NEW YORK STATE SENATE

THE STENOGRAPHIC RECORD

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February 5, 2025

12:36 p.m.

REGULAR SESSION

SENATOR JEREMY COONEY, Acting President

ALEJANDRA N. PAULINO, ESQ., Secretary

P R O C E E D I N G S

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The Senate will come to order.

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

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

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: We are joined by Rabbi Mordechai Rubin, of the Colonie Chabad Jewish Center in Loudonville, who will deliver today's invocation.

Rabbi.

RABBI RUBIN: I would first like to thank Senator Ashby.

I'm here with my wife, and together we co-direct locally in this region Colonie Chabad and Jewish Life at Siena College.

I'm going to begin with an act of charity. (Inserting money into tzedakah box.)

Almighty God, Master of the Universe, the members of this esteemed body, the New York State Senate, convene here today to fulfill one of the seven commandments which you issued to Noah and his family after the Great Flood: The commandment that all society be

governed by just laws.

As stated in the Book of Genesis and its sacred commentaries, You issued at that time the following seven laws: To worship You and You alone; never to blasphemy Your holy name; not to commit murder, respect human life; not to commit adultery, incest or any sexual misdeeds; not to steal, lie or cheat; not to be cruel to any living creature; and that every society be governed by just laws, based on the recognition and acknowledgement of You, O God, as the sovereign ruler of all humankind and all nations.

Grant, Almighty God, that the members of the New York State Senate confidently realize that by enacting just laws, they're doing Your will.

Almighty God, I beseech You today to bless the Senate and entire state and nation in the merit of two spiritual giants of our time, and of our country and state: Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, of saintly memory, the sixth Chabad and Lubavitcher Rebbe, and his successor, our Rebbe and inspiration, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, as we soon approach the 10th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat.

This Saturday, this Shabbat will mark 75 years, the 75th anniversary of the transition of their leadership. It is a day of reflection and action, and one which should energize us to be God-conscious beings. Their holy mission continues through our acts of goodness and kindness, hastening the harmonious era of messianic redemption.

Ultimately we ask of You, O God, to usher in the era of redemption, where there will be no more war and strife, and all humankind will know You. As the Prophet Isaiah states: The earth shall be full of the knowledge of God, as the water covers the sea.

And let us say amen.

(Response of "Amen.")

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Reading of the Journal.

THE SECRETARY: In Senate, Tuesday, February 4, 2025, the Senate met pursuant to adjournment. The Journal of Monday, February 3, 2025, was read and approved. On motion, the Senate adjourned.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Without objection, the Journal stands approved as read.

Presentation of petitions.

Messages from the Assembly.

The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Rivera moves to discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 926 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 769, Third Reading Calendar 43.

Senator Mayer moves to discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 425 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 771, Third Reading Calendar 45.

Senator Cleare moves to discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 924 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 772, Third Reading Calendar 46.

Senator Harckham moves to discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 1476 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 776, Third Reading Calendar 50.

Senator Persaud moves to discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 920 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 785, Third Reading Calendar 59.

Senator Scarcella-Spanton moves to

discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 2058 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 790, Third Reading Calendar 64.

Senator Fernandez moves to discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 2435 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 791, Third Reading Calendar 65.

Senator Cleare moves to discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 1099 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 796, Third Reading Calendar 70.

Senator Hinchey moves to discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 1016 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 800, Third Reading Calendar 74.

Senator Brouk moves to discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 1025 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 802, Third Reading Calendar 76.

Senator Ramos moves to discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 2432 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 808, Third Reading Calendar 82.

Senator Persaud moves to discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 1026 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 809, Third Reading Calendar 83.

Senator Sanders moves to discharge, from the Committee on Rules, Assembly Bill Number 421 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 812, Third Reading Calendar 86.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: So ordered.

Messages from the Governor.

Reports of standing committees.

Reports of select committees.

Communications and reports from state officers.

Motions and resolutions.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Good afternoon, Mr. President.

There's a privileged resolution at the desk. Please take that up, read it in its entirety, and recognize Leader Stewart-Cousins on the resolution.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: There is a privileged resolution at the desk.

The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Resolution 312, by Senator Stewart-Cousins, memorializing Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim February 2025 as Black History Month in the State of New York.

"WHEREAS, Black History Month serves as an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the achievements, contributions, and resilience of African-Americans throughout history; and

"WHEREAS, It is essential to recognize some of the most integral parts of Black history, including the struggles; and

"WHEREAS, The Civil War was a defining moment in American history, fought over the issue of slavery, leading to the eventual liberation of millions of African-Americans; and

"WHEREAS, The Emancipation Proclamation, signed by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, declared that all enslaved individuals in Confederate-held territories were to be freed, marking a critical step toward the abolition of slavery; and

"WHEREAS, The passage of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution on December 6, 1865, formally abolished slavery

in the United States, securing the freedom of African-Americans and paving the way for future civil rights advancements; and

"WHEREAS, Black History Month was originally established as Negro History Week in 1926 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a historian and educator committed to ensuring that the achievements and contributions of African-Americans were acknowledged and preserved; and

"WHEREAS, In 1976, the celebration was expanded to a month-long observance, recognized nationally each February to honor the profound impact of African-Americans on the history, culture, and progress of the United States, from their contributions in science, literature, politics, business, and the arts to their pivotal role in the fight for civil rights and social justice; and

"WHEREAS, Black History Month seeks to emphasize that Black history is American history; and

"WHEREAS, The month of February observes the rich and diverse heritage of our great state and nation and encourages the

celebration of Black History Month to provide a continuing opportunity for all people in the United States to learn from the past, and understand the factors that have shaped and guided the course of our present-day experiences; and

"WHEREAS, The achievements of African-Americans have been instrumental in shaping the nation's progress, and it is essential to highlight some key moments, accomplishments, and historical firsts that have left a lasting impact on American history; and

"WHEREAS, From the legal field to public office, John S. Rock became the first African-American admitted to the bar of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1865, followed by Oscar J. Dunn as the first African-American lieutenant governor in Louisiana in 1868; Hiram Revels made history as the first African-American U.S. Senator in 1870, and Charlotte E. Ray became the first African-American female lawyer in the United States in 1872; in education, Booker T. Washington founded Tuskegee Institute in 1881, helping pave the way for future Black scholars; in athletics, George Poage won an Olympic medal

in 1904, and Jesse Owens defied racial prejudices with four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics; in innovation, Bessie Coleman became the first African-American woman to earn a pilot's license in 1921, Garrett Morgan invented the modern traffic signal and received a patent in 1923; in the arts, Hattie McDaniel became the first African-American to win an Academy Award in 1940, while Gwendolyn Brooks became the first African-American writer to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1950; and

"WHEREAS, Breaking barriers in civil rights, law, and politics, Brown v. Board of Education led to desegregation in schools in 1954, and Ruby Bridges, at six years old, became the first African-American child to integrate an all-white elementary school in the South in 1960; Thurgood Marshall became the first African-American Supreme Court Justice in 1967; Shirley Chisholm was the first African-American woman elected to Congress in 1968; Douglas Wilder became the first African-American governor in U.S. history in 1989; in science and space, Guion Bluford became the first African-American astronaut in space in 1983, while Mae Jemison

followed as the first African-American woman in space in 1992; Toni Morrison made literary history as the first African-American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993; and

"WHEREAS, African-Americans have also made great strides in leadership, with Carol Moseley Braun becoming the first African-American woman to serve in the U.S. Senate in 1995, Colin Powell serving as the first African-American U.S. Secretary of State in 2001, and Condoleezza Rice becoming the first African-American woman in that role in 2005; and

"WHEREAS, The impact of African-American contributions to the moral fabric and history of this great nation are ever-growing and unprecedented; more recently, on January 20, 2009, Barack Obama became the first Black President of the United States, earning his wife, Michelle Obama, the same distinction in her role as First Lady; and

