

1 BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE FINANCE  
2 AND ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEES

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3 JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING  
4 In the Matter of the  
5 2025-2026 EXECUTIVE BUDGET ON  
6 AGRICULTURE & MARKETS/PARKS & RECREATION

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7 Hearing Room B  
8 Legislative Office Building  
9 Albany, New York

10 January 27, 2025  
11 1:05 p.m.

12 PRESIDING:

13 Senator Liz Krueger  
14 Chair, Senate Finance Committee

15 Assemblyman Gary Pretlow  
16 Chair, Assembly Ways & Means Committee

17 PRESENT:

18 Senator Thomas F. O'Mara  
19 Senate Finance Committee (RM)

20 Assemblyman Edward P. Ra  
21 Assembly Ways & Means Committee (RM)

22 Senator Michelle Hinchey  
23 Chair, Senate Committee on Agriculture

24 Assemblywoman Donna A. Lupardo  
Chair, Assembly Committee on Agriculture

Senator José M. Serrano  
Chair, Senate Committee on Cultural  
Affairs, Tourism, Arts and Recreation

1 2025-2026 Executive Budget  
2 Agriculture/Parks  
3 1-27-25

4 PRESENT: (Continued)

5 Assemblyman Ron Kim  
6 Chair, Assembly Committee on  
7 Tourism, Parks, Arts and  
8 Sports Development

9 Senator Patricia Fahy

10 Assemblyman Steven Otis

11 Senator Chris Ryan

12 Assemblyman Brian Cunningham

13 Senator Peter Oberacker

14 Assemblyman Scott Gray

15 Assemblywoman Jodi Giglio

16 Senator Jim Tedisco

17 Assemblyman Brian D. Miller

18 Assemblywoman Rebecca A. Seawright

19 Assemblyman Steven Raga

20 Senator Nathalia Fernandez

21 Assemblyman Joe Angelino

22 Assemblyman Al Stirpe

23 Assemblywoman Mary Beth Walsh

24 Assemblyman Tommy John Schiavoni

Assemblywoman Paula Elaine Kay

Senator Pamela Helming

1 2025-2026 Executive Budget  
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4 PRESENT: (Continued)

5 Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner

6 Senator George M. Borrello

7 Assemblyman Chris Tague

8 Assemblyman John Lemondes

9 Assemblyman Matthew Simpson

10 Assemblywoman Dr. Anna R. Kelles

11 Assemblywoman Stefani Zinerman

12 Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon

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1 2025-2026 Executive Budget  
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3 LIST OF SPEAKERS

4 STATEMENT QUESTIONS

5 Richard A. Ball  
Commissioner  
6 NYS Department of Agriculture  
and Markets  
7 -and-  
Randy Simons  
8 Commissioner  
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation  
9 and Historic Preservation

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10 Katie Baildon  
Policy Coordinator  
11 Northeast Organic Farming  
Association of New York  
12 (NOFA-NY)  
-and-

13 Kyle Wallach  
Associate Director of  
14 Public Policy  
New York Farm Bureau  
15 -and-

Allyson Jones-Brimmer  
16 VP of Regulatory and  
Legislative Affairs  
17 Northeast Dairy Producers  
Association  
18 -and-

Josh Stephani  
19 Manager  
Adirondack Food System Network

178 190

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21  
22  
23  
24

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4 LIST OF SPEAKERS, Cont.

	STATEMENT	QUESTIONS
5 Bill Ketzner 6 Senior Legislative Director 7 American Society for the 8 Prevention of Cruelty to 9 Animals 10 -and- 11 Brian Shapiro 12 New York State Director 13 Humane Society of the 14 United States 15 -and- 16 Libby Post 17 Executive Director 18 New York State Animal 19 Protection Federation	214	224
20 Will Coté 21 Senior Director, Public Lands 22 Parks & Trails New York 23 -and- 24 Julian Mangano New York Policy Manager American Farmland Trust -and- Carli Fraccarolli Government Relations Manager Scenic Hudson	234	244

1                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Hi. If everybody  
2 would start to take their seats, we can get  
3 the show rolling. One more second while the  
4 Assembly gets one thing taken care of.  
5 (Pause.) Okay, we have people seated.  
6 Legislators have enough seats to sit in.  
7 Great.

8                   Well, welcome to the first budget  
9 hearing for 2025. I'm Senator Liz Krueger,  
10 chair of the Senate Finance Committee, and  
11 next to me is the brand-new chair of Ways and  
12 Means in the Assembly, Gary Pretlow.  
13 Welcome. As he said, it's not his first  
14 rodeo, but it's his first rodeo as the chair  
15 of Ways and Means.

16                   And I'm just going to do the opening  
17 remarks -- no, I'm going to go over a few of  
18 the rules of the road.

19                   One, for all the legislators here,  
20 when you want to speak, put your speaker on  
21 the green. You can push the button. And if  
22 you are talking and you accidentally turned  
23 it on or you forgot, the people in the back,  
24 in the room, might decide to turn it off for

1           you, but always keep your eye on whether your  
2           mic is green or red.

3                       For everyone, legislators and our  
4           testifiers, there are clocks that you can see  
5           in a variety of places when you're looking  
6           this way (indicating), or when you're looking  
7           this way. And that's the amount of time you  
8           have available to you. So when you're  
9           testifying, that's your amount of time to  
10          testify.

11                      When legislators are asking questions,  
12          that clock is the amount of time you have to  
13          ask questions and get answers. I have to go  
14          over this every year in every hearing.  
15          Sometimes you spend all three minutes asking  
16          the question. That means you don't get an  
17          answer. So try not to use all the minutes on  
18          your clock to ask the question, because then  
19          it's more of a speech. And some of us love  
20          giving speeches, but then the testifiers will  
21          only be able to say "I can get back to you at  
22          a later date," because we're not going to  
23          give them time to answer you. So just keep  
24          your eye on the clocks.

1                   And it's red and then it goes to  
2                   yellow when you're close -- I'm sorry, it's  
3                   green, then it goes to yellow when you're  
4                   close, and then it goes to red when you're  
5                   done. All right?

6                   And just for keeping track, for the  
7                   time that people have, witnesses from  
8                   government have 10 minutes to testify.  
9                   Nongovernment witnesses have less time a  
10                  little later; they have only three minutes to  
11                  testify.

12                 Then the chairs of the relevant  
13                 committees -- we have three of them today; we  
14                 have the Finance chair, the Ag chair, the  
15                 Cultural Affairs chair -- they get 10 minutes  
16                 to ask questions, and only they get a second  
17                 round for three minutes if they have  
18                 additional questions. The relevant  
19                 rankers -- again, three committees -- each  
20                 have five minutes, no second round. All  
21                 other members have three minutes, no second  
22                 round.

23                 I know people always think that's too  
24                 little time, I get it, particularly

1           legislators. You're allowed to go find these  
2           people and ask them questions any time you  
3           want. And for nongovernmental people who  
4           come to testify and got so little time to  
5           talk, just remember, they're living for you  
6           to call them and ask them more questions.  
7           They will more than happily come to your  
8           offices to talk to you about their testimony,  
9           they will get on the phone to answer  
10          questions. So this is not anybody's only  
11          opportunity to ask questions and get  
12          questions answered.

13                    Okay, with that, before I make the  
14                    official opening to the hearing, I'm going to  
15                    introduce Democratic Senators who are here  
16                    already. And I see our chair, Michelle  
17                    Hinchey, of Agriculture and our chair of  
18                    Parks and Tourism and the rest of the name of  
19                    that committee -- I'm sorry -- Senator  
20                    Serrano.

21                    Are there other Democrats up here? I  
22                    see Senator Fahy. Oh, and Senator Chris  
23                    Ryan, brand-new Senator Chris Ryan. We have  
24                    two Senator Ryans now in the Senate, so you

1 have to practice.

2 And I will turn it over to my ranker  
3 to introduce -- Tom O'Mara, the ranker on  
4 Finance, to introduce the Republicans.

5 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you,  
6 Chairwoman Krueger.

7 Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you  
8 for being here.

9 We are joined on our side of the aisle  
10 by Senators Jim Tedisco, George Borrello,  
11 Pam Helming, and Pete Oberacker.

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Great. Okay, and  
14 now I'm going to turn it over to my Assembly  
15 colleagues to introduce their sides.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: (Mic off.) Thank  
17 you, Senator Krueger, and good afternoon,  
18 everyone.

19 I won't make an opening statement.  
20 It's good to be here. As I said earlier,  
21 it's not my first rodeo, it's the first time  
22 of riding 8 seconds on the bull.

23 (Laughter.)

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: So we have our

1 relevant chairs here. From Parks is  
2 Senator -- that was a joke -- Assemblyman Ron  
3 Kim, and on that committee we have  
4 Carrie Woerner. And the Agriculture chair,  
5 Donna Lupardo, and on that committee Dr. Anna  
6 Kelles, Brian Cunningham, and Steven Raga are  
7 here. We also have joining, as an observer,  
8 Assemblywoman Seawright.

9 And Mr. Ra will introduce his  
10 colleagues.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Good afternoon. We  
12 are joined by Assemblyman Chris Tague, our  
13 ranker on Agriculture; Assemblyman Scott  
14 Gray, our ranker on Tourism and Parks; and  
15 Members Giglio, Angelino, Miller and Simpson.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Do you have any  
17 more?

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: (Mic off.) And I  
19 missed one individual. Assemblyman Steve  
20 Otis is here.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Great.

22 And also, for new legislators or  
23 people who don't usually come to budget  
24 hearings, if you want to ask questions, you

1 want to make sure you are telling -- if  
2 you're a Senate Dem or an Assembly Dem, you  
3 want to tell Assemblymember Pretlow or me  
4 that you want to be on the list to ask  
5 questions.

6 And if you are a Republican, you want  
7 to let your two leaders know that you want to  
8 ask questions, so that we make sure that we  
9 have the list of who wants to ask the  
10 questions.

11 With that, I will just take one --  
12 30 seconds to say today is the  
13 80th anniversary of Holocaust Memorial Day.  
14 It was 80 years ago today that the  
15 U.S. military went into Auschwitz and found  
16 what they found. It was a Holocaust of  
17 nearly 10 million people. When it was done,  
18 two out of three Jews in Europe were killed,  
19 many other non-Jews with us, and Russian  
20 soldiers as well.

21 And I -- if I was on the floor of the  
22 Senate today, I would be giving a resolution  
23 which will go on without me today. But I  
24 thought I would just take a moment for that.

1                   And now we'll switch to the actual  
2                   hearing, which is on Agriculture and Parks  
3                   and Recreation. So again, I've already  
4                   introduced myself as Liz Krueger, cochairing  
5                   today's budget hearing.

6                   Today is the first of 14 hearings  
7                   conducted by the joint fiscal committees of  
8                   the Legislature regarding the Governor's  
9                   proposed budget for state fiscal year  
10                  '25-'26. These hearings are conducted  
11                  pursuant to the New York State Constitution  
12                  and Legislative Law.

13                  Today the Senate Finance Committee and  
14                  the Assembly Ways and Means Committee will  
15                  hear testimony concerning the Governor's  
16                  proposed budget for departments of  
17                  Agriculture and Markets and the Office of  
18                  Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

19                  Following each testimony there will be  
20                  some time for questions from the chairs of  
21                  the fiscal committees and other legislators.

22                  We've already introduced the members  
23                  from both houses, so I am going to remind  
24                  everyone that any testimony that is

1 submitted, whether or not you have a chance  
2 to testify in person, will be on the  
3 appropriate websites of both the Senate and  
4 the Assembly so that everyone can read the  
5 testimony submitted by anyone and everyone.  
6 Because sometimes people get told that they  
7 don't have time to testify.

8 And sometimes -- I don't think it will  
9 be a problem today, but some of these  
10 hearings run much longer than others, and by  
11 late in the day people realize, If I don't  
12 get on the train, I won't get home.

13 So if you are signed up to testify and  
14 for some reason you know you're not going to  
15 be able to stay to testify, just do us a  
16 favor, come down to the front to any of these  
17 people here and let them know so that we're  
18 not looking for you when you've already  
19 decided you have to leave town.

20 With that, I want to welcome our first  
21 panel: Richard Ball, commissioner of the  
22 Department of Agriculture and Markets, and  
23 welcoming the Office of Parks, Recreation and  
24 Historic Preservation. I will also be



1 green.

2 Thank you, Senator. And thank you for  
3 the thoughtful introduction to today's  
4 activities. Appreciate that.

5 Good afternoon, Chair Krueger,  
6 Chair Pretlow, Senator Hinchey,  
7 Assemblymember Lupardo, members of the  
8 agricultural committees, and elected  
9 officials. I am pleased to offer my  
10 testimony on the fiscal year '25-'26  
11 Executive Budget for the Department of  
12 Agriculture & Markets.

13 In this year's Executive Budget  
14 Governor Hochul continues to demonstrate her  
15 commitment to New York agriculture. Her  
16 first two budgets increased funding for our  
17 industry by 60 percent, and I'm happy to see  
18 that this year's plan continues to build on  
19 that commitment.

20 The Executive Budget recommends  
21 \$364 million for the department, which allows  
22 us to maintain our core functions and carry  
23 out initiatives to boost our sustainability  
24 efforts and food systems, further our

1 workforce and agriculture education goals,  
2 and invest in capital projects, marketing,  
3 and research to grow the industry.

4 Agriculture is a cornerstone of the  
5 economy in our state, with nearly  
6 32,000 farms numbering among the nation's top  
7 producers of more than 30 different  
8 commodities. Our dairy industry is a big  
9 part of that, with dairy farming making up  
10 half of New York's agricultural economy.

11 Through the Dairy Think Tank, we know that we  
12 share a goal with our dairy farmers, and that  
13 is to make New York the most sustainable  
14 dairy state in the country.

