NEW YORK STATE SENATE

THE STENOGRAPHIC RECORD

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REGULAR SESSION

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR ANTONIO DELGADO, President

ALEJANDRA N. PAULINO, ESQ., Secretary

P R O C E E D I N G S

THE PRESIDENT: The Senate will come to order.

I ask everyone present to please rise and recite with me the Pledge of Allegiance.

(Whereupon, the assemblage recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.)

THE PRESIDENT: Today's invocation will be delivered by Rabbi Mara Young, of the Woodlands Community Temple in White Plains.

RABBI YOUNG: The story is told of a person who wished to climb to the top of a very high mountain. The mountain was steep and difficult to ascend, and the climber encountered many obstacles along the way. She was weary, discouraged, and often considered giving up. At times she even felt that the summit was too far out of reach and that the climb was not worth the effort.

However, she pushed forward one step at a time. Every time she felt like giving up, she reminded herself that the goal was to reach higher, even if it seemed impossible. Slowly but surely, after much effort and struggle, she reached the top of the mountain.

And when she finally arrived at the summit, she looked around and realized something incredible. As far as the eye could see, there were still higher peaks, taller mountains, new heights to reach. But instead of feeling discouraged, she felt a deep sense of joy and purpose, understanding that the journey itself, striving to go higher step by step, was the true reward.

Distinguished officials, today you stand at the base of the mountain. The 2025 legislative session rises before you. The path of democracy is difficult -- rocky terrain, uncertain paths, dead ends and deadlocks. And yet we know the reward is great: A state built by the people, for the people, governed by laws of justice, fueled by compassion at its core.

As you begin your climb, you will observe the crags and summits of sessions before. Some you will surpass; some will loom higher. How lucky you are to have this opportunity before you. Set your feet upon the current mountain of possibility. Excelsior! Onward, upward. May you be blessed in your ascent. Emblazoned on the seal of this Senate body, may this word be your

guide. It urges you forward: Excelsior, ever higher.

As you embark upon this holy work of building and securing our democracy, stay true to the path of righteousness. As is written in the Book of Proverbs, guard your heart, as it is the source of life. Turn aside from crooked speech. Distance yourself from wicked words.

Let your eyes look forward. May you behold the future with upright intentions. Survey your course, the way in which we may all prosper. Be not deterred by the left or the right, but walk the path of goodness.

Source of Goodness, bestow Your blessings upon this assembled body and those who serve within it. Strengthen their capacity to listen, to discern, and to learn. While starting on disparate paths, guide them together, helping them to walk in ways of compromise and understanding, to walk humbly together in paths of peace.

Divine Presence, may the fruits of their labors be acceptable to You. You, known by many names and many tongues, may we find unity in discovering the divine spark that lies within

every representative, every citizen, every sojourner who seeks safety in our midst. May we see it in our homes and workplaces and in the beauty of nature itself.

As we lift our eyes to the session before us, give us the strength to rise to the challenge and embrace the possibility. We express gratitude for being kept alive, sustained, and brought to this auspicious day. And we give thanks for the holiness we may manifest with our own hands, words, and hearts.

Amen.

(Response of "Amen.")

THE PRESIDENT: The chair now hands down a message from the State Board of Elections, being the duly official certification of the members of the Senate, and directs the same be filed. So handed down and so ordered.

And now I ask all Senators present to please rise at this time to take the ceremonial oath of office.

Please raise your right hand and repeat after me: I do solemnly swear --

ALL SENATORS: I do solemnly swear --

THE PRESIDENT: -- that I will support the Constitution of the United States --

ALL SENATORS: -- that I will support the Constitution of the United States --

THE PRESIDENT: -- and the Constitution of the State of New York --

ALL SENATORS: -- and the Constitution of the State of New York --

THE PRESIDENT: -- and that I will faithfully discharge the duties --

ALL SENATORS: -- and that I will faithfully discharge the duties --

THE PRESIDENT: -- of the office of Senator --

ALL SENATORS: -- of the office of Senator --

THE PRESIDENT: -- according to the best of my ability --

ALL SENATORS: -- according to the best of my ability --

THE PRESIDENT: -- so help me God.

ALL SENATORS: -- so help me God.

THE PRESIDENT: Congratulations on your election to the Senate.

(Applause.)

(Inaudible; laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary shall read the names of the members present to ascertain that a quorum exists.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Addabbo.

SENATOR ADDABBO: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Ashby.

SENATOR ASHBY: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Bailey.

SENATOR BAILEY: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Baskin.

