

## **Remarks of Lt. Governor Molly Gray**

### **Recognizing the End of the 2022 Senate Session**

**Thursday, May 12, 2022**

Senators, good evening, we've finally arrived at this moment; the last planned convening of this Senate Chamber and the end of this legislative session.

I know for many, myself included, this moment also marks the near end, if not THE END of our formal time together in this Senate Chamber. And for that reason, this moment is as bitter as it is sweet. In some ways, it's come too quick, in others not quick enough.

I want to take a moment to briefly go back to the beginning of this biennium.

I want to recall Jan. 6<sup>th</sup> 2021 insurrection and attack on the U.S. Capitol, and what that meant for all of you, your safety and security as well as the deep necessity for your work.

I want to recall that this biennium started near the height of this pandemic and that it wasn't clear whether this moment, being here in this chamber, would even be possible.

We all faced challenges in every part of our daily lives; from our jobs and work, to our kids and school, to caring for loved ones and protecting our own health. It hasn't been easy.

Countless hours spent on zoom, committee meetings via zoom, senate sessions via zoom and more "Senator, kindly unmute," that I care to remember.

It wasn't easy but you all showed your constituents and Vermonters that even in the most challenging of times, legislative leaders from every corner of our state can come together to be responsive and to do a lot of good.

It's been an honor to be part of that, in some way, as your Madam President. The day I was sworn in, I committed to you publicly to preside over this Chamber with fairness, compassion, predictability and, most certainly, timeliness.

While I'm not sure, and especially after today's germaneness ruling, I have more friends than enemies, but I hope you feel as though, regardless of political affiliation, you've been treated with respect and fairness.

As you might imagine, I've spent a lot of time observing AND listening to all of you. I want to tell you just some of what I've heard and witnessed over the last two sessions:

The heartfelt debate and passage of a historic medical monitoring bill addressing and protecting the health of Vermonters, particularly those in Bennington County. (Sears/Campion)

The creation of Vermont's first ever statewide ethics code. A code that will help prevent conflicts of interest and preferential treatment, protect whistleblowers and promote public trust in elected officials. (Pollina/White - Gov't Ops)

**I've heard and witnessed:**

A compassionate debate and update to our medical-aid-in-dying laws that will make the process more accessible for terminally ill Vermonters. (McCormack, Clarkson, Lyons, Sirotkin)

Action that will expand access and coverage of desperately needed telehealth services across Vermont as well as overdue investments in mental health and support services, especially for Vermont youth. (Lyons/Hardy – Health and Welfare)

Unified hard work and cooperative action by our Vermont state employees, teachers, legislators, and Task Force members, in making compromises and achieving pension reform that will protect the retirement of state employees and teachers. (Pollina/White – Gov’t Ops)

**I’ve heard and witnessed:**

Critical steps to protect the reproductive autonomy of every Vermonter through the passage of Proposition 5, now set for voters in November. (Lyons/Balint)

An important compromise that extended waiting periods for background checks for firearm purchases. (Baruth)

**I’ve heard and witnessed:**

The passage of a historic transportation bill that includes unprecedented funding for electric vehicles, and infrastructure ready to combat and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The passage of Vermont’s first ever environmental justice bill, deeply necessary to equitable participation in climate action and protection from environmental harms.

The passage of perhaps the largest investment in workforce development in Vermont’s history and at a time when we need it most in nearly every sector. (Sirotkin/Clarkson)

And of course, I’ve heard and witnessed: an ever-lively debate around the budget...

And what would this budget have looked like without the leadership of our congressional delegation? The effectiveness of this legislative session and the reach of our response to the pandemic would not have been possible without the hard work and service of our congressional delegation - particularly Senator Leahy and his service as Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. It is because of their service that we as a state have received over \$2.7 billion in federal dollars to help aid Vermont's recovery.

Through bipartisan negotiations and compromise, the legislature has effectively helped direct those federal dollars to address the many challenges we face as a state, including funds for; a badly needed broadband buildout, water quality and climate initiatives, and a badly needed reimbursement rate increase for our nonprofit mental health agencies, and much more.

While there is still plenty of work left to be done, we've made significant progress to recover stronger from the pandemic than we were when we it began.

#### Reflection on the process, integrity across the aisle:

From the Senate dais, I've heard and witnessed differing sides to the many issues debated this legislative session and throughout the process I've been proud to witness and help moderate thorough integrity across the aisle.

As elected leaders, we can set an example, from our rural communities to the State House, and continue to set a tone of civility, cooperation and productivity, and do our part to restore and strengthen faith in good government.

There are not many places in this country where differing political parties can disagree with as much civility as they do in Vermont.

Maintaining that integrity in a transparent and accessible manner is how Vermont can once again set an example for the country in how to nurture a thriving democracy. I commend you all for your professionalism and your integrity in representing the best interests of Vermonters.

### Closing Thank you

I want to close by recognizing everyone who makes this chamber and democracy work, both digitally and in-person.

The last two years have been anything but a normal legislative session, with lots of the work traditionally done under the golden dome having to take place remotely.

Thank you to everyone in the Legislative Information Technology Office for facilitating the necessary technology to allow this unique session to be held in a safe and accessible manner.

I also want recognize the Sargent at Arms, Janet Miller, Assistant Sargent at Arms Sid McLam, Donna Waiter and everyone in the Sargent at Arms' Office.

Thank you to the Senate doormen, Michael Waiter, Cornelius Reed, Dennis Miles, Brett Murphy, Joe Sweeny, and Wilson Hughes, for facilitating communications within this chamber and for their leadership in mentoring the legislative pages.

Thank you to the Capital Police for keeping watch over the People's House.

Thank you to everyone in the Secretary of the Senate's Office, Steve Marshall, Helen Estroff, and Penny Carpenter. Secretary of the Senate John Bloomer and Vanessa Davison it's been an honor to work with you

- your service to Vermont and this Senate is unparalleled. I am grateful for your mentorship and will miss working with you tremendously.

I also want to recognize my Chief of Staff, Andrew Gillespie.

And before I thank all of you, I want so especially thank President Pro Temp Balint. The Senator from Windham. It's been quite the journey here together navigating the last two years. Team work makes the dream work, it also makes the senate work. It's been a pleasure to work with you.

And, thank you Senators for your tireless work, your heartfelt debates, and passionate exchanges on behalf of Vermonters.

And congratulations to the Senators who are retiring. Your communities, districts and our state are better for your service and each of you leaves behind a legacy in this building and in ways big and small across Vermont.

To everyone: while my work as your Madam President now comes to a close, my work as your Lt. Governor continues. I look forward to seeing you across the state and all we might still together in the months ahead.

Lastly, I want to take a moment to recognize and thank the people of Vermont for having faith in this building and our state's democratic process.

Thank you and congratulations!