"WHEREAS, More notable African-American trailblazers who serve as a testament to the success, growth, and strength of our nation are: Cheryl Boone Isaacs, who became the first Black president of the Academy of

Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 2013; Paulette Brown, the first Black woman to become the American Bar Association president in 2015; Dr. Carla Hayden, the first Black Librarian of Congress in 2016; Jennifer King, the first full-time Black woman NFL coach, heading the Washington Commanders in 2020; Kamala Harris became the first female and first Black and Asian American Vice President of the United States in January 2021; Lloyd J. Austin has the unique distinction of being the first Black United States Secretary of Defense, sworn in on January 22, 2021; Maya Angelou, the first Black woman to appear on U.S. currency in 2022; Ketanji Brown Jackson made history in her becoming the first Black woman to serve on the United States Supreme Court on June 30, 2022; Karine Jean-Pierre became the first Black and LGBTQ White House press secretary in 2022; and Sika Henry, the first Black woman to be recognized as a professional triathlete in the United States, was inducted into the National Black Distance Running Hall of Fame in 2022; and all of whom encompass the many more powerful Black individuals who pushed through countless

obstacles to earn the respect of their peers and this great state and nation; and

"WHEREAS, Furthermore, Fred Perpall was elected to serve as the 67th president of the United States Golf Association in 2023; also in 2023, Kirsten Neuschwanger made history as the first Black woman to graduate from the U.S. Air Force Academy's pilot training; Victor Glover was selected as the first Black astronaut to orbit the moon as part of NASA's Artemis II mission in 2024; Simone Biles became the most decorated American Olympic gymnast in history on July, 30, 2024; and on February 2, 2025, Beyoncé became the first Black woman to win a Grammy for Best Country Album with 'Cowboy Carter'; and

"WHEREAS, In recognition of the vast contributions of African-Americans, a joyful month-long celebration is held across New York State and across the United States, with many commemorative events to honor and display the cultural heritage of African-Americans; and

"WHEREAS, This Legislative Body commends the African-American community for preserving, for future generations, its

centuries-old traditions that benefit us all and add to the color and beauty of the tapestry which is our American society; now, therefore, be it

"RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to memorialize Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim February 2025 as Black History Month in the State of New York; and be it further

"RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Honorable Kathy Hochul, Governor of the State of New York, and to the events commemorating Black History Month throughout New York State."

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Leader Stewart-Cousins on the resolution.

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Thank you so much, Mr. President.

I don't usually speak on Black History Month resolutions because they're usually a recitation of what happened in the past -- which I know is important to the body. And because we are a body that is diverse and erudite, I have so many colleagues who are able to speak eloquently on the contributions of African-Americans to our country, to the world.

And I generally step aside, having spoken on King Day, and allow my colleagues to express so much of what remembering Black History Month means to them.

But because of where we are, because of the time that we're in, because of the moments that really require all of us to say something about something, I needed to say something about why we celebrate Black history. I needed to make sure that in this chamber and in this state we do not pretend that history is unimportant or easily erased.

I stand here because of the ancestors whose shoulders I stand upon. And when we do our resolution, we talk about what happened in the 1800s and what happened in the 1900s, and it's easy for us to pretend that that was so long ago and that the accomplishments that we see today, so many firsts that we see today, are just a normal and natural thing.

And I wanted staff to update the resolution, and that's why we talked about Beyoncé and Justice Ketanji Brown -- and oh, by the way, this weekend two Black quarterbacks will meet at the Super Bowl.

But I don't want anybody to assume that all of that was just an organic thing that happened. I don't want anybody to pretend that it was always about merit and never about race. Because too many people missed an opportunity to achieve the highest heights because the system said that based on the color of their skin, they could not possibly do any of those things.

They could not possibly be able to walk on the moon. They could not possibly be able to quarterback. They could not possibly be able to be wise enough to sit on the Supreme Court bench. They could not possibly, in the case of my father, who served in a segregated Army, be capable of defending the country.

I understand that for a moment they took down the information about the Tuskegee Airmen, the Black pilots who, because Franklin Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor said, Let's take a chance, because we need defense, allowed these Black pilots to reach not only great heights, but be so effective in what they did. They allowed them, as pilots, to pilot.

Because it was assumed that they could not do it. It was assumed that

Black people should be enslaved. And even though the Civil War was fought, the fact that the Emancipation Proclamation happened -- and we all know the story of Juneteenth, so it took a couple of years for people to actually know. Even then, they were -- said, Okay, you're free. With nothing. Nothing.

So when we read the scores of people who, despite that, show up, stand up, sacrifice, risk death, risk lynching, risk incarceration, risk -- no, not even risk, know that they will continue to be marginalized unless and until people who sit in places like this created legislation to say: Oh, by the way, you're no longer three-fifths of a person, you're a whole person.

Until those things happened, nothing changed. And it happened because people outside -- Black, white, people of good conscience -- decided that it was not okay to demonize and marginalize and suppress an oppressed people because of the color of their skin.

Some of these dates I was alive for. I was alive when schools were desegregated. This

is not something someone -- that's why we fight so hard to give resources to schools, because people depend on that. Why? So that they have the education so that they will not repeat the same mistakes.

And here we are pretending that we're not looking at things that are being rolled back as though somehow people are getting ahead of folks because we celebrate history or we celebrate our culture or we celebrate the fact that we've achieved something.

We've achieved something because the American dream is big enough to allow us to achieve it. We've achieved something because people's minds were pure enough to know that you can't continue to leave people behind and think it's perfectly fine. Not when, as the rabbi said, we're supposed to be making just laws.

We can't pretend that if we roll these laws back, or if now somebody of color, some woman, somebody who's got a disability is hired, it's DEI. No. It's right to allow people to do the best they can on behalf of each one of us.

I stand here not because of DEI, but

because I have an opportunity to serve this chamber and this state. And I hope, as we watch what's unfolding, we remember that many of us would not be sitting in our seats if not for the fighting of people to allow the dream to encompass us all.

Thank you so much, Mr. President.

(Standing ovation.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins.

Senator Parker on the resolution.

SENATOR PARKER: Thank you, Mr. President.

And I'm not sure I'm happy to be following the leader on this particular day.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR PARKER: But it's always a pleasure to be in the company of our leader, who is, you know, history in the making every single day that she leads this great office. And so thank you very much for not just your intrepid leadership, but for continuing to be the conscience of this state government here in New York.

We are here today again to celebrate

Black History Month, a month that was created out of Negro History Week, out of the zeitgeist, if you will, of Carter G. Woodson. Now, a lot of times people don't remember Carter G. Woodson because he was the second Brother to graduate from Harvard University. Right? Everybody knows W.E.B. Du Bois, right, who was the first.

You know, Du Bois, creator of sociology, right? His study The Philadelphia Negro was the first sociological work ever recorded. So he's literally the father of sociology. One of the creators, at the Niagara Movement, of the NAACP, what emerged into what we now know as the NAACP. But the first African-American to be graduated with a Ph.D. from Harvard. Carter G. Woodson was the second.

And Carter G. Woodson was a teacher. Right? Jabari, like -- you know, a teacher. And like he wasn't -- he wasn't like the head of teachers in this -- right? He had a Ph.D. from Harvard back in the early 1900s, and he wasn't like the head of teachers in the country. He wasn't like even the head of Black teachers anywhere. He was just like -- literally like a teacher. Right? Like Miss Murphy was for me in

third grade at P.S. 193. Right? We're going to have to fix our education system as we go forward with all our credentials.

But he was well-learned man. And in that experience, he was determined in the 1920s to say we need to know more, that there needs to be more of a conversation about who we are as African-Americans. So he actually, through the organization that he ran at that time, started Negro History Week, which was chosen to be the second week of February for two reasons.