SENATOR BASKIN: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Borrello.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Brisport.

SENATOR BRISPORT: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Brouk.

SENATOR BROUK: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Bynoe.

SENATOR BYNOE: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Canzoneri-Fitzpatrick.

SENATOR CANZONERI-FITZPATRICK: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Chan.

SENATOR CHAN: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Cleare.
SENATOR CLEARE: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Comrie.
SENATOR COMRIE: Present.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Cooney.
SENATOR COONEY: Present.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Fahy.
SENATOR FAHY: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Felder.
SENATOR FELDER: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Fernandez.
SENATOR FERNANDEZ: Present.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Gallivan.
SENATOR GALLIVAN: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Gianaris.
SENATOR GIANARIS: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Gonzalez.
SENATOR GONZALEZ: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Gounardes.
SENATOR GOUNARDES: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Griffo.
SENATOR GRIFFO: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Harckham.
SENATOR HARCKHAM: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Helming.
SENATOR HELMING: Present.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Hinchey.
SENATOR HINCHEY: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Hoylman-Sigal.
SENATOR HOYLMAN-SIGAL: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Jackson.
SENATOR JACKSON: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Kavanagh.
SENATOR KAVANAGH: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Krueger.
SENATOR KRUEGER: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Lanza.
SENATOR LANZA: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Liu.
SENATOR LIU: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Martinez.
SENATOR MARTINEZ: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Martins.
SENATOR MARTINS: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Mattera.
SENATOR MATTERA: Here.
THE PRESIDENT: A quorum is present, and the Senate may proceed.

Good afternoon.

(Response of "good afternoon.")

THE PRESIDENT: As the President of the Senate, it is my distinct honor to welcome all of you to the 2025 legislative session.

And let me first just say Happy New Year to everyone. I hope you all had a very blessed holiday season.

To the esteemed Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, it is always good to see you. And thank you for the invitation to preside over the Senate. And thank you for your leadership to Deputy Majority Leader Gianaris, Minority Leader Ortt, Deputy Minority Leader Lanza, and to all of the members of this incredible body.

As we gather here today and mark the start of a new legislative session, may it also mark the start of new opportunities to collaborate and work together to deliver to communities all across our great state.

Let us remember that governing is not the same as campaigning. Governing is about representation. Everyone in this body, everyone in this body, represents real people, real families with real hopes and dreams. And we do

right by them when we govern responsibly, effectively, collaboratively, with transparency and accountability.

Our diverse points of view should not be a weakness to exploit in order to score political points, but rather a strength to be leveraged in order to deliver meaningful results for all New Yorkers from every walk of life.

We are, before anything else, public servants, here to serve, ideally from a place of genuine concern for our fellow New Yorkers and with real love for the place we all call home. We all love New York. We all love our great country. And my hope in these politically divisive times is that each of us, by way of example, can inspire those we serve to heed their better angels.

As President Lincoln once said in his first inaugural address: "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic cords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet

swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

As leaders, let us set the example. I certainly look forward to working with every single one of you as I continue to build out the New York State Office of Service and Civic Engagement, which I'm incredibly proud to lead. I had the opportunity to connect with a number of you about how we can work together to uplift communities through service and civic engagement, and I look forward to connecting with more of you in the coming year.

Each of you has a deep connection with the communities you represent and what their needs and priorities are. And I would be honored to work with you to ensure that this new office empowers folks all across New York to find greatness within.

As Dr. King once said: "Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve ... You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."

So let's get busy being great and love each other. Thank you.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Thank you, Governor Delgado. And thank you for joining us for today's opening session.

Can you please recognize Senator Ortt for remarks.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Ortt.

SENATOR ORTT: Good afternoon, Lieutenant Governor.

And good afternoon to my colleagues from around the state on both sides of the aisle. It's always good to be back on this day. I told my members this morning, you know, today's probably the best day of session -- except for the last day of session, right? That's kind of how it goes.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR ORTT: But today is a good day. It always reminded me kind of like, you know, back to school, right? Everyone's got their new back-to-school clothes on, their new threads, and we're all excited, the post-holiday glow.

But it's also when there's a lot of optimism. Right? It's a new year. Yes, there are many challenges in front of us, but none of those challenges, in my estimation, are new. They are challenges that have existed now either for several years or they're challenges that have existed in front of the state in the past. And previous legislatures, previous governors, previous administrations have had to grapple with similar issues. And I believe I would say many times they have grappled with it and they have effectively addressed those issues.