15 Building on last year's historic  
16 investments in New York's dairy community,  
17 the Governor this year is proposing  
18 \$10 million for the second round of the  
19 Dairy Modernization Grant Program to update  
20 on-farm milk storage and improve dairy  
21 supply-chain efficiencies. An additional  
22 \$1 million will support cutting-edge research  
23 and further support the implementation of  
24 climate-resilient practices on our dairy

1 farms.

2           These initiatives are vital to our  
3 nation-leading fight against climate change.  
4 With Governor Hochul's plan to maintain a  
5 \$400 million Environmental Protection Fund,  
6 the department will see continued investment  
7 in programs that reduce the effects of  
8 climate change and protect our water and our  
9 land.

10           Funding will support farmland and  
11 pollinator protection programs, Soil and  
12 Water Conservation Districts, the Climate  
13 Resilient Farming program, Cornell Soil  
14 Health, and so much more. The Governor is  
15 also proposing new investments to improve  
16 tracking of lost farmland and increase  
17 capacity within New York's network of  
18 community-led land trusts.

19           In addition to climate, a top priority  
20 for the state is supporting our local food  
21 system and expanding access to food for all  
22 New Yorkers. This year's Executive Budget  
23 includes targeted support to continue this  
24 work, including nearly \$4 million for the

1 expanded FreshConnect program and a  
2 \$5 million increase for the Nourish New York  
3 program. It also supports the  
4 Farm-to-School, Farmers' Market Resiliency,  
5 and Urban Farms and Community Gardens  
6 programs.

7 In addition, Senior Farmers' Market  
8 Nutrition Program benefits will be maintained  
9 at its current level. The \$50 million  
10 Regional School Food Infrastructure Grant  
11 Program will also see another \$10 million to  
12 encourage the use of fresh local farm  
13 products in school meals and expand markets  
14 for our New York producers.

15 I'm also excited to see support for  
16 New York's fiber and maple industries. The  
17 \$10 million Food and Fiber Small-Scale  
18 Processing Grant Program will fuel the supply  
19 of diverse products for New York's local  
20 purchasing initiatives such as Executive  
21 Order 32. Additional investments in  
22 marketing and research will help New York to  
23 become the leading innovator in the maple  
24 industry. The proposed \$73 million local

1 assistance budget will also support research  
2 and promotion for many commodities, including  
3 craft beverages, apples, vegetables, honey,  
4 hemp and more.

5 The Executive Budget also builds on  
6 the state's One Health approach, proposing  
7 funding to support animal and plant health.  
8 Again, this year, \$4.25 million is proposed  
9 for Cornell University's Integrated Pest  
10 Management Program. In support of companion  
11 animal care, \$5 million will continue the  
12 Companion Animal Capital Fund, which provides  
13 critical upgrades at animal shelters and  
14 enhanced care for our dogs and our cats.

15 One Health also encompasses the health  
16 and well-being of our workforce, who are  
17 essential to the strength of the industry.  
18 To support our farmworkers, I am pleased to  
19 say that the Governor has proposed an  
20 additional \$5 million for the Farmworker  
21 Housing Program. This program will help our  
22 farmers provide safer housing for their  
23 workforce while continuing to meet the  
24 production goals on the farm.

1                   In addition, \$3.2 million will create  
2                   safer environments and greater capacity at  
3                   Agri-Business Child Development -- or ABCD --  
4                   centers. A total of \$13.5 million will be  
5                   dedicated to these facilities overall. These  
6                   improvements will allow ABCD to expand  
7                   education, health, and nutrition services to  
8                   roughly 1,000 children whose families make up  
9                   New York's farm workforce.

10                   To ensure the long-term success of the  
11                   agricultural industry, we are also working on  
12                   strengthening our agricultural education. We  
13                   have had many successes in this area,  
14                   especially this past year. This year's  
15                   budget will allow us to further those  
16                   efforts, investing \$1 million for the  
17                   New York Agriculture in the Classroom  
18                   program. This is double the amount of last  
19                   year's investment. Additional funding  
20                   totaling \$1.8 million is proposed for other  
21                   education programs like FFA, 4-H, the  
22                   National Society for Minorities in  
23                   Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related  
24                   Sciences -- or MANRRS -- and the Association

1 of Agricultural Educators. Together, these  
2 programs help to grow agriculture education  
3 and support our next generation. We will  
4 join these organizations to kick off the  
5 Governor's blue-ribbon panel to advance  
6 agricultural education later this year.

7 Finally, the state is also focusing on  
8 our county and local fairs, which are hubs  
9 for agriculture education. The Executive  
10 Budget includes \$2 million to support these  
11 fairs statewide, ensuring that they will  
12 remain a critical avenue to connect  
13 New Yorkers with local food and agriculture.  
14 We are also excited that Governor Hochul has  
15 proposed a nearly \$51 million investment for  
16 capital improvements to the Great New York  
17 State Fair. We plan to upgrade our  
18 entertainment areas to further position the  
19 fairgrounds as a year-round attraction. This  
20 will build on the fair's ongoing projects,  
21 like new barns, upgrades to the Dairy Bar and  
22 Youth Building, and more -- all of which help  
23 the State Fair continue to spotlight our  
24 vibrant, diverse agricultural industry.

1                   Thanks to the investments that the  
2                   Governor and all of you have made in New York  
3                   agriculture over the years, we today have a  
4                   more resilient food system and a stronger  
5                   industry today. I look forward to seeing  
6                   that momentum continue as we work together to  
7                   further our shared goals in the coming year.

8                   Thank you.

9                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very  
10                  much. And you had two and a half minutes to  
11                  spare. And I'm sorry, Parks doesn't get the  
12                  two and a half minutes. You also get  
13                  10 minutes.

14                  PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

15                  Thank you very much. It's such a pleasure to  
16                  be with each of you today.

17                  Good afternoon, Chair Krueger.

18                  Welcome, Chair Pretlow. Senator Serrano,  
19                  great to see you. We've spent a lot of time  
20                  in celebrating our centennial over the last  
21                  year, and appreciate you for helping build  
22                  the momentum. And welcome, Assemblymember  
23                  Kim. Thrilled to see you in the new role.  
24                  And members of the State Legislature, thank

1           you, truly, for inviting me here today.

2                       I'm honored to represent  
3           Governor Hochul on behalf of our state parks  
4           system, which includes 250 state parks,  
5           historic sites, golf courses, boat launches,  
6           recreational trails, marinas and more. The  
7           Legislature's enduring support for our  
8           operational and capital funding has truly  
9           benefited all New Yorkers and has been deeply  
10          appreciative here at Parks.

11                      Governor Hochul recognizes the park  
12          system's importance to the physical and  
13          mental wellness of our communities. Our  
14          agency has proudly worked with the Governor  
15          on major initiatives to expand access to  
16          healthy recreation and looks forward to  
17          building on those successes.

18                      Last year we jumped in with both feet,  
19          literally and figuratively, on the Governor's  
20          NY SWIMS Capital Grant Program. The program  
21          had two critical goals: helping  
22          disadvantaged communities across our  
23          neighborhoods to offer safe swimming in an  
24          era of extreme heat, and reducing the number

1 of drownings, a leading cause of death in  
2 young people. In the largest investment in  
3 public swimming since the New Deal, we  
4 awarded \$150 million in grants to  
5 municipalities to support 37 projects  
6 statewide, and we're appreciative of our  
7 partnership with DASNY as well to help make  
8 that program such a success.

9 NY SWIMS led to another nation-leading  
10 recreation program: Get Offline, Get  
11 Outside. Prior to the July 4th weekend,  
12 Governor Hochul removed swimming pool entry  
13 fees at all state parks across our system for  
14 the entire summer. Through Labor Day,  
15 542,000 people came out to a state park pool.  
16 That was a 36 percent increase -- remarkable.  
17 Twenty-two facilities hosted free swimming  
18 lessons, tripling the number of sites from  
19 the prior year, and we were able to increase  
20 the number of students we taught to swim by  
21 400 percent, to more than 2,000 children.

22 And to further protect our patrons at  
23 the pools and the spray grounds when it gets  
24 hot, we gave out roughly 35 gallons of free

1 sunscreen.

2 Now, these programs didn't just make  
3 waves locally. They positioned our agency  
4 and this state as the vanguard of public  
5 health and recreation. Now Governor Hochul's  
6 Unplug and Play initiative invests  
7 \$200 million in this very necessary work  
8 through NY BRICKS -- Building Recreational  
9 Infrastructure for Communities, Kids and  
10 Seniors; NY PLAYS -- New York Places for  
11 Learning, Activity, and Youth  
12 Socialization -- a grant program to aid  
13 municipalities with new and improved  
14 playgrounds; and of course the next phases of  
15 NY SWIMS and Get Offline, Get Outside.

16 It has been a pleasure and a privilege  
17 to lead our park system during its centennial  
18 year. In 2024, we honored influential  
19 figures and milestone moments in our system's  
20 development. Our teams hosted one-of-a-kind  
21 centennial events, many of which you were  
22 alongside with us to help us celebrate, and  
23 received hundreds of stories and memories  
24 from our visitors.

1                   Building on the success of the  
2                   centennial, public enthusiasm for our parks  
3                   and historic sites surged in 2024. We  
4                   welcomed a record-breaking 88 million  
5                   visitors to our state parks. That's a  
6                   4.5 percent increase over the prior year,  
7                   marking 12 consecutive record years here at  
8                   State Parks.

9                   And our parks are doing what the  
10                  architects of this system intended -- serving  
11                  as affordable destinations for all  
12                  New Yorkers while also attracting visitors  
13                  from across the country and across the world.

14                 The Governor's proposed budget  
15                 maintains the robust capital and operational  
16                 funding necessary and will enable us to shape  
17                 our system as we kick off the next 100 years  
18                 here in 2025.

19                 But the work of building our system's  
20                 future never stops. Some of the highlights  
21                 from the more than 100 announcements and  
22                 events we held in 2024:

23                 Adding more than 1,000 acres across  
24                 our system, from Fahnestock to Moreau Lake to

1 Treman to Taghkanic;

2 Renovated swim facilities at Riverbank  
3 and Stony Brook to better serve our swimmers;

4 Forty-five miles of greenway trails  
5 were developed, and we're advancing plans on  
6 six key trail corridors across New York City  
7 and the outer boroughs;

8 Work is underway across Selkirk Shores  
9 State Park and our shorelines at Buffalo  
10 Harbor State Park for a destination spray  
11 area;

12 New visitor centers at Olana, Bayard  
13 Cutting Arboretum, and Niagara Falls, and new  
14 accessible park infrastructure all across our  
15 system to provide recreational opportunities  
16 for people with disabilities.

17 As New York's greatest public  
18 recreation asset, we also are working to  
19 remove financial barriers to those who need  
20 it most. As of April 1st, I'm particularly  
21 proud of New York State Veterans and our Gold  
22 Star Families, who became eligible for a  
23 Lifetime Liberty Pass. Since 2014, we issued  
24 approximately 1,200 Lifetime Liberty Passes

1           annually. After the Governor's initiative,  
2           we increased that number by 900 percent, to  
3           over 12,000 passes issued. Remarkable.

4                     And visitor safety is a top priority  
5           at Parks -- always has been, always will be.  
6           Fifty-three million, for the first time under  
7           the Governor, was dedicated to improving  
8           safety technology infrastructure, staff  
9           training, and public awareness. I was  
10          particularly proud of the Junior Ranger  
11          program, which empowered our youngest  
12          visitors to take charge of their personal  
13          safety and built connections between the  
14          public and our Park Rangers.

15                    We significantly expanded our training  
16          program to equip more staff with essential  
17          skills in visitor engagement, missing person  
18          response, and human trafficking awareness.

19                    Additionally, we have bolstered our  
20          law enforcement presence by recruiting nearly  
21          50 new Park Police officers since last year,  
22          and we remain steadfast in our commitment to  
23          providing our officers with the necessary  
24          resources to support and effectively fulfill

1           their critical duties to protect our park  
2           visitors.

3                   And in the next two years our system  
4           will shine brightly at a national and  
5           international stage. In September, the eyes  
6           of the golf world will be upon Bethpage State  
7           Park. Twenty-four of the top golfers in the  
8           world, from Europe and the United States,  
9           will compete in the 2025 Ryder Cup. More  
10          than a quarter-million fans will attend.

11                   And in 2026, we join the nation in  
12          commemorating the 250th anniversary of the  
13          American Revolution. As cochair of  
14          New York's 250th Commemoration Commission, we  
15          are committed to a commemorative experience  
16          that is both educational and inspiring. And  
17          we will do this by engaging all New Yorkers,  
18          from students to community members, in this  
19          exciting celebration.

20                   And we will, most importantly, achieve  
21          this by embracing the agency's Our Whole  
22          History initiative, which ensures diverse  
23          perspectives and inclusive storytelling are  
24          at the forefront of our efforts.

1                   In closing, throughout our agency's  
2                   history we've helped New Yorkers meet the  
3                   challenges of the day, whether supporting our  
4                   troops during World War II or creating  
5                   affordable recreational opportunities for the  
6                   Baby Boom generation. We are meeting today's  
7                   needs for connecting people in an age of  
8                   division and fragmentation, fortifying our  
9                   properties against climate change, and giving  
10                  New Yorkers affordable ways to improve their  
11                  physical and mental well-being.

12                  I truly have valued the time that we  
13                  have spent together over the last year in  
14                  promoting and celebrating the benefits of our  
15                  great parks system to our communities. Our  
16                  centennial year was a time to certainly  
17                  reflect on our past, to concentrate on the  
18                  mission ahead, but more importantly grasp the  
19                  current moment, one which our successors, I  
20                  truly believe, will look at us -- maybe at  
21                  the bicentennial -- and really proclaim this  
22                  era as one of the most important eras in the  
23                  history of state parks.