One, it was the same week as the birthday of President Lincoln, right, who was very much admired because of his stances on ending slavery. And the second was the birthday of Frederick Douglass, whose birthday is also the second week of February. And it is those two luminaries which Carter G. Woodson thought that we ought to use as a foundation to build this edifice to African-American history.

But even when you read his works -- most notably, The Miseducation of the Negro -- Carter G. Woodson always knew that our history was bigger than us landing on the shores of Virginia in 1619. Right? 1619, an important

date because it was the time that the first ships came from Africa with African people enslaved on them.

But he knew that it started before then. And what I like to refer to -- and I'm going to use it again, because I like it so much -- is that to understand that there is an African in African-American, that we didn't pop up like mushrooms on the shore of Virginia in 1619. That in fact that the first people on this planet were people of African descent.

And we know that anthropologically. Right? They call her Alice. I don't think that was quite her name, but certainly the name that the anthropologists called her. I believe she was Homo sapien Anthropopithecus, right? Sorry, Australopithecus. Right?

The important thing to know about this anthropologically is that the first humans are found on the continent of Africa. But more importantly, the modern humans, the first remnants of the modern humans are found on the African continent: Homo sapien sapien. Right?

And so out of that history and the anthropological evidence that we have, we get

Ayi Kwei Armah, who is a West African author who wrote a book called Two Thousand Seasons. And in it he begins to talk about the history of African people, and he says that if you want to understand how long African people have been on this planet, he said you would have to go to the ocean. And as you started to walk upon the sand, you would have to count every grain of sand, grain by grain. And when you finished counting every grain of sand on the beach, you would only begin to understand how many seasons African people have been on the earth.

He said you then have to walk to the waterline and you would have to start to count the ocean, drop by drop. And then when you add that number to the number of grains of sand, you only have a fraction of the number of seasons that african people have been walking the earth. He said you would then have to look up to the sky and see the sun and count every ray of sun, ray by ray.

And even when you start to add that up with the drops of water in the ocean and the grains of sand on the beach, that you would then only start to understand how long African people

have been walking on this earth.

They were the first to see the dawn, the first to call the name of God, the first to understand mathematics and science and politics and sociology and anatomy. And not because they were better, but simply they were first.

And these were the group of people that were chosen to be enslaved in this place and in this land.

And so when you see this history, it's important to understand that history is a record of culture and a development of culture. And that's critical to understand because we're in a moment now in which people are trying to erase both that culture and that history. Where there's an active attempt to act like, you know, people of African descent have contributed nothing to this planet.

And let me say this. If you think that it's okay to allow that erasure to happen, you're next. You will be next.

We also understand, Mr. President, that history is the record of culture, but culture is the product of history. Culture is a dynamic thing that comes out of the history of

particular groups of people. Right? And the history and the culture of African people in this land has been one of struggle -- similarly, that we find other groups that have come here. Right?

And so in that way, there's this uniting force about what makes us America and about what makes us New York. It's that we come out of a culture and a history of struggle. And just like we survived those previous times, we will survive this time, exactly because we have this history and this culture to lean on.

We had a culture that developed in a hostile place where we were denied our history, our dignity, our freedom, and our humanity. Not just within the context of communities, but within the context of even the law that told us that we were -- that we were not even initially 3/4ths of a human, we were not citizens, that we were not humans, period.

That in fact as I refer to anthropology, literally -- a lot of people don't know this -- literally the discipline of anthropology was built as a scientific explanation of the superiority of white people, and to deny Black humanity. They began with

skulls -- cranial capacity tests. Right? And we should look that up and delve into that. But that's literally the foundations of anthropology. We developed a whole course of study that was really literally predicated on creating a scientific justification on the enslavement and the subjugation of African people.

And this history and this society told us every single day that we were not worthy of humanity, respect or dignity. But African people fought back. And so when this society told us that we were not entitled to freedom, Black history created Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser, and Nat Turner. When this society told us that we were not smart enough to learn how to read and write, Black history gave us Phillis Wheatley, gave us David Walker's Appeal. It gave us The North Star newspaper created by Frederick Douglass. It gave us the newspaper Negro World, created by Marcus Garvey, and the Amsterdam News, by Bill Tatum.

During the Revolutionary War and the development of this country, they told us that we couldn't fight, and Black history gave us Crispus Attucks. They even told us that we

weren't good enough to practice Free Masonry, and Black history gave us Prince Hall.

They told us that we had nothing to contribute to the society, that we couldn't even take care of ourselves once we were free. And Black history gave us Booker T. Washington, who created the Tuskegee Institute.

They told us that we couldn't organize ourselves, that we couldn't produce our own nation, that we had no history that we should pay attention to, and Black history gave us Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

They told us that we didn't have the capacity to go to war or to fight alongside of white soldiers, and Black history gave us the Buffalo Soldiers and the Tuskegee Airmen.

They told us that Jim Crow was our way of life and that we were always going to be separate and unequal, and Black history gave us Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, CORE, the NAACP, the Deacons for Defense, the Black Panther Party, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

They told us that we weren't smart enough to go to space, and Black history gave us Mae Jemison.

They told us that we couldn't perform in the arts, and Black history gave us Hattie McDaniel and Leontyne Price.

They told us that we couldn't be president, and Black history gave us Shirley Chisholm, Barack Obama, and Kamala Harris.

They told us that we could not serve on the highest court of the land, that we didn't have the capacity to do that. And Black history gave us Thurgood Marshall and now Ketanji Brown.

They told us that we didn't have the physical ability to keep up with whites in the sphere of sports, and Black history gave us Jesse Owens.

They told us, even here in the great State of New York, that we could not run the government and did not understand what was happening with finance, and so Black history gave us H. Carl McCall.

They told us that the justice in the great State of New York could never be run by

anybody Black, and Black history gave us Tish James.

They told us that if you were going to have somebody be the second in command of the government, that it had to be somebody white, but Black history told us different and gave us David Paterson and now Antonio Delgado.

They told us that how could a legislature be run by African-Americans, and Black history gave us Speaker Carl Heastie and our eminent leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

That in the development of our history, at every step they told us we could not do it. They told us that we had to eat scraps -- and what did we do? We created soul food. They gave people the ends of the cow to eat, and what did we do? Created oxtail.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR PARKER: They told us that our culture did not create enough viability to understand arts, and what did we do? We created the steelpan, soca, reggae, jazz, R&B, soul, rhythm and blues, salsa, hip-hop and rap.

And so this has all become part of what we are, not just as New Yorkers but as

Americans. And I stand here very proud of this history, and understanding that this history is still being made every day -- not just by us, but by our constituents all over this great state. And that this history is inextricably linked not just to the history of our state but of our great country, and inextricably linked to other groups.

And so we may have gotten here on different ships, but we're all in the same boat now. And it's only by the understanding and the respect of each other's histories and culture that we're going to find a way forward.

I want us to remember that African-American history is not just African-American stories, but it is the story of New York. It is the story of America. And that we must every single day in this chamber, and in our communities, continue to bring good into the world and let no good be lost.

Thank you, Mr. President.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator Parker.

Senator Bailey on the resolution.

SENATOR BAILEY: Thank you, Mr. President.

Moving words, to say the least, by our herstory-, history-making Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins. Every time I've heard you speak on the floor it has been magical, but there was something about today that struck a chord deep in my soul.

So I wrote a few things down, which many of you know that I'm not necessarily wont to do, but I've sort of changed that because Brother Sam Cooke said a change is gonna come, and the change came to me. So I thought about this, and I spoke about this on the floor before, but I wanted to frame it in historical context for you.

On November 8, 1837, a young woman by the name of Sylvia Richardson Holder was born in Johnson County, North Carolina. My great-great grandmother -- great-great-great grandmother. She was theoretically born three-fifths of a human being. She was born into slavery.