So now the question is the challenges, like any legislature convening around the country today -- every state legislature, our Congress -- will we be able to step up and face and deal with the challenges facing us here in this body, in this state, in this moment? And being, today, a day of optimism, today is a day where we can say yes, we hope so.

Now, not everything is able to get done in every session. Right? Otherwise you wouldn't have to come back. It would be one session, we would do it, and that would be the end of it.

But today is a day when we are hopeful, we are optimistic. And it's a day when we get to come back, there's some new members here -- I'm going to talk about one of them now -- we get to see old friends but, I think just as importantly, hopefully we get to make new friends.

And I look forward -- I know my colleagues do, my members in the Republican Conference look forward to working with our colleagues across the aisle where we can, and hopefully do address the issues facing the people of New York State, which are as true for people in Manhattan as they are in Niagara County and are as true for people in the North Country as they are in Nassau and everywhere in between.

One of those new members -- I'm proud to welcome back certainly all my members. Everyone that was here last year came back, which is in my view a very good thing. And we have a new member, Senator Chan, who represents Senate District 17 in Brooklyn.

Senator Chan is a Marine. So Senator Sanders, you've got someone else here for you, right, another Marine.

We have -- he is a former NYPD sergeant, so he is someone who has served this country in military uniform. He's also someone who's served the great City of New York in the uniform of the NYPD Blue. And he is also the first Asian-American Republican State Senator in our state's history.

So, Senator Chan, welcome to the New York State Senate.

(Applause.)

SENATOR ORTT: I know Senator Chan is ready to get to work, along with all of my other colleagues.

Briefly -- because I don't think today is really a policy speech day -- but we all know the issues facing our state. We just concluded an election cycle where we heard all about the issues from candidates running for a myriad of offices obviously right here in New York, whether it was congressional, Senate, Assembly. And we saw how the voters felt on these issues.

So we talk about affordability. That's a term that is going to be brought up today, brought up next week. When the Governor

no doubt gives her State of the State, I'm sure we will hear about affordability. We've heard about affordability a lot in the last several years.

Unfortunately, from my vantage point, we haven't done as much on affordability. In fact, our conference I think would argue we have contributed to making New York less affordable going forward. And voters have said that has to change. Voters are concerned about affordability.

What does that mean? They're concerned about the money in their wallet and having less of it -- having less of it to pay their bills, to heat their homes, to put their kids through college, having less of it to provide for their families, for their hopes and dreams. As, Lieutenant Governor, you outlined I think very well, hopes and dreams usually cost money. Unfortunately. And if people are going to meet their hopes and dreams in New York, we have to make this state more affordable for them to reach their hopes and dreams here and not in other states, as we know we've seen people do.

Crime remains a major issue. I'm

not going to go into all these horrible incidences that have happened recently, but we all see them. We all see the videos. We all know them. And I think we all, I believe we all are horrified when we see these things occur.

But we have to do something about it. We have to be honest about how we got there, and we have to take action. And that takes political will, political courage. And our conference stands ready to take that action.

Certainly when we talk about issues the issue of immigration, both nationally and here in New York State, is a big issue. And we know it's an issue. We know it's an issue for New Yorkers, for voters, for people in New York City as well as in other parts of the state.

I am very excited -- and I know some of my colleagues will not share my enthusiasm, but I am very excited about the transfer of federal administrations and the incoming Trump administration. And I hope -- I'm not so caught up in the moment of optimism that I think it will be easy or that it will be all the time, but I hope that this body, that this Governor will work with the Trump administration on issues like

affordability, on issues like immigration, for the betterment of New Yorkers, and not work against the administration for the betterment of our political careers.

New Yorkers have spoken. The American people have spoken. The issues of affordability and crime and immigration and energy are not just New York issues, they're issues across the country. And we have an obligation to address those issues regardless of political party.

And I am hopeful that we will -- I'm looking forward to working with two prominent New Yorkers: Elise Stefanik, who will soon be the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, and Lee Zeldin, who served in this body as a State Senator and obviously is soon to head up the EPA, which no doubt I think will have real implications, hopefully positive ones, for the State of New York.

So Mr. President, I look forward to the new year. I look forward to the new administration in Washington. I look forward to my colleagues here in this body working with Senator Chan, as well as my colleagues across the

aisle, for the betterment of the people of this state on the issues that we know are facing them and driving them out.

And I say the driving them out part because I think at the end of the day that is the single biggest challenge and threat to the future viability of our state. If we are losing our most valuable asset -- which is people -- to other states, then that affects the economy, it affects employers, it affects who pays the taxes to fund the programs that people do need.