24                  So for this we are grateful. We are

1 grateful to the Governor, we are grateful to  
2 each of you, we are grateful to the 88-plus  
3 million and our partners. Thank you for the  
4 opportunity today, and I most welcome  
5 additional conversation to discuss this great  
6 state park system.

7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very  
9 much.

10 Our first questioner will be Michelle  
11 Hinchey, chair of the Agriculture Committee.  
12 Ten minutes.

13 SENATOR HINCHEY: Thank you very much,  
14 Senator Krueger.

15 And thank you both so much for being  
16 here and for your testimony. There's lots of  
17 exciting things going on in both sectors, so  
18 thank you for your leadership.

19 Commissioner Ball, no surprise, I'm  
20 going to start with you. And I want to thank  
21 you personally -- who knew -- I want to thank  
22 you personally for your work as commissioner.  
23 I think we in New York State are very lucky  
24 to have you at the helm, and appreciate all

1 of the work that you do and your leadership  
2 in our ag space. Because as you know better  
3 than anyone, New York is an ag state. And so  
4 we have to do everything we can to protect  
5 our farmers and support farm businesses,  
6 because this is the future of our food  
7 production in our country. And so thank you  
8 for your leadership in that.

9 I'd like to start with one of  
10 everyone's favorite topics, which is school  
11 food. And we're here to sing. We're very  
12 excited to see in the Governor's budget her  
13 inclusion of universal school meals. But of  
14 course we would love to ensure that all of  
15 the food that our students are eating is not  
16 only healthy farm-fresh food but locally  
17 grown New York farm-fresh food. We have the  
18 school food program, but right now the  
19 reimbursement really only covers lunch, the  
20 30 percent threshold program.

21 I would love to hear from you, if we  
22 were to include breakfast in that program and  
23 expand the reimbursement rate to 25 cents,  
24 what would that mean for our growers and

1 farmers across the state, and what would it  
2 mean for access to healthy food?

3 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
4 thank you, Senator, for that question.  
5 That's a big question. But certainly  
6 universal school meals I think is a very  
7 exciting opportunity for New York farmers and  
8 for New York children.

9 You know, for so many years in our  
10 schools we basically said to local school  
11 boards and cafeteria nutrition people: Break  
12 even on the school lunch program. Let's see  
13 if we can feed our kids lunch at \$1.74. And  
14 I think we have to change that philosophy and  
15 discussion to a value-based one. When you or  
16 I buy a pair of shoes, buy a shirt, buy a  
17 car, whatever, we make a value-based  
18 decision. We look at the price, we look at  
19 the quality, and we make a decision. But for  
20 so many years, when it came to feeding our  
21 children, we made an economic decision.

22 And I think, you know, the school food  
23 program with the 30 percent initiative for  
24 lunch really helped move the dime a little

1 bit, if you'll pardon the pun, and we allowed  
2 schools to get reimbursed from 5.9 cents,  
3 where it had been for probably 40 years, up  
4 to 25 cents. That was a great effort, and  
5 we're seeing great success there.

6 I think including breakfast, I think  
7 we have to put our eye on the ball, which is  
8 really let's figure out how to feed New York  
9 kids New York food. It's going to be higher  
10 nutrition, it's going to be better economic  
11 outcomes. I know the Commissioner of Health  
12 will say we're going to get better health  
13 outcomes five years, 10 years, 15 years down  
14 the road. As a farmer, I know we're going to  
15 see better economic outcomes in our rural  
16 communities when we feed kids with local  
17 stuff.

18 You couple that with the Governor's  
19 Executive Order 32 to get the state to do the  
20 same thing. Let's make sure in New York  
21 State that our -- as a state, across all our  
22 agencies and our purchasers, that we're using  
23 30 percent New York products that we buy.  
24 We're off to a great start there.

1                   So I think between, you know, thinking  
2                   about breakfast, between thinking about  
3                   universal school meals, I think this is a  
4                   tremendous opportunity for our farmers in  
5                   New York State.

6                   SENATOR HINCHEY: Thank you. Yeah, we  
7                   know healthy food is a form of medicine,  
8                   right, and so we can actually -- it's a type  
9                   of preventative care if we can make sure that  
10                  we're eating good nutrients, and that is from  
11                  our New York farmers. We can also save a lot  
12                  of money on the back end, not to mention from  
13                  an administrative perspective, schools don't  
14                  buy apples for lunch and a different set of  
15                  apples for breakfast, right? You just buy  
16                  apples and you put them out. And so having  
17                  to track that closely is really difficult.  
18                  So expanding breakfast I think would be a  
19                  great thing to do.

20                  Switching gears slightly, hemp  
21                  processing. You know, you and I have talked  
22                  about this. I think hemp is an incredible  
23                  opportunity in New York. Especially from a  
24                  building material, from a clothing material,

1 from a green perspective, there's so much  
2 opportunity there. Last year, you know,  
3 we've been advocating for funding,  
4 specifically infrastructure funding, for hemp  
5 processing. Because we have the growers who  
6 have grown it, we know what it could be, but  
7 that middle area of the manufacturing and  
8 processing is really difficult and, quite  
9 frankly, really expensive.

10 So it was great to see in the  
11 Governor's budget last year \$5 million for  
12 hemp processing, I believe it was  
13 specifically cited for Geneva. I don't see  
14 it in the Governor's budget this year, so I'm  
15 curious where that stands and what the  
16 appetite is for an additional facility.  
17 Because New York is a big state. We have  
18 lots of growers, and one facility just in the  
19 center may be difficult.

20 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL:

21 Right. Well, we're just, frankly, in the  
22 process of getting that up and running, that  
23 \$5 million from last year. And that  
24 appropriation went to Cornell University to

1 help with the equipment and the techniques,  
2 the technical expertise that's going to be  
3 needed to explode that business.

4 Hemp has about 2,000 uses, which is  
5 mind-blowing. And New York -- the entire  
6 United States -- has amnesia about what we  
7 used to do with hemp. We used to be a  
8 leading producer of hemp in the world. You  
9 know, and we threw that out so many years  
10 ago; we've got to relearn a lot of things.

11 But I'm happy to say that at Cornell  
12 we now have New York varieties, we've got  
13 this capacity coming on here. And I would  
14 just add we have a very energetic Hemp and  
15 Fiber Work Group. They're not shy. They're  
16 full of ideas. We meet fairly regularly at  
17 the Department of Ag. So I think we're still  
18 getting ready to capitalize on that  
19 investment from last year, which is why we  
20 have the budget we have this year.

21 SENATOR HINCHEY: Great. Thank you so  
22 much.

23 The Farm Overtime Tax Credit. We had  
24 a bill last year that would have included

1 dairy farms, to make it easier for them to  
2 utilize the tax credit that we have set up.  
3 The Governor unfortunately vetoed our bill,  
4 citing that it needed to be done in the  
5 budget. I don't see that in this budget  
6 proposal. Is there a work -- is there  
7 something that we can work on for the budget  
8 this year to make sure that we can get that  
9 done for our dairy farmers?

10 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yes,  
11 thank you. That was a -- there were some  
12 challenges with the way the Overtime Tax  
13 Credit had been written that affected  
14 different farms in different ways. And the  
15 Governor was hoping to get that done in the  
16 budget.

17 We are still meeting with Tax and  
18 Finance as a department, and we also are  
19 meeting with the industry. We have sole  
20 proprietors, we have partnerships, we have  
21 LLCs, we have C Corps, S Corps. We have  
22 management companies on our farms. And we  
23 need to come up with the specific language  
24 that will work. The Governor charged both of

1 us, the Tax and Finance and Department of Ag,  
2 to come up with an answer here. We've been  
3 working on that pretty hot and heavy  
4 recently. Hopefully we're going to have  
5 something for you very shortly, to just  
6 fine-tune that language a little bit and get  
7 it right so it works for all farmers.

8 SENATOR HINCHEY: Great. Thank you.  
9 I would love to see that in the 30-day  
10 amendments. It's something I think we need  
11 to get done in the budget this year.

12 Grants for farmland preservation. As  
13 we started with, New York is an ag state, and  
14 it's incredibly important that we protect our  
15 farmland. I see that there's new language  
16 around planning for grants, but I haven't  
17 seen necessarily additional dollars. As you  
18 know, we're still having challenges  
19 specifically with solar developments being  
20 centered on farmland. I'd love to hear, do  
21 you think we're doing enough in farmland  
22 preservation, and can we do more?

23 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: I  
24 think we're in a great place. We went over

1           100,000 acres preserved last year. I mean,  
2           that still leaves a tremendous amount of  
3           acres that's not protected. But we've had a  
4           commitment of in the neighborhood between  
5           18 and 21 million dollars a year for the last  
6           almost 10 years, which really brought  
7           New York kind of up to pace. Working through  
8           the Regional Economic Development areas,  
9           refining it from an RFP process to an RFA  
10          process, we've been able to move much more  
11          quickly in finding land, helping those  
12          easements happen, and getting farm families  
13          protected.

14                    SENATOR HINCHEY: But more money for  
15          farmland preservation would be helpful.

16                    AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL:  
17          Excuse me?

18                    SENATOR HINCHEY: More money for more  
19          farmland preservation would be helpful.

20                    AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
21          I'm optimistic, yeah. And obviously we're  
22          going to see some assistance there in the  
23          bond act funding coming to fruition. You  
24          know, we're involved in those conversations

1 as well.

2 So I feel pretty good about where we  
3 are. I think where we see some needs is in  
4 the capacity in local land trusts to be able  
5 to handle the influx. We've gotten good as a  
6 department at getting these programs in and  
7 out of the door pretty quickly. We meet with  
8 the partners on a regular basis. But now  
9 we're seeing there's a little bit of a holdup  
10 when it comes to the individual land trusts  
11 around the state being able to handle the  
12 workload. So you'll see some help in there.

13 SENATOR HINCHEY: Thank you. And I  
14 know my time is short; I guess this is a  
15 bigger question. But as shortly as you  
16 possibly can, lots of changes happening at  
17 the federal level. And we're going to see  
18 some loss of dollars, we imagine specifically  
19 in some of the programs you've seen. Can you  
20 talk a little bit about what USDA funding  
21 means for us?

22 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
23 I think it's fair to say we can expect some  
24 changes. For the Department of Ag and

1 Markets, about \$103 million flows from the  
2 federal government to the Department of  
3 Agriculture, mostly from USDA, some from FDA.

4 SENATOR HINCHEY: I'll come back to  
5 you.

6 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Okay.  
7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
9 Assembly.

10 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: (Mic off.)  
11 Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Thank you,  
13 Chair. I can pick right back up where  
14 Senator Hinchey left off.

15 But first, thank you all for being  
16 here. As you know, we're looking at the  
17 budget, very happy to see some new items.  
18 Very pleased with the support for the Cornell  
19 Ruminant Center, Cornell 4-H, the Senior  
20 Farmers' Market Program. Of course  
21 disappointed that more items weren't put  
22 on-budget, but this is an ongoing discussion  
23 we have year after year. We will do our best  
24 to make as many restorations as we can. We

1 just want to make that very clear.

2 I'm concerned about the Climate-Smart  
3 Commodities Program and what we're hearing  
4 about climate-smart farming and marketing in  
5 general. If you could speak on that, what we  
6 can expect in terms of loss of funding -- I  
7 know it's been put on pause -- but also the  
8 effect on our soil health work. Because the  
9 work that we are doing on soil health and  
10 climate resiliency is very important, and it  
11 has had widespread support across the board.  
12 And I would hate to see our soil health work  
13 be impacted by these cuts.

14 So if you could tell us a little bit  
15 about what's happening on Climate-Smart. I  
16 realize, you know, all things climate are  
17 under the microscope, but some things are  
18 just foundational to the work that we're  
19 doing on -- for agriculture.

20 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yeah.  
21 Well, thanks for that question.

22 Again, there's more unknown than known  
23 at this point. You know, the new  
24 administration is still filling out personnel

1 and hearings are happening for leadership at  
2 USDA and FDA.

3 I will say that the Climate-Smart  
4 Commodities Program, which was a project  
5 between DEC, Ag & Markets, Cornell University  
6 and SUNY ESF -- it's about a \$60 million  
7 project for New York State -- has been paused  
8 by the government in Washington. That  
9 doesn't mean it's canceled. I don't know  
10 other than it's paused.

11 It's a concern because this was a good  
12 effort. I will say --

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: I'm sorry,  
14 Commissioner, could you repeat the name of  
15 the program that's on pause?

16 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL:  
17 Climate-Smart Commodities.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Oh, you're  
19 still on that, okay.

20 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yeah.  
21 And we applied for that some three years ago  
22 with our partners at DEC, SUNY ESF and  
23 Cornell. Great program. Some funding has  
24 been out there to research how better to

1           achieve that on our farms and in our  
2           research.

3                       So we know that's been paused. But  
4           again, we're waiting to see, you know, who  
5           are going to be the people we deal with in  
6           Washington, who's going to occupy those posts  
7           at USDA.

8                       I will say that I'm encouraged. I  
9           know three commissioners who are taking  
10          under-secretary positions who are personal  
11          friends, so I think we'll have an avenue  
12          there. But we've got to let the dust settle  
13          here and just figure out what will continue  
14          to be funded and what may be cut or culled  
15          back.

16                      I am encouraged that in New York we  
17          have decades of progress on environmental  
18          issues. We've been looking at water quality  
19          and air quality on our farms for decades.  
20          And the programs we have, supported by this  
21          Governor, supported -- the Climate-Resilient  
22          Farming Program, which is a New York program  
23          completely. Our work with NRDC and our work  
24          with our Soil and Water Conservation

1           Districts is very strong. We've got a great  
2           tradition, and it will be able to keep going  
3           here in New York State.

4                     ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Thank you,  
5           Commissioner.