So when people say, get over it, it's equal, it's merit-based, I want you to realize less than 200 years ago, my own great-great-great grandmother was born into

slavery. But as I was reminded one time in the this chamber by Kevin Parker, she was not a slave. That may have been the restrictions that were placed on her by society, but she certainly was not a slave. Because she fought. She eventually was freed. And I would not be here today if not for her.

So let's contextualize that when they say "get over it," when they throw out this -- you know, I'm going to use DEI in such a different way. And I can tell you everybody in here is some version of DEI -- duly elected incumbent. Shout out to Brandon Scott, the mayor of our Baltimore, Maryland: When they tried to call him a DEI mayor, that's what he told them.

When they're trying to roll back Black History Month in the military and they're saying you can't have these special months anymore, I remind you, I want to remind you that diversity is what makes our country actually great. Contrary to the views of some.

I love being Black. Like, it just fills my soul with joy. Growing up Black, like I just -- I just -- I thank God every day. We should all thank God for who we are, but I thank

God that I was raised, that I was born Black in America. Because it's taught me what J. Cole said in Love Yourz: "There's beauty in the struggle, ugliness in the success."

There's a beautiful struggle about what happens. It feels better when you work for something. You like it more. You respect it more. You appreciate it more when you work for something. And our folks have worked damn hard over the years to make sure that we approach equality.

Listen, Mr. President, when I say "approach equality." Because I don't know what glasses people are wearing or the notion of this post-racial society that happened when President Obama was elected, but we ain't there yet. And my hope is that we can get there. My hope is that my children are able to live out Dr. King's dream.

We're not there yet, when they're cutting programs and they say that it's to increase efficiency, but it's to reduce other things.

But, see, the story of being Black is what I told you about. It's not all -- you

know, the worrying about what they're not doing, let's worry about what we are doing and what we have done. The leader mentioned it. Two Black quarterbacks in the Super Bowl for the second time in history. There was a time in history that they said Black folks were inferior, that you couldn't play quarterback. And if you played high school quarterback, they tried to convert you into a receiver. And if they let you play quarterback in college, they tried to convert you to something else, because you didn't have the mental capacity or aptitude to do that.

We were within a stone's throw of having, for the first time, all four quarterbacks in the division around -- being Black quarterbacks. They said that we couldn't do it, but Sunday you'll watch them do it.

There is a certain beauty in the culture of hip-hop that I come from. "Walk like warriors, we were never told to run" is something that Common said. It encapsulates the Black struggle. We have certain songs that we have -- we "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the unofficial Black national anthem. And the second unofficial Black national anthem, "Before I Let

Go," by Frankie Beverly and Maze. Because if you've ever been to a Black function, that's got to be on.

But sometimes, like, growing up Black you live your life through like the soul music on Sundays -- Hal Jackson, 107.5, Sunday Classics -- growing up listening to our folks, our voices, our struggle.

You can't be what you can't see. And I grew up realizing it's a different world where you come from. My favorite all-time television show, "A Different World," showed that not only could Black people succeed, not only could they go to college, that they did go to college.

And quite frankly, growing up, I thought I was going to go to Hillman. It broke my heart that Hillman wasn't a real college.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR BAILEY: I thought I was going to pledge Kappa Lambda Nu.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR BAILEY: It broke my heart to realize that that was not a real fraternity.

Did you know, Mr. President, that

within the years of 1987 to 1994 -- coincidentally, around the years that "A Different World" was on -- that at HBCUs, historically Black colleges and universities, attendance rates and applications went up 25 percent?

You can't be what you can't see. People saw that, you know what, if Dwayne Wayne and Ron Johnson and Whitley Gilbert can do it, dammit, I can too. That is the importance of being able to have positive Black voices and positive Black people on TV that you can see.

Again, I -- you couldn't tell me that I wasn't going to go to Hillman, man. But it is a different world where we come from sometimes.

That different world is often fraught with strife, fraught with struggle. But it's the positivity. It's the memes that are shared on social media about growing up Black and the things that you know that your mama said that you can't do in your house, and the things that you know what we couldn't do -- there's a shared struggle that we have.

As we lift, as we climb, we continue

to live out the ideals of our ancestors. I live out the ideals of my great-great-great grandmother every day. At least I hope I do.

But I want to leave you with a couple of things, and I want to say this. I talk about my kids all the time: Giada, Carina, and now Julian, the young king. You know, Nas in his song "Ultra Black" said, "We goin' ultra black, we don't fold or crack." "I hope you be better than I, life's precious."

So I'm going to give you Black history in A to Z. Black folks have been Amazingly Beneficial for the Collective, Dynamic and Eager, Fantastic, Genuine and Honest. Intelligent while being Jubilant, Kind and true Leaders. Motivated through our struggle, Never Nervous, Optimistic and Powerful. Quick-witted, Reliable and Sensational, Talented, Understanding our Vibrancy and being Welcoming. Now, there is no Xeroxing our Xeniality as we have Yet, as a people, to reach our Zenith.

That's Black People from A to Z, by Jay-B. But you will never know what it's like to be me. That is the struggle of the Black man in America, the Black woman in America, the

Black child in America.

And I encourage us that we extend the privileges and cordialities of this house, not just in this house but to everyone's house -- to the residence that you live in, to the places that you represent, please make sure that the virtues of Black History Month extend well beyond February.

Thank you, Mr. President.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator Bailey.

Senator Sanders on the resolution.

SENATOR SANDERS: Thank you, Mr. President.

Thank you for the resolution to Madam Leader. I've been in the business for 30 years, I've seen a bunch of people come and go. I've seen leaders, male, female, Black, white. She is the best, you know. She is the best.

But I would go a step further, even as I'm having trouble -- haven't worn this one in 400 years, so give me a little time. If there were a program, a DEI or whatever program, that was able to find leaders with as much quality as

Andrea Stewart-Cousins, not only would that be a great program, but that would be great for America to bring such talent to the fore, not to have it hidden somewhere or forgotten somewhere.

The history month this year, of course, is a bittersweet thing. Bittersweet. Sweet because there are many victories that we can speak of, but bitter because there are efforts afoot at the federal government and other places to muffle and silence this type of history, to imagine that we can take this away.

And I contend that you cannot have American history without Black history. And in that sense, you can't have Black history without American history. And attempts to muffle and silence this are doing such great disservice to the American people. It is hurting these students, Black and white. It is hurting these people. You're not going to have a whole history here.

Let me give you one small example of it. Everybody looks and they've seen the picture of Rosa Parks on the bus -- bold, brave, sitting in the front. Sitting there, bold. There's like a little bit of fear in her eyes, but steely

determination. Look carefully, America. There's a white guy sitting behind her, a New Yorker who just happened to be on the bus at that time. He stayed there to make sure she wouldn't get hurt and brutalized.

You can't separate Black history from white history or American history. Your attempts to do so, for those who are, are doing such damage to your own children and to generations of Americans. There will be a day when people come to their senses and say, Oh, my God, we were trying to do such horrible things.

Every incident of American history moving forward has had all of us involved. We only say Black history because we want to make sure it is not forgotten. You can't separate these things.

We live in a strange day. We live in a day where it seems that the Civil War is not over, that we're still fighting this stupid battle, a battle which -- to all Confederates, news flash -- the Union won. Anybody who needs to -- let me be the first to tell you, the Union won. You can crawl back under whatever hole you want to and believe whatever you wish -- but that

battle, we are not going back.

New York lost more than 50,000 troops in that battle, most of them white. We should say that we are not going to go back on this battle. For those folk. Even if you don't believe in it yourself, you should say, for these folk, we're not going to go back.

We are the Empire State, we claim. We are the best that America's got. (Sighing.) That may be a scary thought. But under those conditions, we should commit ourselves and recommit ourselves to the idea of the union. It's imperfect. Heck, who knows of it better than I, how imperfect the union is.