And so we have to do something about that. And I am optimistic and I am hopeful that everyone in this chamber shares the political will and courage to do just that today.

So, Mr. Lieutenant Governor, nice to see you here in this chamber. You're always welcome back. Don't just make it a one day on the first day. I know you've got to be here today, but we're always happy to have you back here whenever you want to. Thank you for your indulgence.

And to my colleague Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, thank you for your partnership.

I thank her for our many conversations on the phone where she listens to me sometimes go on and on and rant and, you know, just do what I have to do and express my views. But we have a great relationship and one that I'm very proud of, because it's not always easy when you're in these roles, leading conferences, to try to find that common ground and have that dialogue. And certainly to my colleague Senator Gianaris.

And then my partner, to my right -- maybe figuratively, but maybe politically -- is our great deputy, Senator Andy Lanza. And Senator Lanza does a great job here. He's on the floor a lot. But he's most excited because now with Senator Chan, he is no longer the lone Republican in New York City. And so --

(Laughter.)

SENATOR ORTT: So I know he's happy about that.

(Applause; laughter.)

SENATOR ORTT: And to the families that are here, maybe you're here for the first time. It's a remarkable chamber. It's a remarkable building. And I know I've said this before, and it's really true for me: Sometimes I

think when we come here all the time, every week, you sort of take advantage -- or you take for granted that we work here. And we shouldn't do that. And today, with you here, it's always a stark reminder how privileged we are and how honored and awesome the responsibility is to work in this chamber on behalf of the people of the State of New York. So thank you for being here.

Mr. Lieutenant Governor, thank you for being here.

God bless.

(Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Senator Ortt, for expressing the spirit of optimism. And you are right that it is always important to listen. Listening is very fundamental to how we collaborate and build together.

To Senator Chan, welcome, and thank you for your service to our country and to New York.

And to the families as well who are having this experience today for the first time. It is good to be with you as well. As Senator Ortt said, it is a magnificent, awesome

space to be in that we should always cherish.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Thank you, Mr. President.

I have a resolution at the desk. I ask that the resolution be read and move for its immediate adoption and for the opportunity to be heard.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 1, by Senator Gianaris, providing for the election of Andrea Stewart-Cousins as Temporary President of the Senate for the years 2025-2026.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: John J. Dunnigan. Now, there's a name we've not heard in a long time. A long time.

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Who is he?

(Laughter.)

SENATOR GIANARIS: He was -- Senator Dunnigan, for those of you that may not be familiar with him, was the Majority Leader of this chamber almost a hundred years ago.

Now, why is he special? Well, for one thing, he was a Democrat, which gives him extra points in my book. He was the author of the state's parimutuel betting law. So, Senator Addabbo, extra appreciation for Majority Leader Dunnigan.

But for our purposes here today, most notably, he was the Majority Leader of the State Senate for 2,188 days. He was the longest-serving Democrat Majority Leader in New York State history.

He also was the author of one of the first efforts to establish an equal rights amendment in New York State, unsuccessfully. In 1919 he introduced that proposal.

So it's only fitting that that job, with the help of the voters a couple of months ago, was finally finished under the leadership of Andrea Stewart-Cousins. Because this past Sunday the woman sitting next to me served her 2,189th day as Majority Leader in the State Senate.

(Standing ovation.)

SENATOR GIANARIS: So I take it you've all figured out that 2,189 is one more

than 2,188 --

(Laughter.)

SENATOR GIANARIS: -- and she is now the longest-serving Democrat Majority Leader in our state's history.

Of course the first woman to serve in that role, the first Black woman to serve in that role. But her achievements are so much more than being first on so many lists. Because it has been quite a six years that we have had with Andrea Stewart-Cousins as the leader of this body.

For those of you that were around back then -- and there's fewer and fewer of us as time goes on -- the reputation of this body let's just say was less than stellar before her ascension to Majority Leader in 2019. And now, six years later, we can have our policy disagreements -- and we often do -- but nobody, but nobody questions the integrity of this body and the character with which it is governed.

On housing, which is an issue that we care greatly about, the strongest housing protections the state has ever seen are now in place.

We have finally, finally resolved the issue of funding our schools in compliance with the state constitutional requirements, which was something that puzzled previous administrations of the Senate.

And of course we have created historic protections in our time in the Majority for so many individuals throughout this state who have been discriminated against and abused over the decades.

But it's not just what has happened, but what remains to be done. You heard Senator Ortt talk about affordability. Yes, we're going to hear a lot about affordability, as we have in the past and certainly will now. It is top of mind for so many of the people we represent.