6                     A sensitive topic that I'm weighing  
7           into carefully; you and I and most of us in  
8           this room have discussed workforce shortages  
9           on our farms. How concerned are you about  
10          what we're beginning to see in the country at  
11          the moment regarding New York farms and their  
12          preparedness to keep their operations going?

13                    AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: You  
14          know, probably if someone asked me what was  
15          the most limiting factor to growing New York  
16          agriculture, I would say labor supply. We've  
17          seen that happening over a period of decades,  
18          frankly, and we saw it really accelerate  
19          after COVID-19. We'll be watching very  
20          closely the concerns around immigration that  
21          we're hearing.

22                    In the prior administration, this  
23          president took a strong stance on  
24          immigration. I would say that for New York

1 as a farmer, as a farmworker when I was  
2 20 years old, that limiting factor is pretty  
3 strong. We know that somewhere in New York  
4 between 40 and 50 percent of our farmworkers,  
5 construction workers, restaurant workers,  
6 daycare workers do not have proper  
7 documentation, so this is a concern.

8 We saw back in that first  
9 administration a 270 percent increase in  
10 ICE activity and border patrol raids on  
11 New York farms. And that was a very  
12 difficult time for New York agriculture,  
13 particularly dairy.

14 So we're watching this very closely;  
15 you know, how does this play out? We know  
16 that we have some raids happening over the  
17 weekend in Western New York. I don't know  
18 the facts yet, but we're going to watch this  
19 very closely.

20 I would just say that this has been --  
21 the availability of a legal guest worker  
22 program has not been thoughtfully addressed  
23 since Ronald Reagan was president. It's been  
24 decades of being kicked down the road. We do

1           need an answer here. We do need to have a  
2           legal workforce. Agriculture wants one. But  
3           we know that a high percentage of the workers  
4           that are currently here doing work on  
5           agriculture and construction and restaurants  
6           do not have proper documentation. That needs  
7           to be addressed.

8                         ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Thank you.

9           It's somewhat frustrating when so many people  
10          are unaware that these workers are by and  
11          large law-abiding, tax-paying folks who are  
12          supporting our communities in a very  
13          important way.

14          And so I'm very worried about our  
15          ability to maintain a strong agricultural  
16          economy in New York State in light of this.  
17          So hopefully we can stay in close contact  
18          with all of us to figure out what we can do  
19          in response.

20          I know that some of my colleagues here  
21          are going to raise the issue of avian flu  
22          because there's a serious concern right now  
23          across the state, but certainly down in  
24          Suffolk County as a result of this duck farm.

1 I don't want to take away from my colleagues,  
2 but because I have probably a little more  
3 time than they do, I was wondering if you  
4 could give the big picture on avian flu. And  
5 are we -- do we have enough resources in this  
6 budget to address the concerns?

7 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
8 thank you for that.

9 Yeah, we've got two things around  
10 avian flu that are worrisome. You know, one  
11 is the dairy, you know, the fact that  
12 high-path AI has jumped from poultry and  
13 wildfowl to dairy animals. We do not have  
14 that in New York State; it's confined  
15 currently to 17 states. The only increases  
16 that we've seen recently in the last 30 days  
17 have been in Michigan and in California. So  
18 we've successfully, through our emergency  
19 order process and the USDA, been able to thus  
20 far keep that out of New York. So that's one  
21 issue.

22 The traditional high-path AI, if there  
23 is such a thing, brought in by migratory  
24 birds, the last time we saw it here was in

1           2022. But as you know, it has reared its  
2           head across the country again. It's in the  
3           migratory flyways, brought in by birds as  
4           they migrate back to their summer grounds.  
5           It's happening across the United States. It  
6           has hit us in Long Island. We're looking at  
7           two presumptives, one in the Hudson Valley  
8           and another in Western New York.

9                     It's something we take very seriously,  
10          we identify very quickly. We work very  
11          closely with USDA-APHIS on this. And we're  
12          active on Long Island in dealing with the  
13          issue there.

14                    It's life or death for poultry. The  
15          only solution is depopulation and sanitation.  
16          There is indemnification in that from USDA,  
17          but obviously taking somebody out of business  
18          for a period of time is -- it's not a real  
19          big solution there.

20                    So we work very closely with our  
21          partners at USDA. We have one of the best,  
22          state bests in the country, Dr. Joy Bennett,  
23          who works for us at the department. She's  
24          got a great team, a great staff. And we have

1 a very positive working relationship with  
2 USDA-APHIS on that.

3 So we're riding herd on it and paying  
4 very close attention to it, but it is a  
5 terrible situation for a poultry producer to  
6 be in.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Yes, it is.  
8 Thank you.

9 I just have -- I'll have a couple of  
10 questions in a second, but a quick question  
11 for the Parks commissioner. To what extent  
12 is your agency striving to meet our goal to  
13 have more New York-based, New York-sourced  
14 products available in your parks? I have  
15 heard some concerns from some of our beverage  
16 producers on Long Island, for example, about  
17 their desire to have more access to the  
18 parks. But I was just curious what your  
19 overall approach has been.

20 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
21 Yes, so certainly New York products are  
22 available in select state parks. We've had  
23 active conversations to improve that at  
24 various destinations. But also working with

1           our concessionaires to mandate some level of  
2           New York products in our parks. Very  
3           important to us. And many conversations have  
4           been had, at least certainly in the last  
5           year, many years, as we increase the number  
6           of parks that are holding New York products,  
7           certainly.

8                        ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Thank you.  
9           Hopefully we can continue talking about this.

10                      PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
11           Looking forward to that, absolutely.

12                      ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Thank you.

13                      CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

14                      Senator Serrano, chair of Parks and --  
15           sorry, Historic Districts. I always get that  
16           wrong, I apologize. Say your full name here.

17                      SENATOR SERRANO: Thank you. Senator  
18           Jose M. Serrano here.

19                      As chair of Parks, I will direct my  
20           questions to Commissioner Pro Tem Randy  
21           Simons. It's good to see you. It's good to  
22           be here with all of my colleagues talking  
23           about the importance of our state parks  
24           system. I really enjoyed our meetings over

1 the summer during -- and actually throughout  
2 the 2024 centennial for our state parks  
3 system.

4 And it really, I think, gave us a  
5 moment to pause and think about how important  
6 our parks and green spaces are to our  
7 everyday lives. I myself, as a user of state  
8 parks, believe wholeheartedly that they are  
9 transformational, that they provide things  
10 that are important for our mental health, our  
11 physical well-being, and for society as a  
12 whole. It makes us less stratified as a  
13 community.

14 Over the years, my wife and I raising  
15 two children, as you know, we try whenever we  
16 can to be in a state park. And I did teach  
17 my son, who's in college now, but I remember  
18 teaching him how to swim at Bear Mountain  
19 Pool, which is indeed one of the most  
20 historic pools in your system.

21 And, you know, when you visit a state  
22 park, you see how important they are, but you  
23 also notice that they've been around for a  
24 while and that there's always need for work,

1 infrastructure, what you can see, what you  
2 can't see.

3 But again, I always turn back to the  
4 importance and the necessity of connecting  
5 more and more communities to parks, giving  
6 folks throughout New York an understanding  
7 that the parks are for them -- that hiking is  
8 for them, that camping is for them, trying  
9 new things like that, all of the facilities  
10 that are available.

11 So in your testimony you mentioned  
12 NY BRICKS and NY PLAYS, which I'm assuming  
13 are geared towards expanding folks'  
14 interactions with parks. So can you talk a  
15 little bit more about the efforts that you  
16 have to connect more people to parks?

17 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
18 And that's the very mission of this  
19 initiative, right? You know, in a digital  
20 world, the more we are connected to each  
21 other, the more we are really disconnected in  
22 many cases from relationships with one  
23 another.

24 Under Unplug and Play, NY SWIMS

1           certainly, you know, last year we did  
2           \$150 million, our grant program, and it was  
3           grants to municipalities to improve swim  
4           infrastructure, elevate the idea of perhaps  
5           building new or repair or refurbishing swim  
6           infrastructure, for the very important reason  
7           of a sense of pride and accomplishment among  
8           particularly our youth.

9                     Mindful -- we celebrated Graduation  
10           Day at one of those programs in the Bronx --  
11           you were with us at Bear Mountain -- and a  
12           7-year-old little girl came up to me and  
13           said, "I didn't think I would ever learn how  
14           to swim. I thought that was for other  
15           people." And it was this program that  
16           brought that opportunity to her community.

17                     And very much like NY PLAYS, right,  
18           it's now the very same thing, but we are  
19           giving grants to municipalities to invest in  
20           playgrounds, giving families, giving parents  
21           and children opportunities to say, You know  
22           what, life is not on a device, life is, you  
23           know, outdoors.

24                     And BRICKS the same way: Community

1 centers, true community engagement, true  
2 community connection.

3 And, you know, our parks, we're  
4 expansive, we're all across New York State,  
5 more than 250 properties. But by providing  
6 grants to municipalities, this almost assures  
7 the opportunity that no matter where you  
8 live, within a stone's throw there's an  
9 opportunity to take advantage of this  
10 historic investment into the outdoors, into  
11 parks.

12 We're particularly proud of the  
13 successes of NY SWIMS, and in the second  
14 round -- we're looking forward to the second  
15 round -- we'll open up also to  
16 not-for-profits. And we think PLAYS and  
17 BRICKS will do the very same thing.

18 SENATOR SERRANO: Thank you,  
19 Commissioner Pro Tem.

20 Next I want to talk a little bit about  
21 the flagship parks throughout the State of  
22 New York. You mentioned 88 million visitors  
23 in 2024. Year over year, we're seeing  
24 increased visitorship, and that's wonderful.

1 But the parks then take a lot of use. During  
2 the pandemic we saw that our parks were our  
3 refuge, they were -- and brilliant that Parks  
4 kept them open. During the darkest days of  
5 the pandemic, the parks became the place that  
6 we went to to recreate, to be with our  
7 families, to still build memories in a very  
8 dark time.

9 So when I think about -- as a  
10 New Yorker, born and raised in the  
11 South Bronx, going to Lake Welch was a  
12 wonderful afternoon on a Sunday if you could  
13 do it. Getting up to Harriman State Park,  
14 the hiking trails and so on and so forth.

15 What are we doing to keep up with the  
16 capital projects in these places, with  
17 Sebago, to ensure that Lake Welch is not  
18 overpacked? Do you have Sebago up and  
19 running? And also ensuring that we're  
20 teaching our park patrons to be stewards of  
21 the parks. Because with increased usership,  
22 we want to make sure they remain clean and  
23 accessible for all. What are we doing to  
24 increase stewardship?

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PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

You know, I think the centennial was -- came at just the right time, a historic investment in our parks. It is truly great to see. It is much-needed. We sort of -- and I don't know if it's returning, but it's more of a focus on the core needs of our parks, right?

You know, the safety of the public, projects that you come to expect are just going to be done, right? You know, the roads and the parking lots and, you know, the parks are taken care of. At 200 million, we think that we can properly provide the TLC to these parks.

But put the investment aside, and we need -- we need people, right? Our people truly -- you know, you hear the old adage that some might be, you know, a Jack or Jill of all trades but a master of none. Our team is truly a master of many trades in our system. But they can't do it alone. It takes, you know, incredible partnerships. We're fortunate to have incredible partnerships across the state, from the OSIs

1           and the Parks & Trails and the Scenic  
2           Hudsons -- but our volunteer groups, 85  
3           strong. We just welcomed them all out  
4           together in October to get them together to  
5           really advocate and talk about more where the  
6           shared mission can align.

7                       And I think, you know, from  
8           post-pandemic, I think no longer it is a  
9           talking point of what parks mean in their  
10          communities to the physical and mental  
11          wellness. I think many just now wake up and  
12          say, They mean a lot in my community and I  
13          need to now find time on my own personal  
14          calendar to ensure that I'm doing my part to  
15          help maintain them. I Love My Park Day,  
16          first Saturday every May, is a good start to  
17          that. And we've incorporated sort of those  
18          mini I Love My Park Days in different regions  
19          to further improve the stewardship across our  
20          system.

21                       SENATOR SERRANO: Thank you,  
22          Commissioner Pro Tem.

23                       My final question has to do with the  
24          state of our lakes. I love swimming in

1 lakes, I think it's a wonderful thing if we  
2 could do it. But I know over the last couple  
3 of years you've been dealing with algal  
4 blooms in a number of lakes. A lot of  
5 conditions probably out of your control,  
6 climate change and other things.

7 But I just wanted to know, have we  
8 started to get a good handle on these? Will  
9 we see all of our lakes open this summer  
10 despite the potential for algal blooms?

11 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

12 And Lake Welch is the perfect example of  
13 that. You know, two years ago we had a  
14 harmful algal bloom that basically shut down  
15 swim season at our largest public bathing  
16 beach in our state for a community that  
17 didn't have many other options to cool in the  
18 summer.

19 So we're looking at different projects  
20 and we're looking at new technologies. I'm  
21 particularly proud of the technology that we  
22 instituted at Lake Welch, we're pioneering  
23 some technology to see if this is, if not a  
24 solution, it can be part of a solution to,

1           you know, lessening the impact of these  
2           blooms that are showing up in many cases in  
3           spaces that they never showed up before. We  
4           pioneered some solar technology at Lake  
5           Welch, and we went from being closed for  
6           almost the entire summer to being closed just  
7           two days the following year.

8                         Is that the solution? More data is  
9           needed. But we're working with DEC and our  
10          partners, you know, at ESF to formalize, you  
11          know, some of the data to see if these are  
12          solutions. And when you look at, you know,  
13          the Sebagos, looking at projects that will  
14          lessen the burden on a Lake Welch -- which,  
15          believe it or not, you know, closes as soon  
16          as 8 a.m. on a summer weekend or weekday  
17          morning -- and be the other alternative to  
18          not be turned away but have another  
19          opportunity to seek a recreational experience  
20          nearby.