But I also know that a bunch of people gave their lives to this union, to make sure that we would go on, whether we are in Afghanistan, Iraq or wherever we find ourselves, or Gettysburg or Antietam or wherever we find ourselves.

A bunch of people fought and said, You know what, we're going to hold the line. We're going to make sure that this great American experiment, as flawed as it is, does not perish. Some of us took that oath. I remind all of us of

it. We said we would fight against enemies, foreign and domestic, that challenge the union. I encourage you to look to the papers again to look to see what you said.

So we are the union -- the union, yes, we are. Thank God. If I was in the Confederacy, I would have a different conversation perhaps. We are here, we're in New York, we're the Empire State. American history is Black history. Black history is American history. This is a great place to begin it. I encourage all of us to celebrate this history. You made it. Let's accept it, let's celebrate it, let's build on it.

Thank you very much.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Comrie on the resolution.

SENATOR COMRIE: Thank you, Mr. President.

I rise to echo the sentiments of my colleagues as we commemorate Black History Month. I want to thank our Majority Leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins. As Senator Sanders said, she's the best of us. We want to thank her for her

continued leadership.

Chronicling and giving voice, resonance and significance to the immense pioneering and worthy contributions of all African-Americans over the past four centuries is not only necessary from the standpoint of understanding the past, but even more critical for inspiring the future.

Black history is not confined to the history books. Black history encompasses the virtues and values we bring to spaces like this. Black history informs and animates our advocacy and our activism today.

There are many, many important avenues advocacy and activism can take. I want to explore one, economic inclusion, especially as it relates to minority- and women-owned businesses. There's a consumer side to thinking through shopping locally and how many times a dollar circulates in a neighborhood. There's also a government procurement side. As the saying goes, your budget reflects your values. That is true for you as an individual and in your household.

Our budget as a state also reflects

our values. With the recently released Executive Budget our job as legislators is to ensure that it is crafted in a way to ensure equity, access and inclusion. The actions of the federal government and the U.S. Supreme Court to stifle long-term gains, to do away with DEI and affirmative action, to end the celebration of Black History Month in spaces that we have fought hard to make gains, speaks to the sense of urgency we should all have to promote tolerance, pride and agency for all people.

When we build upon a legacy of upholding human dignity, when we work towards ending structural racism, when we advance health and economic equity, and when we defend and expand voting rights -- things that we have done here in this legislative body -- we are building on that vision and the values that Black History Month represents. We, colleagues, are pioneers, creators, innovators and change agents, doing the things that our constituents want to see us do to improve this state.

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously observed: The most important political office is that of the private citizen. I proudly

represent Queens County, home to trailblazing figures who have shaped history across journalism, music and culture. We celebrate the legacy of Gwen Ifill, a groundbreaking journalist, television and news anchor. In 1999, she made history as the first African-American woman to host a nationally televised U.S. public affairs program, Washington Week in Review.

Queens is home to many jazz legends, from James Brown, who made a home there, many other folk that made a home there. Satchmo was there and still has a house in Elmhurst, which I would invite you to go see.

It's home also to musical icons like Nas, Nas Jones, a Grammy Award winner, rapper, songwriter, record producer and actor, who last year we welcomed him to this chamber to celebrate the 30th anniversary of his debut album Illmatic, a project that remains one of the most influential in hip-hop history.

Queens continues to produce leaders, innovators and cultural icons who inspire generations. Their contributions remind us of the legacy of our borough and the importance of uplifting those who paved the way for the future.

We also have everyday heroes, including the first African-American Speaker of the New York City Council, Adrienne Adams, straight out of South Jamaica, Queens.

These are the voices of our new generation who stand on the shoulders of early Queens leaders like Roy Wilkins, Guy Brewer, and my predecessor in the City Council, Archie Spigner.

We have to remember, though, that our history needs to be maintained and that our dignity and respect to others need to be maintained also.

And I bring that up to say that the tragedy that happened to Robert Brooks in Marcy Correctional Facility should not be anything that our state should do anything but push to make sure those people that violently attacked and murdered him while he was in the custody of the state -- shown by the disturbing footage released by the Attorney General that reveals the horrific circumstances in which he lost his life.

This is a stark reminder of the deep-rooted issues of brutality and racial

injustice that still persist in our country. We must be clear: No human should ever be treated in such a dehumanizing manner. The justice system must operate with fairness and transparency, ensuring that this case is investigated and that these people be put in jail.

We cannot continue to allow our prison system to be a place where violence and disregard for life are tolerated. And we want to give our deepest condolences to the family.

We also need to make sure that our voice is critical to the kind of politics that we need to have -- the politics of public policy, the politics of making sure that our government pursues justice, that the kind of communities that we all live in come through these challenges and come out stronger and better.

We need to make sure that we do more to ensure that our budget reflects our values, that our budget reflects fairness and equity throughout this state, that we create opportunities for people in this budget that we bring to our folk that are in need, that we protect folk that are in trouble.

And especially now with ICE going to homes all over this state, we need to make sure that we're doing things to help those that are most in danger.

If we don't do that, we're not fulfilling our commitment as legislators, we're not fulfilling our commitment as New Yorkers, and we're not fulfilling our commitment as Americans.

Again, Mr. President, I want to thank Andrea Stewart-Cousins for bringing this resolution every year. This year it's more important than ever that we talk about our Black history, that we talk about how, as Senator Sanders said, this is one history. Black, white, we're all in this together. As Senator Parker said, we're in the same boat now. We can't it parse it out for any other specific reasons. We have to understand that the only way me move forward in a positive way is to move forward together.

If we allow people to separate us and parse us out into great stories that are not true, we're going to fall apart. But I know that in this body we're better than that. We can rise above the partisanship that other people are

trying to do, and focus on making sure that this state rises above anything that's not for real. Anything that can be easily disseminated, we can overcome.

And I hope that we all remember our charge, which is to make sure that our communities are better than we left them.

Thank you, Mr. President.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator Comrie.

Senator Baskin on the resolution.

SENATOR BASKIN: Thank you, Mr. President.

I rise today with urgency, pride and gratitude as my colleagues and I in the New York State Legislature celebrate Black History Month.

Mr. President, my urgency reflects the frantic efforts -- not new, but ever so present -- of those occupying the White House to reverse initiatives designed to uplift Black people after centuries of oppression.

My pride reflects the joys, the gifts and the sovereignty bestowed upon me by my ancestors. I am a Black American of African descent and proud of it.

And my gratitude, my gratitude, dear colleagues, is rooted in assurance that I am elected to a governing body in this country whose members have not conformed to the vile and overt efforts to erase the monumental contributions of Black Americans, or to obscure the unfiltered truth of the systemic and vicious targeting of Black Americans since our nation's birth.

It is my belief that governing bodies who still hold true to basic humanity must revere Black History Month now more than ever. Because we all know that there are governing bodies in this country that at this very moment are gutting policies designed to increase inclusivity for marginalized communities, including Black Americans.

These government leaders support billion-dollar corporations and dismantling practices that help Black people rise above oppressive history in our country. Because we all know there are governing bodies in this country who have voted to overturn policies aimed at creating equity in college admissions, policies that sought to address historical realities that Black Americans have never had

equal opportunities to education.

We know that there are courts in this country rejecting the John Lewis Voting Rights Act. Because we all know that there are governing bodies in this country who have voted to ban books and educational materials that teach Black history to children.

Because each and every one of us know of the harmful governmental policies of yesteryear in the very city that I represent: Buffalo, New York. Redlining, for instance, a discriminatory practice of denying or limiting financial services to certain neighborhoods based on race, was intentionally designed in Buffalo to create Black neighborhoods entrenched with poor housing stock, which is why so many Black children in Buffalo suffer from lead poisoning.

