Democrat Wolf takes office as Pennsylvania's 47th governor

Mike Stack takes oath as lieutenant governor

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HARRISBURG, Pa. —Democrat Tom Wolf took office Tuesday as Pennsylvania's 47th chief executive, portraying himself as a political outsider while appealing for cooperation in a divided state government plagued by budget deficits and partisan stalemate.

Ex-governors and lawmakers were among the more than 4,000 people that Wolf's office estimated to be at the ceremony outside the state Capitol building.

"I am an unconventional leader," said Wolf, a former businessman. "I may be the first governor of Pennsylvania who ever operated a forklift, ever managed a hardware store. I volunteered for the Peace Corps. I ran a business."

Wolf, 65, outlined his goals in an inaugural address that used positive, general terms -- ending educational disparities in public schools, creating good-paying jobs and providing "a government that works" -- but gave no more specifics to ambitious goals that he laid out during his campaign.

He did not mention the obstacle of a projected $2 billion-plus revenue gap for the fiscal year that starts July 1 or his proposals that include levying a new tax on the natural gas industry, restructuring the state income tax and increasing public school funding.

"Nothing is more essential than working together to make sure that every child in Pennsylvania has access to a great education and that all teachers have the resources they need to deliver that great education," Wolf said. "Our schools must be our highest priority."

Throughout his swearing-in and speech, gas drilling protesters chanted, "Ban fracking now!" Eight people were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct at the inauguration, police said.

Wolf, who ran his family's building-products distribution company in York County for nearly 30 years, beat Republican Gov. Tom Corbett after plowing $10 million of his own money into a highly effective TV advertising blitz. He is scheduled to present his budget proposals in an address March 3 to the Legislature.

Corbett attended the inauguration along with former governors Tom Ridge and Mark Schweiker, both Republicans. Former Democratic Gov. Ed Rendell introduced Wolf at the ceremony.

GOP majority leaders in both houses of the Legislature have said they want to curb rising costs, such as public employee pensions, or privatize the state-run system of liquor and wine sales before they would consider raising taxes.

Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati, R-Jefferson, said that he was encouraged by Wolf's priority of better jobs and schools but that the "real focus" of the Legislature and new governor will be the looming budget talks. "There were really no specifics," Scarnati said. "I'm not surprised."

Wolf's running mate, Mike Stack, who represented a Philadelphia district in the state Senate for 14 years, was sworn in before Wolf. Stack took his oath from his mother, retired Philadelphia municipal judge Felice Stack. As lieutenant governor, Stack will serve as the Senate's presiding officer.

State Rep. Steve Samuelson, a Northampton County Democrat, said the prominence of educational themes in the new governor's speech were music to his ears. "I am thrilled that we have a governor, once again, that believes education is essential to our future," Samuelson said.

Asked at a post-inaugural news briefing what the sign of success would be for the new administration, Wolf replied: "I'm hoping that people say, you know, 'They worked together. They made Pennsylvania better, the deficit didn't exist anymore, we're actually funding our schools fairly, our economy is back on track. ... We're taking full responsible advantage of our resources, and we have a government that I can trust.'"

Post-inaugural events included an art show at the Pennsylvania State Museum and a $100-a-ticket celebration at the Hershey Lodge that was to feature live musical performances and an array of local food and drinks from across the state.