21                         SENATOR SERRANO: Thank you so much,  
22          Commissioner Pro Tem. Always a pleasure  
23          speaking with you. And thank you for your  
24          responses.

1                   PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

2           Thank you.

3                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER:   Thank you.  
4                   Assembly.

5                   CHAIRMAN PRETLOW:   (Mic off.)  
6           Assemblymember Ron Kim.

7                   Before I go, I just want to say that  
8           we've been joined by Assemblymembers Stefani  
9           Zinerman, Al Stirpe, and Tommy John  
10          Schiavoni.

11                   Mr. Kim?

12                   ASSEMBLYMAN KIM:   Thank you, Chairman.  
13          And congratulations on your new role as chair  
14          of the Ways and Means Committee.  We look  
15          forward to a successful budget season.

16                   And Commissioner, thank you so much  
17          for your testimony today.  I look forward to  
18          your partnership, as well as with  
19          Senator Serrano in the coming months as well.  
20          Thank you.

21                   Let me start off by just focusing on  
22          some of the capacity issues at the state  
23          parks.  And with the tremendous demand, I  
24          would imagine we have capacity issues to

1 continue to protect and strengthen our parks.

2 Last year there were 79 additional  
3 staff positions, full-time positions, in the  
4 enacted budget. Have you been able to fill  
5 all those 79 positions?

6 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
7 Yes. And on the record here, even more so.  
8 I mean, we're very fortunate that people want  
9 to work at Parks and we can find the people  
10 for these positions.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Great. And you  
12 mentioned the 50 Parks Police officers. Last  
13 year I believe we added -- we added 30 for  
14 State Police, so I'm assuming you hired more  
15 than 30. What is the current size of the  
16 Parks Police right now?

17 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
18 The current size of the Park Police -- so we  
19 were very fortunate for the first time ever,  
20 under the Governor, we held two academies.  
21 We just graduated the second one, and in a  
22 year's span, on January 3rd.

23 The current size is 243. And we  
24 expect, you know, the attrition rate by

1           October of this year will probably drop us to  
2           235, which is still a pretty confident  
3           number.

4                     ASSEMBLYMAN KIM:   And is it  
5           sufficient, or do we need to continue to  
6           grow?

7                     PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:   We  
8           continue to assess the public safety,  
9           obviously, between Park Police -- we think at  
10          this moment it is a sufficient size.  But  
11          certainly working toward what is a number,  
12          we're trying to gather data to identify that  
13          force strength that is suitable for the  
14          Park Police.

15                    ASSEMBLYMAN KIM:   And you also  
16          mentioned in your testimony the Ryder Cup.  I  
17          think that's on a lot of people's minds.  You  
18          know, the golf course at Bethpage State Park  
19          will host the Ryder Cup in 2025.  What's the  
20          status of the projects to prepare for the  
21          Ryder Cup?  And how much have you spent on  
22          this effort so far?

23                    PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
24          You know, we're already marketing and

1 promoting the Ryder Cup, and the PGA of  
2 America has already touted this as what will  
3 be the most significant golf event in the  
4 history of golf, which is a pretty heavy  
5 statement, and one we're prepared -- mass  
6 gatherings are no stranger to us. We excel  
7 in this manner, from the air shows and, you  
8 know, the concert venues that we have.

9 A lot of -- a majority of the projects  
10 will kick off in August of this year to start  
11 building out that infrastructure. And it was  
12 a partnership, an agreement with the PGA.  
13 But we invested only a couple of million into  
14 these efforts, with the PGA picking up a lot  
15 of the other costs.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Got it.

17 And is New York being compensated for  
18 hosting the Ryder Cup?

19 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS: We  
20 have a deal with the Ryder Cup. We take a  
21 percentage of like hospitality profits, and  
22 we get sort of base fee for hosting the  
23 Ryder Cup.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: What's the base fee?

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PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

The base fee I want to say is two and a half -- or 4 million, somewhere in that range. I can get that accurate number for you, though.

ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Okay, great, thank you.

So according to New York Parks & Trails -- and this kind of continues on in my line of questioning about the Ryder Cup -- for every \$1 million we invest in New York State's parks system, we generate up to \$21 million in economic benefits in sales, labor income, state GDP. That's a 2100 percent return, or 21X, on ROI. That's crazy. That's insane how much money we get back.

Do you have a rough breakdown, a rough estimate on how much of the return in revenues is based on in-state consumers and visitors versus out-of-state visitors?

PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS: A majority of our visitation is in-state. I can work with the team to identify like a closer breakdown to those numbers.

1                   When we look at the breakdown  
2                   certainly, you know, look at our top revenue  
3                   generators, VUF, as we call it, which is  
4                   really the entry fee, the vehicle use fee, is  
5                   really our top revenue generator. Camping,  
6                   concessions and golf all round out like the  
7                   top four. But certainly we can score some of  
8                   the information you're looking for,  
9                   particularly amongst the top four revenue  
10                  generators where that data might be  
11                  accessible, yes.

12                  ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Great, got it.

13                  Do you have any qualitative data on  
14                  what drives out-of-state visitors to spend  
15                  time and money at our state parks? You kind  
16                  of touched on it, but based on things like do  
17                  you do any feedback, any surveys of people  
18                  who visit to get a sense of why they're  
19                  driven to come drive so many hours to come to  
20                  our state?

21                  PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

22                  Yeah, we -- you know, working with our  
23                  partners last year we actually did a number  
24                  of studies within our parks to learn more.

1           You know, because one of the things that we  
2           want to do is not only, A, identify some of  
3           the data why people are coming to our parks,  
4           but once we acquire that data, what are we  
5           going to do with that data? You know, you  
6           just don't want it to sit off to the side and  
7           just be there. We want to be able to take it  
8           and provide value and shape sort of the  
9           direction we want to go.

10                    We launched our biggest marketing  
11           campaign in the agency's history last year  
12           with the centennial. And when you look at  
13           parks, in many ways they're personal. Some  
14           are local destinations, some are regional  
15           destinations, and some are international --  
16           you know, national and international  
17           destinations. You know, for instance, like  
18           Niagara Falls, right? What drives that is  
19           the grandeur of Niagara Falls.

20                    But I think when you look at, you  
21           know, the Long Island parks, it's the  
22           beaches. Thousand Islands, it's that lake  
23           experience. Just some of the things that  
24           drive people to take -- and I think people

1 are certainly looking for affordability, and  
2 I think when you look at affordability you  
3 look at a three- or four-day weekend, you  
4 know, in a trek through New York State, and  
5 it really is incredible the diverse  
6 experience and landscapes that we have going  
7 from one region to another, some of which  
8 we've heard back that, you know, I can't  
9 believe I'm still in the same state, based on  
10 this three-day trip I took from perhaps  
11 Long Island out to Western New York.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: You know, I mean, so  
13 state parks have an impact on hospitality --  
14 hotels, restaurants and all those concessions  
15 and vendors. But do we -- do state parks  
16 generate revenue directly from fees and sales  
17 that they charge inside the parks? Like is  
18 there -- about how much do we generate a year  
19 based on fees?

20 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS: On  
21 revenue generation? About 136 million, you  
22 know, based on certainly the top four revenue  
23 generators. And we have some minor revenue  
24 generators under there. But that's sort of

1 about the amount that we pull in.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: And is the Governor  
3 planning to continue to waive fees on state  
4 swimming pools for the next cycle or season  
5 as well?

6 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
7 You know, and that's a discussion that is  
8 soon to be had. I think you certainly -- you  
9 have to -- I'd be most interested in looking  
10 at the balance of revenue generation. But  
11 also accessibility, particularly for  
12 communities that are typically underserved or  
13 disadvantaged communities.

14 So, you know, we are proud that we  
15 partnered and we received that revenue back  
16 in this year's budget for the fee waiver at  
17 the swimming pools next year. But with the  
18 double down on NY SWIMS, it's a discussion  
19 that I'm happy to have with you, but we  
20 expect to have to determine, you know, when  
21 and where is the right time to waive, you  
22 know, revenue generators, fees, but for the  
23 benefit of the physical and mental wellness  
24 of our communities.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: None of this is  
2 financed based on those fees. So in other  
3 words, it's not bonded out based on those  
4 fees, right?

5 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
6 Correct.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: So this is something  
8 that we can -- we have discretion over for  
9 future --

10 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
11 Correct, we do.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: The 50 million for  
13 NY SWIMS that's been proposed this year, is  
14 this new round of funding identical to the --  
15 to last in terms of the parameters, the  
16 program parameters?

17 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
18 Right, so last year it was a \$150 million  
19 program. This year it's 50. It's the same  
20 parameters, although this year we're  
21 including not-for-profits as eligible  
22 candidates to come in, maybe work with a  
23 municipality. But opening up to those  
24 organizations as well.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Got it.

2 And did the first round of NY SWIMS  
3 award any floating pools? And what are,  
4 exactly, floating pools?

5 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS: We  
6 have a -- we call it a crib pool, but it's a  
7 floating-type pool that we're installing at  
8 Sojourner Truth State Park.

9 No, not to my knowledge in the first  
10 round were there any floating pools that  
11 municipalities had requested the funding for.  
12 I'll double confirm that. But it was -- that  
13 was sort of an outlier.

14 And I think what you saw with the  
15 first round of 150 million, and likely you'll  
16 see again, is many municipalities just needed  
17 a repair or refurbishment on existing  
18 infrastructure. You heard a lot of stories  
19 of leaking X amount of thousands of gallons  
20 or hundreds of gallons a day in their local  
21 pools, and this aimed to repair that for  
22 them.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Great. Thank you so  
24 much for your testimony today. Just like the

1           Senator, I'm raising my young three girls in  
2           the state parks, and I've spent a lot of time  
3           in upstate in the summertime, James Baird  
4           State Park, one of our favorite places to go  
5           and play some golf as well while the kids  
6           play on the side. So I know the economic --  
7           I've seen firsthand the economic impact these  
8           facilities have in their community and  
9           beyond.

10                        So I look forward to working with you  
11           in the future.

12                        PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
13           Absolutely. Thank you.

14                        CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

15                        Before we call the next Senator, I  
16           want to let people know that we were joined  
17           by Senator Nathalia Fernandez and  
18           Senator Shelley Mayer. And I think we have  
19           some additional Assemblymembers.

20                        CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Yes, we do. We've  
21           been joined by Assemblymembers Billy Jones  
22           and Paula Kay.

23                        ASSEMBLYMAN RA: And if I can  
24           acknowledge, Chair --

1                   CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Yes.

2                   ASSEMBLYMAN RA: We've also been  
3                   joined by Assemblywoman Mary Beth Walsh.

4                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. So now  
5                   we're going to turn it to Senator Borrello,  
6                   five minutes, ranker on Agriculture.

7                   SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you,  
8                   Madam Chair.

9                   Thank you both for being here. I  
10                  appreciate it. I want to direct my  
11                  questions, as ranker on Ag, to  
12                  Commissioner Ball. And if I have any time  
13                  left -- so ...

14                 But Commissioner, first of all, thank  
15                 you for being here. I particularly  
16                 appreciate your experience as a farmer and an  
17                 agribusiness owner and the impact that that  
18                 has had, the positive impact that has had on  
19                 your ability to oversee Ag & Markets. I  
20                 truly appreciate that. And it's been a great  
21                 help to the farmers that I represent in my  
22                 district.

23                 My concerns -- I have a few, but my  
24                 first concern is we have a lot of regulations

1           that have a negative impact on farmers and  
2           other small businesses.  Particularly right  
3           now we're wrangling with these new wetland  
4           regulations.  Now, wetland regulations have  
5           been essentially redefining what is  
6           considered a wetland, and that has had -- I'm  
7           hearing this a lot from property owners  
8           around our recreational lakes like  
9           Chautauqua Lake.

10                   I guess my question is, how do we  
11           balance those new I guess expanded wetland  
12           regulations against the needs of our farmers  
13           and our ability to have productive farmland.  
14           Because we're talking about, you know, new --  
15           having to do new permits and potentially have  
16           an impact on the ability to build new  
17           structures within, you know, now newly  
18           designated wetland areas.

19                   So just curious if you had any  
20           thoughts on that.

21                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL:  Well,  
22           sure.  You know, we work in the environment  
23           as farmers every day.  You know, so wetlands  
24           is a big concern.  In most cases in New York

1           it's a national, a federal concern. And  
2           what's coming out of Washington with regards  
3           to those regulations kind of moves and  
4           changes, ebbs and flows, if you'll forgive  
5           the pun there.

6                        But I think that, you know, today I'm  
7           happy to say that at the Department of  
8           Agriculture we've never had a better  
9           relationship with DEC in my history of  
10          farming in New York State. So if we have a  
11          question, an issue about a wetlands and a  
12          delineation or anything of that sort, we're  
13          able to sit down and talk through it and  
14          figure out what the best outcome is for the  
15          farmer.

16                       Having said that, in our work again  
17          together with DEC when we look at those  
18          regulations and water and -- we've got  
19          decades of history working together on that,  
20          both with our CAFOs, our large dairy  
21          operations, nutrient management, et cetera.  
22          So we're actually in a pretty good place  
23          right now in New York with that regard.  
24          We'll wait to see if we'll see any big

1 changes coming out of EPA in the near future.  
2 I expect some changes.

3 SENATOR BORRELLO: Okay, thank you.

4 Yes, so I -- and I agree with the --  
5 your relationship with DEC has been  
6 beneficial, particularly when we're looking  
7 at, you know, the expansion of things like  
8 Great Lakes Cheese, you know. So I  
9 appreciate the relationship that you have and  
10 the partnership so we can balance the  
11 environmental needs with the needs to  
12 maintain agribusinesses.