Environmental hazards have plagued these neighborhoods, which is why so many Black communities in Buffalo are labeled a cancer cluster. And food deserts persist, leaving Black communities without access to healthy and affordable food. Which is why the tragedy unfolded in my community where a grocery store in

a Black neighborhood was targeted by a barbaric white nationalist who drove hours simply to murder 10 Black residents, and seriously wounded three, just because they were Black.

There are government bodies in this country that are doing everything right now in their power to erase Black history and, by extension, erase Black people.

So again, colleagues, today I rise with gratitude, gratitude to the New York State Legislature for your continued support of this great tradition. May we, as New Yorkers, be brave enough and remain brave enough to celebrate Black history today, celebrate Black history six months from now, celebrate Black history four years from now, celebrate Black history always, and, Mr. President, celebrate Black history forever.

Thank you.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Webb on the resolution.

SENATOR WEBB: Thank you, Mr. President.

I want to again echo my complete

gratitude to all my colleagues who have spoken today. Of course, the Senate Majority Leader -- no surprise -- always sets the bar very, very high. And we need leadership like hers not just today, but every day as we as legislators, but first of all as public servants, navigate this treacherous time. That we know the power and the significance of policy, good public policy that can build and not destroy.

I wanted to share a poem by one of our ancestors, who became an ancestor last year, a great leader and poet, also a soror of mine, and that is Nikki Giovanni. And in this particular poem she talks about the importance of Black History Month and what it means to everyone. And she says:

"If Black History Month is not
viable then wind does not
carry the seeds and drop them
on fertile ground
rain does not
dampen the land
and encourage the seeds
to root
sun does not

warm the earth
and kiss the seedlings
and tell them plain:
You're As Good As Anybody Else
And You've Got A Place Here, Too."
And so when I think about my own trajectory of being here and that we all stand on the shoulders of our ancestors, whether it's within our own families, I think about my parents and grandparents and great-grandparent, those folks who made countless sacrifices for us all to be here in this chamber, that it is important that we call their names but, more importantly, we honor their legacies by the work that we do. As I often say, the good work.
Black History Month is an opportunity to not only remember contributions of Black leaders here in America, but it is a call to action. It is a reminder of our shared humanity, that the work we must do not only as public servants but as good human beings, that when we take the time to honor and lift up the contributions of Black Americans, of all of the ways in which diversity is our strength, it is us centering our shared humanity. It allows us to

not only coexist, but to thrive.

I think about not only the sacrifices that our ancestors have made in their willingness, even in the sight of adversity, and no way of knowing if they would be successful, but yet they still stood up and encouraged others to do the same, to push us towards our shared humanity.

For this moment, in this time, I encourage all of us in this chamber to not only acknowledge and support this resolution by voting aye, but I encourage all of us to not only think about but more proactively think about the legacy we are leaving for not only our communities, our children, and those coming after us, to reflect on this moment in time and ask ourselves, how are we as not only legislators, as public servants, as good human beings, working to ensure that the legacy of our shared humanity lives on in the good deeds that we do? Because we all benefit from it.

Again, I want to thank our Majority Leader, the Governor, and of course, Mr. President, I proudly vote aye in favor of this resolution. And I hope that as a body that

we make a collective stand and say that the erasure of Black culture in any shape, form or fashion is not an option. That education we know is the key to our shared success and progress -- not only as New Yorkers, not only as Americans, but as human beings.

Thank you, Mr. President.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator.

Senator May on the resolution.

SENATOR MAY: Thank you, Mr. President.

And I rise also to thank the Majority Leader and my colleagues for their passionate teaching about Black History Month today and every day, honestly.

It was Memorial Day 1921 when a altercation in Tulsa, Oklahoma, turned into a riot and a massacre that left an untold number of people dead and destroyed what was known as Black Wall Street, the most wealthy Black community in the country. Ten thousand people were displaced, and that all the wealth of that community was effectively destroyed.

It was not until 2001, 80 years

later, that the official report of that massacre was published. And a year later, it was -- it began to be included in the curriculum for schoolchildren in the state of Oklahoma.

As we've heard today, the telling of Black history -- Black history itself has been a history of struggle, but even the telling of Black history has been a constant struggle just to get the word out there. And what has happened in the last couple of years in Oklahoma, the state legislature passed a law that has caused most teachers to take the telling about that massacre out of their own curriculum because the state legislature is concerned that white children are not able to cope with the idea of racism as something -- that it's too painful, it's too shameful, that they shouldn't have to deal with that concept.

I'm familiar with this problem because my grandparents collaborated back in 1965 on a textbook that attempted to broaden the teaching of American history in the eighth grade. And they received death threats once that textbook was adopted in the California schools. People started pulling their kids out of

eighth-grade history classes because they didn't want them to learn about Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King, Jr.

And it is deeply saddening to me that 60 years later, we are in the same situation, where the telling of Black history is something that is being expunged from our schools, from our government buildings, from the record. And that we have a president who decided, in the midst of a terrible tragedy, to give a press conference where he, with zero basis, blamed DEI for the tragedy instead of committing to take responsibility for finding out what really happened and making sure it didn't happen again.

I'm proud that here in New York we take Black history and Black History Month seriously, and I'm deeply grateful to my colleagues for teaching me about Black history every day.

I vote aye.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Harckham on the resolution.

SENATOR HARCKHAM: Thank you very

much, Mr. President.

I want to thank our Majority Leader for bringing this resolution forward. I want to thank her for her remarkable remarks on the floor.

I want to thank my colleagues for speaking your truth and telling your stories.

I rise today because I have constituents who want to know that I have their back and that we in this chamber have their back as their stories are diminished, their history and their truth is under threat, as has been told by my colleague about the diminishment of Black History Month in the U.S. military, threats to textbooks, threats to public school funding, and the end of efforts to encourage diversity, both in government, in our academia, in the workplace.

This is deeply troubling to many of my constituents because it diminishes people. It says that you do not -- you are not worthy to have a seat at the table. And that is just unfair, and it's unjust. And it flies in the face of the institutional barriers that are there in so many areas, in terms of the private sector

and in terms of education, in terms of housing, in terms of healthcare, in terms of criminal justice. The data is still there to indicate that there are systemic barriers there.

I thank my colleague from Buffalo for talking about redlining. You look at the Regional Plan Association data, New York City suburbs are the most segregated suburbs in the country. Long Island, the Lower Hudson Valley, where I live, the most segregated suburbs in the country. And that is because of the legacy of housing policy that you described, the redlining and other housing policies that prohibited folks of color from having access to zip codes of opportunity.

And it's not long ago that -- when we came into this body in 2019 and we began working on fully funding Foundation Aid for our schools, we saw that primarily Black and brown schools in districts like mine, Peekskill and Ossining, were at half the funding they should have been, while neighboring communities with high property wealth were getting twice the Foundation Aid. And that is another inequity for those students.

And so it's important that that struggle that educates us about the need to rectify these barriers in this chamber, those stories need to be told that many of my colleagues told today of their own families and of the history.

And so, you know, when a president puts pressure and signs executive orders that we want to erase this history, we have to stand with our constituents and say, No, your history matters, your story matters, your truth matters, and your struggle matters.

I vote aye.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator Harckham.

Senator Gonzalez on the resolution.

SENATOR GONZALEZ: Thank you, Mr. President.

And thank you to the leader for bringing forward this Black History Month resolution. Thank you for setting the tone for New York State.

While the federal government is busy banning the celebration and study of Black history and so much more, here in the State

Legislature we know better. We know that Black history is our history. We know that we are who we are because of the contributions Black Americans and Black New Yorkers have made in our state and in our country.

And we know that the erasure of Black history leaves us not only ignorant of the past but less able to imagine a better future for all New Yorkers.

I've experienced this impact in my own life. I would not be here as the youngest woman ever elected to the New York State Senate if it was not for Black history.

