**BOLDING**: Good morning! I’m House Democratic Leader Reginald Bolding, and I’m honored to be here one final time with my seatmate Senate Democratic Leader Rebecca Rios, as well as members from both our caucuses. Later today Governor Ducey will deliver his final State of the State address and we sincerely hope to find areas of common ground to address the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic that is still spreading, still taking lives, still impacting our schools, our hospitals and our economy, and still devastating our most vulnerable communities.

Today we are releasing our Blueprint for a Better Arizona, which we will make available online and upon request to anyone who wants to take a look. The bottom line is this. Our caucuses are united around an agenda that invests in what matters to Arizona’s working families, and provides opportunity for all.

Thanks to a growing national economy – spurred by Democratic investments in pandemic relief and infrastructure – Arizona’s unemployment is low, incomes are rising and we have the state resources to make a real difference for our schools, for our most vulnerable communities and our economy.

What stands in our way is a governor who has lost interest in the pandemic, though it’s the leading cause of death in our state. And a radical right wing in the Legislature that obstructs progress and roots for failure – failure of our public schools, failure of our healthcare and safety nets, and failure of our Democracy.

We have an alternative. What we need is the political will and a Governor who is willing to lead on what’s best for Arizona, and not what’s best for him politically.

…….Now I want to hand it over to Leader Rios to take you through our comprehensive COVID-19 plan. Senator...

**RIOS:** Hello and thank you for joining us today. I’m Senate Democratic Leader Rebecca Rios. Last session when we stood here, we had lost 10,000 Arizonans to COVID. Today we’ve lost \_\_\_\_\_\_. 1 in 300 Arizonans are dead from COVID and it's the number one cause of death in our state.

We must address the COVID-19 pandemic and its ongoing repercussions. It’s clear Governor Doug Ducey has abandoned Arizona to COVID-19, but Democrats have not. Our main goal is to ensure that the remaining share of the federal American Rescue Plan Act funds that Congressional Democrats delivered to Arizona go to these communities.More needs to be done to ensure these funds make it to where they belong - which is with the people of Arizona.

Meanwhile the Governor is focused on attacking teachers instead of the virus and promoting school vouchers instead of promoting policies to slow down the pandemic. But our priorities have never been more clear as we enter into the third year of this pandemic. We are absolutely committed to slowing the spread of this pandemic, providing resources and relief to working families,aAnd we remain committed to expanding justice, equity and prosperity for all Arizonans. This is what Arizonans want us focused on down here at the Capitol. Passing bills to make their lives easier and better as well as getting a handle on the pandemic. Not passing bills attacking democracy, attacking our teachers and schools or working on bills like “Donald Trump Day.”

I have been in this legislature for a long time. Last session was one of the most divisive and radical I have ever seen as our friends across the aisle were more focused on overturning an election than they were helping Arizonans. And now we hear our Republican friends are ready once again to go against the will of Arizona voters who said a loud NO to last year’s tax cuts they handed out to the wealthiest while leaving the rest of us behind. Trust that we’ll fight against more tax handouts for the richest that are paid for by working people. But this session IS a new chance for us to come together, to focus on the future, and fight for issues – public health, voting rights, strong schools, clean air and water – that impact the lives of every Arizonan.

Leader Bolding…

**Bolding**

Thank you. As you can imagine, we expect an intensified right-wing assault against voting rights in the 2022 session. Arizona voters have a right to be heard in fair and secure elections without interference or hurdles based on debunked conspiracy theories, the discredited “fraudit,” and the Big Lie. While we continue to support automatic voter registration and the repeal of needless roadblocks, we know the fight in the upcoming session will be to save democracy itself.

Governor Ducey didn’t believe the lies and sent Donald Trump’s call to voicemail before certifying the results of the free and fair 2020 election. Where will he stand today?

But, before we get to any of that, our most urgent priority is our public schools. Despite education funding and teacher pay that still ranks at or near the bottom for our country, our public schools face devastating midyear cuts because of something called the aggregate expenditure limitation.. And now, without an immediate bipartisan resolution to lift this arbitrary cap on education spending set in 1980, we will not be able to make any further investments. We must come together to pass a clean waive – with no caveats – to allow schools to use the resources we already appropriated. Our caucus will always have the back of our public schools. If Republicans won’t work to get this done, then why should the public trust this Legislature to ever do the right thing? This is no excuse to breach that trust and put a billion dollars of education funding at risk, or to extract another pound of flesh from our schools.

Now I want to hand it over to Leader Rios one more time…

**RIOS CLOSING**

Finally, It is time to say "no more" to the decades-long assault on women’s rights and equality. Democrats support rolling back laws that have eroded reproductive rights and specifically the freedom to an abortion. We support increased healthcare options for Arizona women, gender pay equity, and the Equal Rights Amendment. And we will fight to ensure no person in our state is fired or faces discrimination because of how they identify or who they love. Legislative Democrats are ready this session to defend public education, defend democracy and defend against the pandemic. The Governor and our friends across the aisle have fallen short at every turn and Arizonans need our help–Now. Our priorities are simple and our caucus is 100 percent focused on making investments that matter and creating opportunity for all. Thank you.

And with that we will be happy to take some questions…