13 So that being said, moving on to solar  
14 proliferation, I know we -- the chairwoman  
15 touched on that. But, you know, I have many  
16 concerns still. We have in Chautauqua  
17 County, in the Town of Ripley, 3,000 acres of  
18 farmland that is now going to be solar  
19 fields. I'm concerned about, you know,  
20 runoff from those solar fields, as well as  
21 the fact that it's taking up valuable  
22 farmland.

23 You know, we've got plenty of  
24 brownfields in New York State. We've got

1 closed landfill cells and everything else. I  
2 don't know why we have to take up, you know,  
3 good farmland -- other than I know it's  
4 easier and they make more money doing that,  
5 more profit from that.

6 So with being said, agrivoltaics is  
7 something that people keep talking about.  
8 Right now, from what I can tell, all it is  
9 is, you know, letting sheep graze under solar  
10 panels. Can you tell me where we really are  
11 with agrivoltaics, and how we can use that as  
12 a complement, hopefully?

13 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yeah.  
14 Obviously we'd like to try to solve this and  
15 figure out how to make it work for everybody.

16 I think the -- we farm about 7 million  
17 acres of land in New York State. And having  
18 just experienced a pandemic, I think we all  
19 recognize that New York better have a food  
20 system right here in the state; let's not  
21 depend on another country, another region for  
22 our food. And so that farmland is even more  
23 important to us today than it's ever been.

24 So I think with that in mind, we need

1 to look very carefully at solar. We've been  
2 able to work with our partners in energy at  
3 NYSERDA, and we talk with the PSC and we've  
4 been able to extract -- I shouldn't say  
5 extract, but come to an agreement with an MOU  
6 with NYSERDA to look at how do we avoid,  
7 minimize or mitigate the impact of solar on  
8 actively farmed land, in particular our top  
9 four tiers of soil.

10 So we're pursuing that. We refine  
11 that on a regular basis. But so many times  
12 it would be just as good to look down the  
13 road at that hundred acres that's not being  
14 actively farmed, that has rocks on it. You  
15 know, not the actively farmed land. So we'll  
16 continue to do that.

17 SENATOR BORRELLO: Great, thank you.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

19 Assembly.

20 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: The ranker on  
21 Agriculture, Assemblymember Tague.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: Thank you,  
23 Chairman.

24 And thank you, everybody. And our

1           guests that are here this morning, thank you  
2           very much.

3                     My questions are going to be towards  
4           the Commissioner of Agriculture, my neighbor,  
5           Richard Ball.

6                     First of all, I just wanted to say  
7           happy to see that we raised the Nourish NY  
8           program. We're not at 75 million yet,  
9           Commissioner, but we're getting there. And I  
10          appreciate that.

11                    One question I had, you mentioned  
12          during your statement some of the money  
13          that's being invested at the State  
14          Fairgrounds. You had mentioned something  
15          about the dairy buildings. But I was just  
16          wondering, are we revamping the sheep and  
17          goat barns as well at the State Fair?

18                    AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yes.  
19          Actually we've got -- the plans are at OGS  
20          right now. They've been approved. We're  
21          going to be acting on the Sheep and Wool  
22          Center at the fairgrounds.

23                    ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: Okay. That's  
24          great. Because they were in some pretty

1 rough shape over the last few years, and it's  
2 one of the complaints I get from mothers and  
3 fathers of some of the young folks that show  
4 at the fair.

5 The other thing I want to touch on,  
6 and Senator Hinchey did as well, but I want  
7 to talk about the Farm Laborers Fair Labor  
8 Practices Act. Has the department undertaken  
9 any effort to study and/or alleviate some of  
10 the economic difficulties that this has  
11 caused?

12 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
13 we have the overtime tax credit that the  
14 Governor proposed a year ago now.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: Well, that's kind  
16 of my reasoning for asking that question,  
17 because all I hear from our farmers is that  
18 it's very confusing, it's not exactly what  
19 they thought it was going to be.

20 So although the tax credit has been  
21 enacted to help offset the cost of this act,  
22 the big problem that I see is that it does  
23 not solve the front end. You know, the cash  
24 flow issues increased, the increased labor

1 and payroll costs. So what else can we do?

2 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
3 I think we're looking forward to a solution  
4 that's going to make it work for all farms  
5 across the state regardless of their  
6 management entity.

7 I would point out that we did have an  
8 early release, farmers could apply to get an  
9 early return on that in July. And we put  
10 together a website that was very easy for a  
11 farm to access that, sign up for it. I have  
12 to tell you, 63 farms took advantage of that,  
13 63 farms. And they got their money within  
14 two weeks of it being approved by us and by  
15 Tax and Finance. And about \$1 million went  
16 out the door in September for those farms.

17 It looks to me as though most farms  
18 are waiting till the end of the year, at tax  
19 time, to actually get their accounting in and  
20 get the overtime tax credit, the refundable  
21 tax credit back to them. So I think we're  
22 still too early in the process to know the  
23 right answer to dial that in. Initially we  
24 heard farms wanted to do it four times out of

1 the year, they wanted it sooner. But the  
2 fact is, the middle of summer, we only had  
3 63 farms ask for that.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: Well, I can  
5 alleviate the whole problem. We should have  
6 just kept it the way it was. That's -- you  
7 and I can agree to disagree about that, but  
8 we should have left it -- 73 percent of the  
9 farmers in the State of New York were against  
10 moving to this new practice as well.

11 But I'll move on. I want to touch  
12 on -- how many farmers have come to you  
13 expressing a specific desire to install solar  
14 or wind energy products on their farmland?

15 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: About  
16 a handful. The majority are not farmers who  
17 come to us with a proposal.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: How many  
19 developers would you say are aggressively  
20 pushing such products on our farmland owners?

21 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: I  
22 would say that of the notice of intent that  
23 we get at the Department of Agriculture about  
24 proposed solar projects, I would say

1           95 percent or more are coming from solar  
2           developers.

3                   ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: And are the  
4           farmers that are coming to your agency  
5           looking for some advice, are they given  
6           adequate support and resources to make sure  
7           that they can make informed decisions with  
8           these situations?

9                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: They  
10          do. Our Land and Water people are very good  
11          at this subject.

12                   ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: All right. And  
13          then I got a little bit of time left before  
14          the buzzer rings. But, you know, we've  
15          talked about this before, but do we know how  
16          much farmland in terms of acreage has been  
17          lost to wind or solar energy development  
18          within the last five years?

19                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
20          we're going to accurately look at that in  
21          this budget here, looking at the loss of  
22          farmland from a variety of sources. There's  
23          no doubt there has been some Tier 1 through 4  
24          actively lost farmland, actively farmed land

1           that has been lost to solar development.

2                   ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: That's my biggest  
3 concern, Commissioner, is that the left hand  
4 doesn't know what the right hand is doing.  
5 And we talk about food security throughout  
6 this state. We can sustain ourselves here,  
7 but we surely can't if we have no farms. As  
8 Farm Bureau says: No farms, no food.

9                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: We  
10 share that concern.

11                   ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: Thank you.

12                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

13                           Our second ranker -- for Parks,  
14 Cultural Affairs, et cetera -- Jim Tedisco,  
15 five minutes.

16                   SENATOR TEDISCO: Thank you,  
17 Commissioners, for being here today, for your  
18 testimony and so often coming to visit me and  
19 my constituents in the 44th Senatorial  
20 District. And inviting me to be there with  
21 you and bringing good news, usually. So I  
22 really appreciate that.

23                           You know, you're probably aware of the  
24 fact, because we are here if we've been to

1           these budget hearings often, that when we  
2           start the year and we have the budget, a lot  
3           of words start to emanate around the Capitol  
4           here. And usually they give you an  
5           indication of the direction we're going. And  
6           sometimes one word rises to the top here at  
7           the budget. And you probably can guess what  
8           that one word has become here in the Capitol  
9           and in New York State. I say tongue in cheek  
10          and probably not that seriously, but if I had  
11          a dollar for every time I heard the word  
12          "affordability" in New York State this year,  
13          we wouldn't have these hearings because we  
14          could balance this budget and budgets into  
15          the future.

16                 I think my question to you is, because  
17                 I believe that if we're going to reach  
18                 affordability -- and this is coming down from  
19                 our leaders here, the Governor of New York  
20                 State and many of our colleagues, and all of  
21                 us know that's important, extremely  
22                 important -- we're going to have to have  
23                 spending priorities, serious spending  
24                 priorities. Not based on an election coming

1 up, but based on creating a better quality of  
2 life for our constituents. And as has been  
3 said by the leaders here, leaving more money  
4 in taxpayers' pockets -- not maybe generating  
5 that money from them directly and giving it  
6 back to them, but talking about tax cuts,  
7 which we're very supportive. We've been  
8 talking about those from my conference, and  
9 as ranker I think that's important  
10 holistically.

11 But I would ask you, because I'm  
12 probably believing that as commissioners,  
13 your groups -- the Governor has reached down  
14 to you and said, Help me with this goal of  
15 affordability, help me to find out what we  
16 can do through the great parks and recreation  
17 we have, through the historic sites where  
18 people come to visit -- because there's  
19 restaurants and there's hotels where people  
20 are staying, generating money from small  
21 businesses and developing that, and the  
22 farmers we have and the great products they  
23 produce and the jobs they create. We had  
24 some pretty good tax dollars that came in,

1 sales tax money that came in this past year.

2 As you interact with the Governor, and  
3 I'll ask you this question, what would be  
4 your direction or top priority to help her  
5 achieve those goals of affordability in  
6 New York State, through your activity in  
7 terms of keeping people in New York State,  
8 attracting people to come to New York State?  
9 We shouldn't be -- we're a beautiful state,  
10 and I think you guys do a wonderful job in  
11 many areas, and our commissioners do too with  
12 what they have available to them.

13 Bu 101,000 people left the state last  
14 year. So I do agree with the Governor --  
15 better late than never -- we have an  
16 affordability problem. What would be the  
17 number-one priority you think you could do or  
18 direction you could take as commissioners to  
19 help her with that affordability problem and  
20 us in New York State?

21 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

22 And I can start there. You know, for Parks,  
23 Recreation and Historic Preservation,  
24 accessibility. I think last year what you

1 saw is when we waived fees at swimming pools  
2 all across our system, we saw a 36 percent  
3 increase. And mind you, that fee that we  
4 waived was a dollar at some parks and upwards  
5 of \$5 at other parks.

6 When temperatures rose in that third  
7 week of June to above 92, 95 degrees for four  
8 straight days, we did also waive fees  
9 throughout the parks system -- that VUF, that  
10 vehicle use fee -- and we saw attendance jump  
11 by 40 percent.

12 And I think parks can be a litmus test  
13 for affordability. We are incredibly  
14 affordable. And some of the biggest things  
15 that we hear when we're out there with  
16 communities -- you know, there's been times  
17 where perhaps, you know, with inflation or  
18 costs rising, we've had to consider maybe,  
19 you know, jumping the costs on a base fee at  
20 a campsite, it could be 50 cents, and we hear  
21 about it. And it's good understanding that,  
22 you know, what is affordable to perhaps me  
23 may not be affordable to many of those who  
24 live in New York State, and being conscious

1 of that. And that's why we're incredibly  
2 sort of, you know, dedicated to making sure  
3 that parks remain affordable on many levels.

4 SENATOR TEDISCO: So about more people  
5 being available to invest in our parks at  
6 maybe lower income levels that some others  
7 can't.

8 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
9 And then access our parks, you know, in a  
10 number of different ways, yeah.

11 SENATOR TEDISCO: Thank you very much.

12 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: My  
13 colleague said accessibility, and I would  
14 have said connecting the dots between our  
15 agricultural community and a community that  
16 needs access to food in a bigger and better  
17 way. So I think we're on the same page  
18 there, yeah. Thanks for the thoughtful  
19 question.

20 SENATOR TEDISCO: Thank you,  
21 Commissioners. Appreciate it.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
23 Assembly.

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblymember Mary

1           Beth Walsh, for three minutes.

2                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALSH: Thank you very  
3 much.

4                   Good afternoon. My question is for  
5 Commissioner Simons, and it has to do with  
6 the 250th anniversary of the  
7 Revolutionary War and those events that are  
8 starting to take place. And one of the  
9 things that has come back to me is that  
10 there's a lot of disappointment that the  
11 Governor's budget has not made any investment  
12 in the 250th celebrations that are being  
13 planned for the area.

14                   And that's in contrast to other  
15 states. Like New Jersey has made an  
16 investment of 25 million; Virginia,  
17 20 million; South Carolina, 5 million. And  
18 so really -- I'll ask the question and then  
19 I'd really love your feedback.

20                   You know, New York State was the site  
21 of so many crucial events leading to the  
22 creation of our nation, including the  
23 Battles of Saratoga in 1777. You know,  
24 military buffs, patriotic Americans, people

1 from around the world are even expected to be  
2 coming to Saratoga County and other places  
3 around New York State to help mark these  
4 events, including at the battlefield, to  
5 learn, to celebrate.

6 And this won't only just be a point of  
7 pride for New York State, but also, if we do  
8 it well, it will generate tourism revenue.

9 So will you advocate for New York  
10 State to invest in this important,  
11 once-in-our-lifetime commemoration? You  
12 know, it's just a little bit embarrassing  
13 that New York State appears to be investing  
14 nothing while other states who can't claim as  
15 much history as we do are doing so much more.

16 So I'd love your feedback on that.

17 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
18 And thank you for that. I appreciate that,  
19 as cochair of the 250th Commemoration  
20 Commission. And, you know, we're confident,  
21 we're confident New York State will deliver a  
22 robust commemoration, certainly with  
23 available resources.

24 I'll say we're just at the beginning

1 of the budget process, and certainly, you  
2 know, we'll of course be happy to continue to  
3 discuss, you know, legislative priorities  
4 along the coming weeks and coming months.

