

Embargoed until 5pm

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**Prepared remarks of Senator-elect Bell in the Senate Democratic Caucus during the debate on the nomination of a Senate President**

As some of you might know, I pledged during my campaign not to vote for Senator Ruggiero for President of the Senate. Over and over, my constituents asked me not to support him. I am here to represent the people of my district and will do so today.

I want to be clear that there are things I appreciate about Senator Ruggiero's record. I want to credit him with working to restore the upper chamber to its traditional role as the senior partner to the lower chamber. I was very pleased with both his selections of committee chairs and his willingness to empower those chairs to hold a real voice in setting public policy.

When it comes to policy, however, the simple reality is that Senator Ruggiero does not support many of the core principles of the Democratic Party. He opposes repealing the tax cuts for the rich. He is endorsed by Right to Life and is not pro-choice. He even voted against marriage equality--something that still stings members of the LGBTQ community today. While we have some areas of agreement, such as protecting social services and workers' rights, he and I simply do not agree on some fundamental issues. If I voted for Senator Ruggiero, it would be hard for me to face so many of my constituents, including my fiancée.

My constituents' perception is that the chamber should be more open, more democratic, and more collaborative in its approach--and I agree with them. So much legislation that a majority of Rhode Islanders support has been held up for years. The people of our state deserve more from us. That being said, I am fully aware that I have not yet served in the chamber, so I have only seen it from the outside. I am optimistic that I may be pleasantly surprised about how things work. Early signs, however, have not been what I had hoped for.

After the election, I assumed Senator Ruggiero would reach out before this caucus so we could talk through our viewpoints and priorities to figure out where we could work together. I would have liked to come here today with at least a basic understanding of how the Senate President would work to find common ground with new members of his caucus before we were asked to support his continued tenure in this position. Despite indicating several times I wanted a meeting before this caucus, that did not happen.

I must add that I was saddened and alarmed by the personal tone of the email he sent out about our colleague, Senator Nesselbush.

I am looking forward to the meeting Senator Ruggiero has agreed to have with me after the caucus, and I hope he will be willing to build a productive relationship. There are many issues I am excited to work together with him on. Today, however, I must fulfill my pledge to my constituents and not vote for Senator Ruggiero.