As many of you know, I studied race and ethnicity studies, in addition to political science, at Columbia University. The Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, CSER, was created in response to a student strike in 1996 when a coalition of Black and brown student leaders, inspired by the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, waged a month-long campaign to demand an ethnic studies department.

Because of this organizing and because of this major, I learned a lot about the history of colonization and the history of the

civil rights movement.

It was Black women leaders like Shirley Chisholm who inspired me to enter politics, who taught me that we do not have to accept the world as it is, but we have the ability to fight for better. It was Black queer feminist authors like Audre Lourde and bell hooks who taught me that using my voice for good was an act of resistance.

Black history gave me the tools to understand capitalism and the tools to organize in my own community. It's what led me on my path to politics. And if it wasn't for another Black leader, President Obama, I wouldn't have gotten my start in politics.

As a democratic socialist, I'm also inspired by Black leaders like MLK, who said "Call it democracy or call it democratic socialism, but there must be a better distribution of wealth for all of God's children," and reminded us that class struggle and the struggle for racial justice are one and the same, and that we must acknowledge our collective responsibility to each other and to our communities.

In a moment when oligarchs are building wealth off the backs of the most vulnerable in our state, we must not only celebrate Black history, but we must use this knowledge and tools of past movements combat hatred.

As John Lewis said: "We cannot lose ourselves in a sea of despair. We must speak up, speak out and get in the way." As we celebrate Black history in this moment, let us celebrate this tradition of resistance and speak up and speak out for equal rights and justice for all New Yorkers.

I vote aye. Thank you.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Brisport on the resolution.

SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you, Mr. President.

And thank you to the leader for introducing this resolution, to all my colleagues for speaking on it and supporting it today. And I especially want to thank all of my Black colleagues. Today we are saying it loud: We are Black, and we are proud -- despite the efforts in

D.C. to erase our history and try to erase us from America.

I would be remiss if I did not also bring up another group that the current federal administration is trying to erase. On the campaign trail, President Trump said, "We pledge to you that we will root out the communists, Marxists, fascists and the radical left thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our country."

And I'd like to say that dehumanization is straight out of the playbook of Hitler's Third Reich, and I reject that type of language.

And as a proud Black socialist, I'm happy to stand on the shoulders of incredible men like Martin Luther King, Jr., who also said "The problem is that we all too often have socialism for the rich and rugged free-enterprise capitalism for the poor. That's the problem."

And in our current moment, with the appointment of co-president Elon Musk, oligarchy's grip on the White House has been turbocharged. And the attempts to erase Black people and Black History Month are part of

a wider and broader assault on working-class people.

Cuts to Medicaid funding will harm Black people and working-class people. Gutting environmental regulations will harm Black people and working-class people. Tariffs will raise prices and worsen the cost of living for Black people and working-class people.

But despite those chaotic proposals at the federal level, I'm inspired by another man whose shoulders I stand on, Fred Hampton, of the Black Panther Party. He said, "We don't think you fight fire with fire best. We think you fight fire with water best. We're going to fight racism not with racism, but we're going to fight it with solidarity. We say we're not going to fight capitalism with Black capitalism, but we're going to fight it with socialism."

So I'm looking forward to using our budget process here in the State of New York to fight against the chaos of Washington, D.C., by fighting for universal healthcare, universal childcare, social housing, free and fast transit for Black New Yorkers and all New Yorkers.

Happy Black History Month.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Cleare on the resolution.

SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you, Mr. President.

I want to first thank our leader, Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, for bringing this resolution.

And I didn't think I would be saying anything today, but her words were so moving. And you all know the district I represent. So proud of the Black history in that district, and I felt that I needed to say something.

The first Black man in the Legislature, the New York State Legislature, was one of 11 children born into slavery. Got hisself elected from Harlem in 1917, into the State Assembly.

The first Black woman to get elected in the State Senate, Constance Baker Motley, from Harlem. I have to say that I have watched her life long before I even thought I would be a Senator. This is the person who wrote the legal brief for Brown v. Board of Education, which opened the doors for so many, all of us, to be

educated, Black and otherwise.

And there's a quote of hers that just struck me today. When asked about her achievements, which were many, far beyond the New York State Senate, she said: "I rejected the notion that my race or sex would bar my success in life."

That's such an important quote. And that is the very epitome of why we have to preserve Black history. Black children, Black boys, Black girls, Latina girls, boys, need to know that for themselves. They need to see someone who overcame some of the most difficult circumstances.

Our Black history is not just about the pain that some people say we're putting on others. It's about the victories. It's about the overcoming. It's about the surviving. And it's about hope.

So when you hear the discouraging and hurtful remarks and actions of some, just know that you can overcome those things, and those words don't make you. Those circumstances don't define you.

I proudly represent a district that

includes Harlem, where the historic March on Washington was planned on West 130th Street by A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin.

I walk through history every single day. Just this past weekend I was able to celebrate the life of Langston Hughes, one of the greatest, greatest writers in our history. Through him, and through many others, is where our young people see hope. They see themselves. They see how they can achieve. They see how they can contribute.

And it is criminal for anyone to deny anyone's history. You have to know who you are. You have to know what happened. We have to know the things that occurred in history so that we don't repeat them.

So today I'm really proud to stand here with this body celebrating Black History Month, all of us celebrating Black history. And as my colleague said earlier, Black history is American history. It is important to us and all of our children to know what happened, to know the role that we all played in it.

And as was said earlier, let the history books reflect what we did in this moment.

When this was said by our so-called leader, what did we do? Because the history will go on. The books will be written.

I proudly vote aye on this resolution today. And I align myself with the remarks of my colleagues and once again thank our leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and our Governor for making sure that we recognize and celebrate Black history.

Happy Black History Month to all.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Scarcella-Spanton on the resolution.

SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you, Mr. President.

And thank you to Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins for bringing this resolution to the floor. And to all my amazing colleagues, hearing your testimony today is incredibly powerful. It helped me, inspired me to jot down my own words, not anything prepared.

Staten Island and Southern Brooklyn are home to countless Black legends, leaders, artists, and so much more. Just last year we

honored Kamora Freeland on the floor of the Senate, the youngest Black female pilot in the entire country, who is now proudly at Spelman University.

Staten Island is the birthplace of the Wu-Tang Clan. I know we don't get the reputation for being the home of hip-hop --

(Laughter.)

SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: -- but you have to give us that. They revolutionized hip-hop by combining poetic lyrics, martial arts, and philosophy, completely changing the dynamic as we know it.

My district is home to powerful leaders, including Hakeem Jeffries, who is the first African-American Congressman from Southern Brooklyn and the first African-American elected official to represent either party in the United States Congress.

My district is home to the Black Angels, who were a dedicated group of African-American nurses from Staten Island who played a crucial role in curing TB patients in Sea View Hospital. Their role changed the course of medical care and helped with integration.

New York State will always honor Black history. And more importantly, we must never, ever forget the history that they have provided.

I proudly vote aye on this resolution. And I want my constituents to know that the contributions of our Black community are celebrated this month and all the time, but I will work with all of my colleagues to make sure that that history is preserved every day of the year.

Thank you.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Jackson on the resolution.

SENATOR JACKSON: Well, thank you, Mr. President and my colleagues, all of you who have spoken to this Black history lesson for about two hours. So whether you wanted to or not, we all had a lesson of Black history told by Black people.

And so as someone that is an African-American -- and I grew up with James Brown: Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud! That's what it's about. And so when

James Brown said that going back then, so many Black people were saying: "Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud!" And that's good, because we are proud of who we are. And we struggle every single day like everybody else in order to try to, you know, live the life of healthiness and, you know, raising our children and getting a good education.