5 But, you know, you -- we -- half of  
6 our historic sites are tied to the  
7 American Revolution, you know, in many ways.  
8 We are particularly proud of the launch of  
9 our kiosk program. You know, we launched  
10 this at Washington's Headquarters. We have  
11 20 more that will debut at historic sites and  
12 state parks across the state. And this  
13 really is, you know, sort of the storytelling  
14 of the 250th, but telling it from multiple  
15 perspectives, that Our Whole History  
16 initiative.

17 So certainly it is something that is  
18 just the start of it. You know, I could get  
19 a list of capital projects too at many of our  
20 historic sites. But the commemoration  
21 commission, we kicked off, we have our next  
22 meeting in March. And we have a strategic  
23 plan that is imminent. And I think that  
24 you'll find many of the recommendations

1           might, you know, cover some of the concerns  
2           you raise here today in the lead-up to the  
3           250th.

4                         CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

5                         Senator Chris Ryan, three minutes.

6                         SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: Thank you, Madam  
7           Chair.

8                         Good afternoon. A question to  
9           Commissioner Ball.

10                        We talked about the fair. I'm in the  
11           50th District -- Chris Ryan, 50th Senate  
12           District, thank you. Home of The Great  
13           New York State Fair, I might add.

14                        So with that said, very happy to hear  
15           about, obviously, the capital improvements.  
16           But I know that's a broad -- but hopefully we  
17           can get a little bit more in the weeds.  
18           Could you elaborate just a little bit  
19           beyond -- I know we talked about the outdoor  
20           concert venue, but can you get a little bit  
21           more specific on it?

22                        AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Sure,  
23           yes. Well, welcome aboard, first of all.  
24           Thank you, look forward to working with you

1 out in your county.

2 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: Thank you.

3 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yeah,  
4 we're looking at a variety of projects.  
5 certainly I've heard it characterized that  
6 we're looking to add more concerts at the  
7 fair, which is not the case. We did put a  
8 substantial investment in that area over the  
9 last 10 years, pretty significant. For  
10 example, the Expo Building, which prior to  
11 COVID was booked for the entire year. And  
12 we're now working on getting back up to  
13 having that be a more year-round experience  
14 for people.

15 So we're anxious to accelerate the  
16 number of horse shows that we have at that  
17 fair in that building. And I would say we  
18 need -- we recognized over the last few years  
19 some needs for upgrades to the building to  
20 accomplish that goal around electrical  
21 outlets and things like that. So we're  
22 working with OGS on that.

23 But we're also looking at the whole  
24 western end of the fair. We have the pond

1           there now, we've got the villages. I don't  
2           know if you've had an opportunity to visit  
3           the villages. We have a central location for  
4           them at the western end of the fair where we  
5           had the Asian village, we have the Indian  
6           village, and we had the Latino village there.  
7           We've had the Black experience on the other  
8           end of the fair. But tying together and  
9           making that a more significant event and  
10          having their own stage and place to recognize  
11          that.

12                         That's our youth end of the fair, in a  
13          very big way -- the 4-H building, the FFA  
14          proposed buildings. That's an opportunity to  
15          invest in agriculture with our youth. Those  
16          are some of the things that we're thinking  
17          about, along with some capital improvements  
18          that we need to do. We've got to finish that  
19          sheep barn, and we've got those other  
20          buildings up and running.

21                         SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: Well, that's, you  
22          know, good news. And I certainly -- I think  
23          we really, really need to look at it in the  
24          context of an economic driver.

1 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Sure.

2 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: We certainly need  
3 to utilize that facility where the -- I mean,  
4 the whole entire experience. Because I think  
5 it can create tourism, I think it can be a  
6 good economic development driver. I'd be  
7 really -- really anxious to hear about some  
8 priorities going forward, how we could best  
9 utilize that for the region. So expect good  
10 things to come.

11 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Sure.  
12 Well, you know, we've made a very direct move  
13 to make agriculture the centerpiece of the  
14 fair again. And I tell all our ag groups,  
15 all our commodity groups: If you had a  
16 chance to talk to a million people -- which  
17 is what we'll attract just in those 13  
18 days -- what would you want to say to them?  
19 So it's a great opportunity for that.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
21 Assembly.

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblymember Otis  
23 for three minutes.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Here we go. My

1 clock did not start till the green light went  
2 on.

3 Commissioner Ball, thank you always,  
4 every year, for your thoughtful answers to  
5 the questions that come your way and the  
6 great job that you do. And for all of that,  
7 I'm not going to ask you a question, I'm  
8 going to ask a question of State Parks. But  
9 I want to -- I've heard you over many years,  
10 and the quality job you do is appreciated by  
11 everybody. So thank you.

12 Commissioner Simons, a question about  
13 the great program at state parks which is the  
14 growing of EV charging access in state parks'  
15 parking lots for visitors. And we've been  
16 updated over the years on that program; if  
17 you could update us on where we are today and  
18 how that continues to grow at state parks.

19 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS: So  
20 it's something certainly that we have been  
21 drilling in on more heavily. Right now we  
22 have really been -- concentrated on improving  
23 our own fleet. I think we're upwards of  
24 50 percent of our light-duty fleet is

1           certainly electric in nature, renewable.

2                   And we're looking at sort of the next  
3 goal, is sort of those charging stations  
4 within our parks. You know, there are a  
5 select few where they do -- are housed. And  
6 the next conversation is public versus, you  
7 know, our own fleet and the needs for them.

8                   But I think you see us around a  
9 15 percent, you know, number right now, with  
10 the idea that the number will continue to  
11 grow because of the nature of where we need  
12 to be, certainly, to do our part.

13                   ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: That's great. And  
14 that's certainly, I think, an added  
15 attraction for people to come to parks but  
16 also with the growing adoption of EV  
17 vehicles, it's something that we should be  
18 doing -- not just at state parks, at every  
19 state facility where there's parking, and  
20 grow that. So thank you.

21                   With that, we love our state park  
22 system and your whole team at State Parks.  
23 Keep up the good work, and I will yield back  
24 the rest of my time.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Mic issue.) All  
2 right. Sorry. Thank you very -- these are  
3 tricky.

4 Senator Nathalia Fernandez.

5 SENATOR FERNANDEZ: It's supposed to  
6 be green, okay.

7 Good morning -- good afternoon. Thank  
8 you, Commissioners, for being here.

9 My question is to Commissioner Ball.  
10 In the state fiscal year 2024-'25 enacted  
11 budget, the Governor had given a million  
12 dollars for beginning farmers and 1 million  
13 appropriated for socially and economically  
14 disadvantaged farmers. We see that that is  
15 the 1.3 percent of Black, Indigenous and  
16 people of color.

17 Now, this year she has discontinued  
18 those programs. Can you provide any  
19 information on how -- I'm sorry, on the  
20 programs this funding has supported and the  
21 status of projects funded through these  
22 programs? And what organizations has the  
23 department partnered with to distribute the  
24 grant funding for socially and economically

1           disadvantaged farmers?

2                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL:  Yeah,  
3           thanks for that.

4                   This has been a long effort.  We  
5           started this after the USDA NASS statistics  
6           had come out in 2018, and we saw the numbers  
7           of Black farmers, for example, Latino  
8           farmers, we saw those numbers drastically  
9           changing, and we sought to address that.

10                   So the -- I'm happy to tell you that  
11           it's not in her budget this year because we  
12           have reappropriations of over \$4 million  
13           available to us.  We had to go through a  
14           fairly lengthy process of finding  
15           administrators to put the program out.  So  
16           the initial funding a couple of years ago was  
17           spent getting them up to speed, getting them  
18           certified, getting them the 501(c)(3) status  
19           that they needed to actually accept the  
20           money.

21                   I'm happy to tell you that the  
22           Beginner Farmer Work Group money, that has  
23           been -- it's out there.  That program closed  
24           I think a couple of weeks ago.  We'll be

1 released -- we'll have the grants released in  
2 January. So we've got the funding there. We  
3 didn't -- that was a legislative add that you  
4 guys put in the last couple of years. It's  
5 much appreciated. But it will finally be  
6 able to get out the door here in the next  
7 coming months. So we've got over \$4 million  
8 available to do that.

9 Along the way, we now have an  
10 assistant commissioner in charge of this  
11 subject area, we've got a website, outreach,  
12 agriculture.ny.gov. We have open calling  
13 hours -- office hours, I should say, not  
14 calling hours -- office hours twice a month  
15 for people that are interested. And we  
16 expanded the scope of this program to --

17 SENATOR FERNANDEZ: How many farmers  
18 have been awarded so far?

19 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: We're  
20 just getting to that point now where farmers  
21 are getting awarded.

22 But we worked with Black Farmers  
23 United and Northeast Farmers of Color to get  
24 that administrative work done.

1                   So the number of farmers that we've  
2                   served in the last couple of years has  
3                   been -- we have been all across the state  
4                   visiting farmers everywhere, including in the  
5                   city, in urban farms, community farms. And I  
6                   feel very good about this program. It is  
7                   finally moving. The biggest challenge we had  
8                   was the disconnect between, you know, the  
9                   lending institutions, between land, people,  
10                  between education, and between navigating all  
11                  the systems. All these socially  
12                  disadvantaged groups didn't have access to  
13                  that, and that has been solved.

14                  SENATOR FERNANDEZ: Thank you.

15                  AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Thank  
16                  you for the question.

17                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

18                  We've been joined by new Senator April  
19                  Baskin. Welcome.

20                  Assembly.

21                  CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Anna  
22                  Kelles, three minutes.

23                  ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: So quick  
24                  question. This year there was funding for

1           \$1 million for an agrivoltaics research  
2           program, specifically to help us create best  
3           practices to ensure that we do maximize the  
4           agricultural production where we have solar.  
5           That was not in this year's budget, and I'm  
6           curious if that is ongoing and where that is  
7           at right now and whether there is an interest  
8           in adding that funding back in for the 30-day  
9           amendments.

10                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yeah,  
11           two things. One, that funding is ongoing at  
12           Cornell, one aspect of it. I think that's  
13           what you're referring to.

14                   The other aspect of it is that  
15           separate from that, is Ag & Markets and  
16           NYSERDA with the technical working group are  
17           looking at this subject very intently, trying  
18           to decide what is, what isn't, what's  
19           feasible, what doesn't work, what could work.  
20           It's got --

21                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: But this is an  
22           ongoing -- we've already put a million  
23           dollars into it. And it was a three-year,  
24           \$3 million project, so I was curious.

1                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yeah.  
2                   So I think what you're speaking about is the  
3                   Cornell project.

4                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Mm-hmm.  
5                   Specifically, yeah. For best practices.

6                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: It's  
7                   ongoing. That's ongoing.

8                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Okay. And I  
9                   know farmers depend heavily on agricultural  
10                  products research funded by the state, and  
11                  that's through Cornell CALS and their capital  
12                  Cornell program for tech research. That  
13                  funding has been flat since 2009. I know  
14                  that there's been a request by multiple  
15                  entities who will be testifying today for  
16                  \$5 million for capital and \$5 million for  
17                  operating. Is that something that would be  
18                  considered potentially for a 30-day  
19                  amendment?

20                  AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
21                  you know, we'll cross that bridge. But we do  
22                  have funding in research at Cornell; it's  
23                  pretty extensive. I've got to sit on the  
24                  CALS advisory committee for the dean. We've

1           invested some money in CURC -- you know, the  
2           ruminant center on -- at Cornell this year.  
3           That's in the budget.

4                         ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLEES: Right. I know  
5           that if they just did an adjustment for an  
6           inflational loan back to 2008, it would be  
7           \$46 million that they would need. So the  
8           10 million, 5 million for each, is pretty  
9           nominal compared to that. I know that's  
10          something worth considering, I think.

11                        Another quick question, to Parks.  
12          Thank you so much. And thank you so much,  
13          Commissioner Ball, I really appreciate it.

14                        You talked about the Parks officers.  
15          Is there an inclusion of the 20 million  
16          pension parity in this budget?

17                        PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
18          Not in this budget, no.

19                        ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLEES: Okay. Because  
20          I know that that has been causing huge issues  
21          in disparity between the two groups.

22                        And the 200 million that was put in  
23          the budget for parks infrastructure, do we  
24          know what the actual need is?

1 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

2 Yeah, I think when you look at the 200  
3 million you're looking at our core, right?  
4 You're looking at, you know, the foundational  
5 elements that sort of -- that lift the park  
6 system up.

7 But we're currently putting together  
8 that short list, and I think you're going to  
9 see like a 90 percent return rate on the core  
10 items, everything from -- the core  
11 infrastructure within our system to improve  
12 upon the expectations that visitors have.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Thank you so  
14 much to you both for all your great work.

15 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Thank  
16 you.

17 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
18 Thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

20 We have Senator Oberacker.

21 SENATOR OBERACKER: There we go.  
22 Green to go I guess is what it says.

23 So, Commissioners, thank you both for  
24 taking the time to come up here to Albany.

1           It's always good on a -- when it's not snowy  
2           and having to deal with that.

3                       So -- and Commissioner Ball, please  
4           don't feel that I'm not addressing anything  
5           with you, but I'm going to address my  
6           questions to Parks & Rec, so you get a chance  
7           to relax.

8                       So, Commissioner Simons, thank you  
9           again for coming up. You know, as somebody  
10          who has a bunch of parks in their district --  
11          in Otsego County, where I live, we have  
12          Glimmerglass, Betty and Wilbur State Park,  
13          Gilbert Lake, you know, and they're  
14          absolutely amazing. And one of the things  
15          you brought up was accessibility, which I  
16          found was the key word to that.

17                      We did a great job of a kayak boat  
18          launch at Glimmerglass. It's being used  
19          unbelievably -- you've made a lot of people  
20          happy.

21                      Being a sportsman and one who would  
22          love to take my grandkids out onto  
23          Glimmerglass Lake in a more traditional role  
24          of taking them fishing, it would be really

1 interesting if we could look at accessibility  
2 and getting a boat launch for those that are  
3 in that realm, and opening up this absolute  
4 jewel of a rec to those constituents.