And I think affordability for so many of us means more than just making it easier for wealthy people to live here and making it harder for working people. I think you will see a dedicated effort to continue making New York, which is a very expensive place, easier for people to provide for their families, to care for their children, to go and get healthcare -- more

so, certainly, than has been done in the past.

We also expect, with respect to Senator Ortt's statement in this regard, but I think we're expecting some curve balls out of Washington, D.C., that we perhaps can't even anticipate that we're going to have to deal with. And there is no one whose steady hand I would want on the wheel as we react to that than Andrea Stewart-Cousins, who has shown the type of steady leadership and sober leadership that is prepared to deal with this moment.

And so once again -- I've had the privilege of giving this nominating speech now four times, and it is one of the greatest honors of my service here in the State Senate to get to present to the people of this state, to the people of this State Senate, the opportunity to support the greatest Majority Leader New York State has ever had in its history, Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

Mr. President, I encourage all my colleagues to vote yes on this resolution.

THE PRESIDENT: The question is on the resolution offered by Senator Gianaris. All those in favor signify by saying aye.

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(No response.)

THE PRESIDENT: The ayes have it. The resolution is adopted.

I now call on Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins to come forward to be sworn as Temporary President of the Senate by Judge Rowan Wilson, Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals.

(Chief Judge Wilson and Senator Stewart-Cousins move to the center of the chamber.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: I'd like my family to join -- my daughter Candice, my son Kevin and my daughter-in-law Kecia, and the child that you've seen grow up, now a senior in Howard: Kendall.

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: Raise your right hand, Senator, and repeat after me: I, Andrea Stewart-Cousins --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: I, Andrea Stewart-Cousins --

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: -- do solemnly swear --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- do

solemnly swear --

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: -- to uphold and defend --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- to uphold and defend --

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: -- the Constitution of the United States --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- the Constitution of the United States --

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: -- and the Constitution --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- and the constitution --

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: -- of the great State of New York --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- of the great State of New York --

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: -- and to fulfill the duties of the office --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- and to fulfill the duties of the office --

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: -- of Temporary President --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- of Temporary President --

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: -- and Majority Leader --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- and Majority Leader --

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: -- of the Senate of the State of New York --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- of the Senate of the State of New York --

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: -- to the best of my ability --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- to the best of my ability --

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: -- so me help me God.

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- so help me God.

CHIEF JUDGE WILSON: Congratulations.

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Thank you so much.

(Extended standing ovation, and Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins approaches the dais.)

THE PRESIDENT: Congratulations, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Mr. President, I think we are now going to hear remarks from the newly reelected Majority Leader of the State Senate.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, please come forward for opening remarks.

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Thank you so much.

So good afternoon.

(Response of "good afternoon.")

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: I am -- it really has that first day of school atmosphere. So for all of you young people here who think that we don't get just as excited on the first day, now you know: We do.

And I really want to thank our Lieutenant Governor for always being present when called upon and always bringing, you know, your wisdom and your perspective to this opening day ceremony. We so appreciate you and look forward to working with you during this year.

And of course to Rabbi Mara Young, thank you so much, Rabbi. I loved the metaphor,

climbing those mountains. I know that many of us believe that once we've climbed that mountain we've arrived. And clearly those of us who know that those mountains never recede, we need the energy and the inspiration to continue to go. And as long as we are here, we know that working together, we can achieve high heights. Thank you so much for being present and reminding us of that.

And to all of our families who are here, again, I think what you said, Leader Ortt, was true. You know, people -- we kind of take for granted, we come in, we do our work. But it is an extraordinary place to be and to actually represent so many folks in our district.

But the fact that we are all here is because we do have the support of so many of our family members. And certainly my family has sacrificed for years and years -- and most of you do -- in order to allow us to sit in these very magnificent chambers and do that work. So we do appreciate you, and we are very, very happy that you are here.

I also really want to give a special welcome back to Senator Mark Walczyk.

(Applause.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: You know what I'm thinking. As you know, Senator, there were a lot of people who were happy --

(Laughter.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: It's an inside joke. But we are certainly happy to have you back safe and sound and really, really appreciate your work on behalf of our nation, your service on behalf of our nation.

(Standing ovation.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: You notice what I said, there are some people that were happy, well, you know, the laughter was kind of, you know --

(Laughter.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: So it's an honor to mark the start of another session as Senate Majority Leader. And, you know, this work could not -- not be done without really the support not only of my incredible, incredible conference and all of you here. But certainly I want to give a special shout out to my deputy, Deputy Mike Gianaris. Thank you so much for what you do.