Someone mentioned about the Foundation Aid. Well, many of you know I was the lead plaintiff in that lawsuit. I walked 150 miles twice in order to prove a point, that everyone is entitled to a sound, basic education. It doesn't matter who you are, whether you're Black or white or Hispanic, Asian, whether you're rich or you're poor, everyone deserves a good education. And that's what we fight for today.

And so we had a lesson today. And I thank Andrea Stewart-Cousins, our Majority Leader -- as was said earlier, the first African-American to lead this Senate chamber, and a woman too.

So there's lessons to be learned every single day. All we have to do is open up our eyes, see it, hear it, and speak it.

God bless you all. Asalamu Alaikum to everyone. And say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud!

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator Jackson.

The question is on the resolution. All in favor signify by saying aye.

(Response of "Aye.")

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Opposed, nay.

(No response.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The resolution is adopted.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Thank you, Mr. President.

Thank you again to all my colleagues who spoke so powerfully today on that resolution.

Let us move on to previously adopted Resolution 255, by Senator Weber, read that resolution's title and recognize Senator Weber.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Resolution 255, by Senator Weber, commending Brandon Gruttemeyer

upon the occasion of his designation as recipient of a Liberty Medal, the highest honor bestowed upon an individual by the New York State Senate.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Senator Weber.

SENATOR WEBER: Thank you, Mr. President.

It's my honor to rise to acknowledge an extraordinary young man who joins us here in the gallery today, accompanied by his parents and grandparents, grandmother. I want to thank you also for your patience; it's been a very long session so far.

But Brandon Gruttemeyer lives in Congers, New York, in Rockland County. He is currently a sophomore at Siena College and works a summer job as a sailing coach at the Lake George Club.

Throughout his childhood he spent nearly every spring and fall weekend, and almost every summer day in between, sailing with his family in Lake George.

On Thursday, August 1st of last year, around 12:30 a.m., Brandon was sound asleep after a long day at work at the Lake George Club.

He awoke to the screams of his coworker, who barged into his room, hysterical and pleading for help. In a daze, Brandon grabbed a flashlight and ran into the darkness towards the water. When Brandon got to the lake, he shined his flashlight across the water and spotted a lifeless body 10 to 12 feet down.

A coworker named James, who was working the night shift, decided to take a dip and cool off with friends. James, who stood at six-foot-five, and over 250 pounds, was not a strong swimmer. When he began to struggle, his friends made several attempts to get him to safety, all for naught.

When these attempts failed, they ran for help to get Brandon, who was only six foot and 140 pounds, and he dove right in and was able to get the much larger, now waterlogged coworker to the deck.

James had turned blue and had no pulse. It was believed he had spent about six minutes at the bottom of the lake. Brandon and his friend Eric took turns performing CPR and doing chest compressions. After about two minutes, they got him to cough up the water,

but he remained unconscious. James was barely alive when paramedics rushed him away, but he was still alive.

He spent over a week in a coma, and his prognosis was grim, but he did wake up. He stunned doctors a month later when he was taken off a heart-lung machine. Still, a full recovery was thought to be unlikely. But that's exactly what happened.

The decision to transfer James to Albany Medical Center, right here, and get him on the state-of-the-art equipment, was a factor in his recovery. But if it were not for the heroic actions of Eric VanAuken and Brandon Gruttemeyer, James would not have survived.

The Liberty Medal is a symbol of courage given to a few New Yorkers who demonstrate acts of -- heroic or humanitarian acts for others, and it is the highest honor given to an individual by the New York State Senate.

Brandon's quick thinking in the face of crisis not only demonstrates his resourcefulness, but also his courage during those critical moments on the docks. His bravery

and perseverance serve as a strong representation of how we should all strive to act.

I'm proud to call him a constituent, and it is with great honor that I present the New York State Senate resolution and Liberty Medal to Brandon Gruttemeyer.

And Mr. Speaker, please extend Brandon and his family with all of the courtesies of this great body. Thank you.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Thank you, Senator Weber.

To our guests, I welcome you on behalf of the Senate. We extend to you the privileges and courtesies of this house.

Please rise and be recognized.

(Standing ovation.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The resolution was adopted on January 28th.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: The resolutions we took up today are open for cosponsorship.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The resolutions are open for cosponsorship. Should you choose not to be a cosponsor on the resolutions, please notify the desk.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Please take up the calendar.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 43, Assembly Bill 926, by Assemblymember McDonald, an act to amend a chapter of the Laws of 2024.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 62.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 45, Assembly Bill 425, by Assemblymember Otis, an act to amend the Insurance Law.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect on the same date and in the same manner as a chapter of the Laws of 2024.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 45, voting in the negative:

Senator Walczyk.

Ayes, 61. Nays, 1.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 46, Assembly Bill 924, by Assemblymember Paulin, an act to amend a chapter of the Laws of 2024.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce

the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 62.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 50, Assembly Bill 1476, by Assemblymember Pretlow, an act to amend the Public Health Law.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 50, voting in the negative:

Senator Walczyk.

Ayes, 61. Nays, 1.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 59, Assembly Bill 920, by Assemblymember Lavine, an act to amend the Penal Law.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 9. This act shall take effect on the same date and in the same manner as a chapter of the Laws of 2024.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 62.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 64, Assembly Bill 2058, by Assemblymember Cunningham, an act to amend the Veterans' Services Law.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 62.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 65, Assembly Bill 2435, by Assemblymember Cruz, an act to amend the Veterans' Services Law.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect on the same date and in the same manner as a chapter of the Laws of 2024.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 65, voting in the negative:
Senator Walczyk.

Ayes, 61. Nays, 1.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 70, Assembly Bill 1099, by Assemblymember McDonald, an act to amend the Elder Law.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect on the same date and in the same manner as a Chapter of the Laws of 2024.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 62.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 73, Senate Print 799, by Senator Mayer, an act to amend the Election Law.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect on the same date and in the same manner as a chapter of the Laws of 2024.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce

the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 73, those Senators voting in the negative are Senators Ashby, Borrello, Canzoneri-Fitzpatrick, Chan, Griffo, Helming, Lanza, Mattera, Murray, Oberacker, Ortt, Rhoads, Scarcella-Spanton, Tedisco, Walczyk, Weber and Weik.

Ayes, 45. Nays, 17.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 74, Assembly Bill 1016, by Assemblymember McDonald, an act to amend the Public Health Law.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 3. This act shall take effect on the same date and in the same manner as a chapter of the Laws of 2024.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 62.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 76, Assembly Bill 1025, by Assemblymember Solages, an act to amend the Public Health Law.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 62.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 82, Assembly Bill 2432, by Assemblymember Bronson, an act to amend the Labor Law.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the

roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 82, those Senators voting in the negative are Senators Chan, Gallivan, Helming, Stec, Tedisco, Walczyk, Weber and Weik.

Ayes, 54. Nays, 8.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 83, Assembly Bill 1026, by Assemblymember Solages, an act to amend the Public Health Law.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect on the same date and in the same manner as a chapter of the Laws of 2024.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 62.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 86, Assembly Bill 421, by Assemblymember Anderson, an act to amend the Banking Law.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 3. This act shall take effect on the same date and in the same manner as a chapter of the Laws of 2024.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 86, those Senators voting in the negative are Senators Ashby, Borrello, Chan, Gallivan, Griffo, Helming, Lanza, Mattera, Palumbo, Rhoads, Stec, Tedisco, Walczyk, Weber and Weik.

Ayes, 47. Nays, 15.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: The bill is passed.

Senator Gianaris, that completes the

reading of today's calendar.

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

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: There is no further business at the desk.

SENATOR GIANARIS: I move to adjourn until Monday, February 10th, at 3:00 p.m., with the intervening days being legislative days.

ACTING PRESIDENT COONEY: On motion, the Senate stands adjourned until Monday, February 10th, at 3:00 p.m., with intervening days being legislative days.

(Whereupon, at 2:20 p.m., the Senate adjourned.)