leaders fought last year. "I think it is a very prudent thing for us to do," he said. "And with the excess funds we have this year, it would be easy for us to do, rather than just spending all the money."

However, Rep. Short said he was disappointed the governor was again pushing for a bill banning so-called assault weapons. The legislation, which failed to win approval in the General Assembly last year, would prohibit the sale of specific makes and models of semi-automatic rifles, handguns, and shotguns.

Rep. Dukes was also disdainful of the idea, noting that none of the cited weapons had been used in the commission of a violent crime in Delaware in the preceding year. He said such a contentious issue would only distract legislators from focusing on real challenges, like drug abuse. More than 340 people died in Delaware last year from drug overdoses.

Both men also took issue with the governor's support of a bill to allow people to register as voters on Election Day. That measure failed in the 149th General Assembly amid controversy.

Under existing Delaware law, voters can use utility bills showing their home address as a form of identification. Critics of same-day registration note it could facilitate voter fraud by anyone willing to manufacture counterfeit billing statements. There were also concerns that such a law would further burden short-staffed election workers, lengthening waiting times at the polls and discouraging voters.

"Initiatives like this create controversy among legislators, and they draw attention away from the things that have to be done," Rep. Short said. "If they do not have to be done, I think it would be wise for us to put them on the back burner and try to focus on what needs to be done."



State Rep. Danny Short