

Cuomo eschews history for NY address

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(Photo: AP Photo/Mike Groll)

ALBANY - When Gov. Andrew Cuomo took office in 2011, he scrapped decades of history by not giving the annual State of the State address before the state Legislature in the ornate Assembly chamber in the Capitol.

Instead, he chose the convention center nearby in the Empire State Plaza, turning the speech partly into a PowerPoint presentation to lay out his agenda for the year.

Next month, Cuomo will step away even further from the Capitol to give the speech: He's going to give six regional addresses to kick off the 2017 legislative session.

The move is the latest effort by Cuomo to work outside of the Legislature to build support for his agenda.

The decision is also drawing criticism for eschewing the historical and practical significance of detailing his proposals before the 213-seat Legislature, which would ultimately have to adopt much of what he will seek.

"I preferred some very special times when the governor came to the Legislature, much the same as the president comes to the Congress" for the State of the Union, said former Assemblyman Jack McEneny, D-Albany, and an historian of the state Capitol.

"I think that tradition is more and more getting lost."

The state Constitution requires an annual message from the governor to the Legislature that discusses the condition of the state, Cuomo's office said.

But the article doesn't detail the timing or location of the message, and only starting with Gov. Al Smith in 1923 did the format change from a written message to a speech, Cuomo's office said in a statement Monday.

So the speeches will be held the week of Jan. 9 in New York City; western New York; the Hudson Valley; Long Island; the Capital Region and central New York. The governor's office has yet to detail the times and locations of the regional speeches.

"Our efforts have focused on regional development strategies across the state, and we want the opportunity to lay out regional accomplishments, goals and challenges," Melissa DeRosa, Cuomo's chief of staff, said in a statement.

The change was also viewed as another sign of the strained relationship between Cuomo and lawmakers.

Last January, [Cuomo was heckled \(/story/news/politics/politics-on-the-hudson/2016/01/13/state-state-lawmaker-shouts-cuomo-during-speech/78747850/\)](#) by Assemblyman Charles Barron, D-Brooklyn, and after [a deal this month fell apart \(/story/news/politics/politics-on-the-hudson/2016/12/27/special-session-collapses-leaving-uber-unresolved/95885274/\)](#) over lawmakers' first pay raise since 1999, tensions are high between the sides.

"I think that he's separating himself from the Legislature, and he separating himself from Albany physically," said Gerald Benjamin, the long-time political science professor at SUNY New Paltz.

"He's saying, 'I'm going to govern around this system.'"

Cuomo has also tinkered with the construct of the State of the State address in recent years.

Over the past two years, he has combined the address with his proposed budget for the fiscal year that starts April 1.

Traditionally, the State of the State address was followed two weeks later by the budget presentation by the governor.

The budget is due by Jan. 17, and it's unclear whether Cuomo will give a budget presentation to the Legislature.

He could include spending details in his regional addresses, as well as release budget documents on the due date.

His office didn't detail how the budget proposal would be unveiled.

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