(Applause.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Thank you for the fourth nomin -- and it was me sitting next to you who said "Who?" when you were talking about the Senator, because it was so long ago that I'd certainly lost track. But you see people like you actually pay attention to those things. So it really is an honor.

And again, thanks for keeping the trains running and for being by my side every step of this journey.

For us today it is really not just the opening of session, it's a day for all of us to take time to reconnect, to refocus, to recommit to important work that we do together. I kind of, you know, am excited too.

And Senator Ortt, I look forward to working with our colleagues across the aisle and certainly to continue our partnership with Governor Hochul, with Speaker Heastie in the Assembly, and to accomplish the people's work.

Now I want to talk a little bit about the new majority class in the Senate, because I've found that in every incoming group of people there's a certain thing, a

characteristic. And last time we were here during opening day two years ago when we had a new class, we had the historic all-female class of Senators. Never -- never seen before in this chamber, and I don't believe in the Assembly as well.

But now they're old hands. They've been around. But now we have another new class. And this is a new class that I can't really call freshmen because each of them is coming to us with an extensive legislative background and experience.

So why don't I begin with one member who comes directly from the Assembly, and somebody who's no stranger to this building, former Assemblywoman, now Senator Pat Fahy.

Pat, welcome.

(Applause.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: And she's the first woman to represent the Albany-based seat. So congratulations, Senator Fahy.

Next, Senator Siela Bynoe, coming to us from Nassau County.

(Applause.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Before

that, she was a member of the local board of education before she was a county legislator. And she too is shattering a glass ceiling. She's the first Black State Senator from Long Island.

Congratulations.

(Applause.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Senator Chris Ryan -- come on, stand up.

(Applause.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: He was also a former local town board member, and he was the minority leader of the Onondaga County Legislature as well as being the president of CWA Local 1123.

Welcome, Chris Ryan.

(Applause.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: And from the great State of Buffalo --

(Laughter.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- I will say what she said: Rough Buff.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Senator April Baskin --

(Applause.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- who served as the chair of the Erie County Legislature. And she also -- another ceiling breaker -- is the first Black woman elected to the State Senate from Buffalo.

(Applause.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: So by the way, with the addition of these three new female Senators, this chamber -- I know, listen to this -- a historic number of women sitting in the Senate.

(Cheers; applause.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Yay! Twenty-two. Stand up, ladies. Let the ladies stand up. Stand up, ladies.

(Continuing applause; cheers.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Thank you. Thank you. Yay! And all who support -- you guys can stand up too. Come on, guys, stand up. I don't want you all to feel -- I didn't want you to feel left out. I want you to stand up too. You can -- after the ladies, though.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Well, you know, this is a big deal for me. When I first

came, in 2007, there were nine women in the chamber. Only nine. And I really want to remind us that here in New York as well as in the nation, you know, women are holding up at least 50 percent of New York in terms of population. So, you know, we're not there, but we're certainly getting there.

And, you know, I like to say to stand up because representation matters. And of course welcome, Senator Chan, as well. It is you -- you too, as Senator Ortt said --

(Applause.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- besides being a veteran, a ceiling breaker as well.

So there is no question that we are entering a year defined by enormous challenges. Yes, with the incoming administration in Washington, uncertainty does hang heavy in the air. But let me be clear. New York has never been a state to back down. And when others seek to divide, we stand united and tall. We do not just endure challenges; we meet them head on and we lead the way for the nation.

This year we have a vital

legislative window to address our residents' real struggles and continue being a beacon of hope, of progress, and of resilience for the entire country.

Amid mixed national election results this past November, we in this chamber were sent back to the people with a mandate to continue our transformative work, the work that we've set out to do since 2019. Since 2019 we've delivered transformative change, always focused on helping everyday New Yorkers, from fully funding public education to passing much-needed voting reforms like early voting. We've taken bold steps to protect our environment, expand opportunities for affordable higher education, safeguard Medicaid, fortify reproductive freedoms through shield laws -- and, yes, a strong Equal Rights Amendment.

We've also stood firmly in support of municipalities, our safety net hospitals, and essential services across our state. We've always kept our focus on affordability. While we've made great strides by expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit, capping property taxes, raising the minimum wage, and securing and

expanding paid family leave, we know families are still feeling the pinch. And we know the challenges ahead require maintaining and strengthening our resolve to make New York more affordable.

As the New York Senate Majority, we're in our communities taking action on things that matter most. Our constituents know us because they see us fighting for them. And after half a decade of showing up, doing the work, delivering results, they know that we'll meet that moment.

We're not a one-and-done conference. Although Senate Democrats have been the architects of New York's boldest policies, there is much more to be done. One of the challenges to working families and our local economies is the uncertainty in Washington. When federal funding is threatened, everyone is harmed, and certainly the most vulnerable are hit the hardest.

But here in New York we've repeatedly proven that we can and will step up to protect our residents. That means building on the progress that we've made: Expanding

universal prekindergarten, taking it one step further by moving closer to universal childcare, because working parents deserve affordable high-quality care for their children. Continuing to fully fund our public schools. Ensuring that every child, no matter their zip code, has the tools they need to succeed. And cutting the cost of everyday essentials by continuing to fight for meaningful prescription drug reforms and reduced prices for our consumers. No New Yorker should put off medical care due to worry about the cost.

Furthermore, as New Yorkers grapple with their utility bills, we'll double down on efforts to lower the cost of energy and protect ratepayers from price gouging, all this while continuing to tackle exorbitant costs at the register for food and clothing.

We'll continue to stand up for our farmers, because they are a critical piece of our fight for affordable food. Because we all know if there's no farms, there is no food.

We're building our efforts to address New York's housing crisis by protecting tenants and making bold investments in affordable working-class and middle-income housing to ensure

that every New Yorker has a place to call home. And we will continue to fight for policies that make it easier for first-time homebuyers to get their foot in the door.

We'll support our existing programs that will keep people in their homes amid financial setbacks and advance policies that keep the cost of living down for seniors and our veterans and others on fixed incomes.

We will also redouble our efforts to make higher education more affordable, because the path to the middle class begins with opportunities that are accessible to all.

As the birthplace of the American labor movement, we know that unions are one of the surest paths to the middle class. We'll continue to advance robust labor protections and benefits to expand our workforce from the ground up. We'll remain a safe haven where the right to organize and collectively bargain is not just recognized but encouraged. And we will once again champion improvements to worker benefits like temporary disability insurance while continuing to advance measures that make it easier to join our public workforce.

By the same token, our conference has proudly fought for Main Street by injecting billions of dollars into small businesses and cultural institutions. This year we'll recommit our efforts to these economic drivers to ensure that the cost of doing business in New York doesn't shutter our moms-and-pops.

Tackling the affordability crisis and getting New Yorkers back on track must be our top priority, but we can't ease up on the fight for our most basic freedoms. We will continue to protect the rights of all New Yorkers and will once again look to bolster reproductive health freedoms. For decades we were told that Roe v. Wade was settled law and would never change. Well, we know that was a false promise.

This year is the eve of the 250th anniversary of our great nation, and New York played a critical role in the birth of our great democracy. All of us in this chamber are tasked with protecting that democracy. That's why we'll be charging ahead at the top of this session with a renewed voting rights package.

We cannot ignore the weight of this

moment. Forces of extremism are working harder than ever to sow division and discord. Here in New York we will rise above the chaos. We'll chart a course grounded in equity, in fairness, and in opportunity for all. This is our chance. It's our responsibility to lead not just for today but for future generations. Together we will meet the challenges of this moment and show the nation what true leadership looks like -- true representational leadership looks like.

Thank you for standing with us, believing in what we can accomplish together, and your unwavering dedication to building, yes, an affordable, safer, fairer and stronger New York.

Thank you very much.

(Standing ovation.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Mr. President, there's a resolution at the desk adopting the rules of the Senate. Can we take that up at this time.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 2, by Senator Stewart-Cousins, providing for the adoption of the Rules of the Senate for the years 2025-2026.

THE PRESIDENT: The question is on the resolution. All those in favor signify by saying aye.

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(Response of "Nay.")

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is adopted.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Now there's another resolution at the desk, calling for the election of the Secretary of the Senate. Can we take that up, please.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 3, by Senator Stewart-Cousins: RESOLVED, That Alejandra Paulino of Albany, New York, be, and she hereby is, elected Secretary of the Senate for the years 2025-2026.

THE PRESIDENT: The question is on

the resolution. All those in favor signify by saying aye.

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(No response.)

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is adopted.

Ms. Paulino, I ask that you please come forward to receive your oath of office while Senator Stewart-Cousins performs the swearing in.

(Ms. Paulino and Senator Stewart-Cousins move to the center of the chamber.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Raise your right hand. And again, thank you so much for all you do for all of us to make sure that these chambers and everything that goes on works smoothly. So Alejandra, thank you.

So you'll repeat after me and state your name: I, state your name --

MS. PAULINO: I, Alejandra Noel Paulino --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- do solemnly swear --

MS. PAULINO: -- do solemnly

swear --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- to uphold and support the Constitution of the United States --

MS. PAULINO: -- to uphold and support the Constitution of the United States --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- the Constitution of the State of New York --

MS. PAULINO: -- the Constitution of the State of New York --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- and to dutifully perform my duties as Secretary of the New York State Senate --

MS. PAULINO: -- and to dutifully --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- perform --

MS. PAULINO: -- perform all of the duties as Secretary of the New York State Senate --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- to the best of my ability --

MS. PAULINO: -- to the best of my ability --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- so

help me God.

MS. PAULINO: -- so help me God.

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Congratulations.

MS. PAULINO: Thank you.

(Standing ovation.)

THE PRESIDENT: Congratulations, Ms. Paulino.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Next up is a resolution pertaining to the appointment of the Sergeant-at-Arms. Let's take up that resolution, please.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 4, by Senator Stewart-Cousins: RESOLVED, That Benjamin M. Sturges III be, and he hereby is, elected Sergeant-at-Arms of the Senate for the years 2025-2026.

THE PRESIDENT: The question is on the resolution. All those in favor signify by saying aye.

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(No response.)

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is adopted.

For the record, Benjamin Sturges has been elected Sergeant-at-Arms for the years 2025-2026.

(Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Next up is a resolution appointing Catherine Kirkland as Senate Stenographer. Let's take that up, please.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 5, by Senator Stewart-Cousins: RESOLVED, That Catherine Kirkland be, and she hereby is, elected the Official Stenographer of the Senate for the years 2025-2026.

THE PRESIDENT: The question is on the resolution. All those in favor signify by saying aye.

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(No response.)

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is

adopted.

For the record, Catherine Kirkland has been elected Official Stenographer of the Senate for the years 2025-2026. It is my honor to present to you the Official Stenographer of the Senate.

(Standing ovation.)

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: I find this next one more procedural and technical, because we know we work all hours of the day and night. But there is a resolution setting forth the hours of the Senate --

(Laughter.)

SENATOR GIANARIS: -- for 2025 to 2026. Let's take that up, please.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 6, by Senator Stewart-Cousins, providing for the hours of meeting by the Senate for the years 2025-2026.

THE PRESIDENT: The question is on the resolution. All those in favor signify by saying aye.

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(No response.)

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is adopted.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Let's now take up the resolution appointing a committee of two to inform the Governor.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 7, by Senator Stewart-Cousins: RESOLVED, That Temporary President appoint a committee of two, comprised of Senator Baskin and Senator Rolison, for the purpose of informing the Governor that the Senate is organized and ready to proceed with business.

THE PRESIDENT: The question is on the resolution. All those in favor signify by saying aye.

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(No response.)

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is

adopted.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Next up, the resolution appointing the committee of two, being Senator Fahy and Senator Walczyk, to inform the Assembly. Please take that up.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 8, by Senator Stewart-Cousins: RESOLVED, That the Temporary President appoint a committee of two, comprised of Senator Fahy and Senator Walczyk, for the purpose of waiting upon the Assembly and informing that body that the Senate is assembled and ready to proceed with business.

THE PRESIDENT: The question is on the resolution. All those in favor signify by saying aye.

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(No response.)

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is adopted.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: On behalf of Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, I hand up the following committee and conference assignments for the Majority Conference and ask that it be filed in the Journal.

THE PRESIDENT: The hand-up is received and shall be filed in the Journal.

SENATOR GIANARIS: On behalf of Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, in consultation with Senator Ortt, I hand up the following committee assignments of the Minority Conference and ask that it please be filed in the Journal.

THE PRESIDENT: The hand-up is received and shall be filed in the Journal.

SENATOR GIANARIS: If we could return to messages from the Governor, I believe we have a message.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

(Pause.)

THE PRESIDENT: The Senate has received the Governor's invitation to the State of the State on January 14th, and it will be noted in the Journal.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Is there any further business at the desk today?

THE PRESIDENT: There is no further business at the desk.

SENATOR GIANARIS: I move to adjourn until Monday, January 13th, at 3:00 p.m., intervening days being legislative days.

THE PRESIDENT: On motion, the Senate will stand adjourned until Monday, January 13th, at 3:00 p.m., intervening days being legislative days.

The Senate is adjourned.

(Whereupon, at 1:13 p.m., the Senate adjourned.)