5 And I will tell you this, I learned  
6 more from my grandfather fishing in a boat  
7 than I ever have anywhere else. So if you  
8 could do that, that would be awesome.

9 One other question I do have, and this  
10 is again for Parks -- and this pertains  
11 particularly to safety. I know we had some  
12 incidences at the state parks -- I believe  
13 we've had a couple of deaths, which we've  
14 never had. And so one of the things I was  
15 concerned about with that, is there a  
16 continued -- I'm sure there's a continued  
17 focus, but is there anything more that we  
18 could be doing at our state parks to kind of  
19 ramp up security? I'm a first responder --  
20 those type of things, you know, is there a  
21 plan in place to address -- because we're  
22 talking quite a few people coming hopefully  
23 for the Ryder Cup and things of that nature.

24 Thank you.

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PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

And thank you for your service as a first responder. It's the partnerships that we have with the emergency services, both from a state and local perspective, that really sort of help us all, you know, partner in delivering, you know, utmost public safety to our visitors.

You know, for the first time ever, you know, we saw last year the Governor invested 53 million towards just, you know, improving safety infrastructure in our parks. We immediately got to work, we identified, you know, 51 projects -- 51 parks, I should say, that were in use of everything from maybe license-plate readers to, you know, improved security, fencing and lighting, security cameras. And right now those projects are everywhere from design to procurement to in the construction phase.

And we are especially mindful of our own personnel as well. I mean, it is -- we painfully, you know, now and again get reminders of the risks that are involved in

1 providing for safe and enjoyable recreation.  
2 So we are looking at training, enhanced  
3 training across the board to make sure they  
4 have the resources they do to to get the job  
5 done.

6 SENATOR OBERACKER: Thank you.

7 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
10 Assembly.

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblymember  
12 Scott Gray, the ranker on Parks.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN GRAY: Thank you very  
14 much.

15 Thank you, Commissioners, for being  
16 here today.

17 So first I want to address  
18 Commissioner Simons. It says "investing in  
19 parks," some of the language in the state --  
20 in the Executive Budget, "200 million," and  
21 it said "substantial level of funding that  
22 will aid ongoing transformation of New York  
23 State's flagship parks."

24 So first of all, I'd like to know

1           where those parks are geographically, and  
2           perhaps you want to name what the parks are.  
3           But I'm looking for equity in terms of  
4           distribution of that \$200 million as well.

5                         And then the other thing I want to  
6           talk about a little bit, if you can, is  
7           the -- some of the grant programs, NY BRICKS,  
8           NY PLAYS, NY SWIMS. A lot of those have  
9           language in there again that is targeting  
10          where that money is going to be directed to.  
11          And I'm really concerned that New York State  
12          taxpayers believe that there's some sort of  
13          expectation that they're going to have some  
14          of the taxpayer money returned to their  
15          communities, without parameters attached to  
16          them where it's going to be directed to other  
17          communities, so that everybody has a fair and  
18          equal opportunity to address -- to get some  
19          of those funds back.

20                        And then once you get done with that,  
21          Commissioner Ball, if you can just talk about  
22          NDAs with developers and solar farms and  
23          things like that. Should farmers be expected  
24          to have an NDA in those agreements? Do you

1 support removing NDAs from those agreements  
2 so farms know what they're being -- you know,  
3 how they're being played against each other.

4 So now, Commissioner, thank you.

5 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

6 No, I appreciate those questions, very  
7 important to us. Equity across the board,  
8 from a personal/professional capacity,  
9 certainly believe in equity. I think when it  
10 comes to our capital funding, those are  
11 extensive meetings with our regional teams.  
12 You know, the regions get an allotted amount,  
13 you know, set for their particular regions.  
14 And they will raise up the priority projects,  
15 and we'll discuss.

16 So certainly equity of our funding  
17 does get spread out. Certainly flagships,  
18 you know, obviously are prioritized in many  
19 regions. But we have 250 properties, right,  
20 and we have to make sure that they are not  
21 only accessible, but they have the proper  
22 funding so we can accommodate, you know, all  
23 those who visit those parks as well.

24 And when you look at the Unplug and

1 Play -- you know, I think it's about  
2 elevating. Parks can be on the main stage,  
3 elevating New York State. And what we're  
4 finding in the conversations with communities  
5 is certainly, you know, the annual allotment  
6 we have of our parks, you know, goes a long  
7 way in repairing, refurbishing and, you know,  
8 taking the TLC on our own parks.

9 But we're finding that in stressed  
10 budgets in municipalities, oftentimes parks  
11 and the arts are the first, you know,  
12 programs to go. And this really is -- we are  
13 at a time, because of the physical and mental  
14 wellness, you know, benefits that parks  
15 supply, we're in a time where the state can  
16 step in and the state can aid our communities  
17 in raising that profile.

18 For SWIMS -- you know, a swimming pool  
19 is not at the top of a local budget. In  
20 fact, that's why many of them were in  
21 disrepair. That we can provide a little  
22 assistance for them to say how can I miss out  
23 on this funding coming to me, I will raise  
24 that to the top. And we're looking at

1 playgrounds, to get kids off their devices,  
2 giving them other opportunities. And the  
3 community centers, putting a great  
4 concentration there as well.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN GRAY: Thank you very  
6 much.

7 Commissioner?

8 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yeah,  
9 thank you for the question. It's a hot topic  
10 for certain. And frankly New York State  
11 wasn't ready, the farm community wasn't  
12 ready, and our municipalities and county  
13 governments were not ready for the -- you  
14 know, the onslaught of developers with solar  
15 ideas.

16 So those are technical, legal  
17 questions. I'll go back to our counsel on  
18 that.

19 I think the best thing that we can do  
20 to serve the agricultural community is an  
21 educational one, and we've sent our Land and  
22 Water people out across the state to educate  
23 them on, you know, some of the language  
24 that's in the agreement that's being put in

1 front of them. There were all kinds of  
2 language issues and rights that farmers were  
3 giving up if they agreed to accept, you know,  
4 \$2,000 per acre per year for the next  
5 20 years. That sounds pretty attractive, but  
6 some of them were very poor deals.

7 So for us I think it's very much  
8 continue to work with NYSERDA, continue to  
9 work with the technical working groups there,  
10 continue to educate our communities. Because  
11 we can't achieve our solar goals just on the  
12 back of farmland.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN GRAY: Thank you.

14 And so just in my remaining time, I'll  
15 go back to Commissioner Simons. So I just  
16 offer you or ask you to look at your boat  
17 launches, especially your standalone boat  
18 launches. I know we talked offline here.  
19 You know, they're in a struggle to get  
20 funding and get adequate attention from both  
21 staff and financial resources. So we have a  
22 lot of standalone boat launches, they're very  
23 important to fishing and other activities.

24 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

1           One hundred percent. Thank you.

2                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Sorry  
3 to cut you off.

4                   Our ranker for Finance, Tom O'Mara,  
5 five minutes.

6                   SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you,  
7 Chairwoman.

8                   Good afternoon, gentlemen. Thank you  
9 both for being here. Commissioner Ball in  
10 particular, thank you for your many years of  
11 service to this great state, and your  
12 continued service.

13                   I want to thank you for your comments  
14 earlier in regards to support for industrial  
15 hemp. I'm still very hopeful on that  
16 industry in New York and that we get some  
17 traction on that in addition to the other  
18 uses of hemp. But the industrial stuff is  
19 extremely important and promising, I believe.

20                   And also to your efforts on making  
21 sure we protect farmland, in light of the  
22 ever-expanding solar industry in New York  
23 eating up farmland across the state. So look  
24 forward to continued review and guidance on

1           that, so thank you for that.

2                     A couple of specific questions on some  
3 line items. I see a 61 percent cut to the  
4 New York State Apple Growers Association.  
5 Now, last year was a devastating year to the  
6 crop for the apple industry in New York  
7 State. Can you explain to me why we're  
8 cutting that association by \$760,000, this  
9 year's 61 percent cut?

10                    AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: I  
11 believe that was, if I'm correct, your folks'  
12 good work on adding that funding there. The  
13 Governor came in at the same level this year  
14 as she did last year. That reflected your  
15 inputs.

16                    And again, this budget is really --  
17 the Governor's budget is the starting gun,  
18 and we rely so much on your input in the  
19 Senate and the Assembly for things that are  
20 important to you.

21                    But that was a legislative add and  
22 worth considering again.

23                    SENATOR O'MARA: You agree that the  
24 apple crop in New York took a big hit last

1 year because of some weather incidents of, I  
2 think, hail and frost?

3 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: I  
4 visited some farms in your area last year.  
5 And we've had some challenging years  
6 recently. You know, we set a record for the  
7 number of tornados in New York State in one  
8 single day last year. We set flooding  
9 records. I was in your neighborhood looking  
10 at some pretty big devastation there.

11 So absolutely. And I think it's not  
12 just a state issue, it is a national issue.  
13 You know, the national crop is also facing a  
14 pretty significant surplus as a result of  
15 some trade decisions that have been made over  
16 the recent years.

17 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you. And I was  
18 going to get to commenting on your visit to  
19 Canisteo in the post-flooding. I thank you  
20 very much for that and your leadership in  
21 that, and certainly our agriculture industry  
22 across -- and farmers across the  
23 Southern Tier. Appreciate your work on this.

24 Another significant area that's seen a

1 significant line-item cut is the New York  
2 Farm Viability Institute, with over a  
3 million-dollar cut, a 53 percent cut. Is  
4 that the same thing, where we need to fight  
5 to get that back in, the Legislature, one of  
6 these fights we have every year?

7 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
8 at least at this level, yes. That was -- you  
9 know, that was your legislative add last  
10 year. We support the Farm Viability  
11 Institute. And actually we fund them in some  
12 alternative ways with small -- not small, but  
13 specialty block grant funding on some  
14 projects that they have subscribed to us.

15 So we believe in the viability of  
16 farms in New York State.

17 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you,  
18 Commissioner. I'll move on in my remaining  
19 time to Commissioner Simons.

20 Thank you, and it was great to see you  
21 at Stony Brook this summer --

22 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
23 Yes.

24 SENATOR O'MARA: -- for that.

1           A couple of questions on the funding  
2           for ORDA, particularly in the ski resorts,  
3           particularly focusing on recreational skiing,  
4           cross-country, downhill.

5           There's an \$85 million capital  
6           appropriation, an increase of 15 million,  
7           21 percent, to ORDA; another line of 25  
8           million, an increase of 12.5 million, a  
9           100 percent increase on that line for ORDA.  
10          I looked at facility things, but I think that  
11          also encompasses recreational skiing  
12          facilities as well. Can you break that out  
13          on what of that is going towards traditional  
14          recreational industry and what we're doing in  
15          this study to help all the private industries  
16          that we have?

17          And I support ORDA and these  
18          facilities, but it's very unfair competition  
19          when we send hundreds of millions of dollars  
20          to these state-owned ski facilities -- which  
21          are fantastic, and I'm a skier -- but we've  
22          got other great private facilities that we  
23          can't even get tax breaks on energy for them  
24          to make snow.

1                   So can you address the fairness of  
2                   that competition, so to speak, between these?

3                   PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
4                   You know, and that's a -- it's a great  
5                   question, a very fair question. I'd like to  
6                   take some time to investigate that further.  
7                   We were discussing that very thing just the  
8                   other day.

9                   You know, parks are communities,  
10                  right? Parks are partners in many aspects.  
11                  And we try to elevate, you know, our agency  
12                  to assisting communities in a number of  
13                  different ways. But I'm happy to drill in  
14                  very -- you know, much deeper on that very  
15                  idea, and I'll get back to you with a more  
16                  firm answer when we have some more time to  
17                  discuss.

18                  SENATOR O'MARA: Thanks. Thank you.

19                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

20                  Assembly.

21                  CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblymember  
22                  Carrie Woerner.

23                  ASSEMBLYWOMAN WOERNER: Thank you,  
24                  Commissioners. It's always a pleasure to see

1           you both.

2                   Commissioner Ball, could you give us  
3           an update on the meat processing plant  
4           grants? Have they been -- were there  
5           applications made? Are they moving forward?

6                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: On  
7           the New York grants?

8                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN WOERNER: Yeah.

9                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: They  
10          are all out. They're all out the door.

11                   And it was a \$5 million program. I  
12          think we were over subscribed. I think we  
13          were able to award 26 different entities some  
14          funding there. But we spent that money.  
15          It's out the door and doing good work. So  
16          that was a tremendous success.

17                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN WOERNER: Great. Do we  
18          need to do more of this? Do we -- where are  
19          we on capacity for meat processing?

20                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
21          I'm going to make the Senator smile, but I  
22          think it was a great program. And it  
23          identified a real weakness in New York  
24          State's supply management of, you know, meat

1 products.

2 We saw on -- the federal side there  
3 was over a billion dollars put forth to  
4 advance processing around the country. Too  
5 much of it is centered in one part of the  
6 country. But we had very little takers.  
7 Maybe it was because of the federal  
8 government and the complexity of dealing with  
9 them and the complexity of the grants, but we  
10 did not have success with that, even though  
11 we called every processor in the state, USDA  
12 or custom, and tried to convince them to go  
13 that way.

14 But the state monies went out very  
15 quickly, in a rapid period of time, and made  
16 a difference. It continues to make a  
17 difference.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WOERNER: So it has  
19 expanded our capacity.

20 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yeah,  
21 I think so.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WOERNER: Terrific.

23 You talked about the state fairs, and  
24 I know in the past we've done capital

1 programs for county fairs to help them  
2 upgrade their infrastructure. We didn't do  
3 one last year because there was still money  
4 that had not been -- had not been applied for  
5 yet. Where are we on the need for an  
6 additional fund for county fairs?

7 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: I  
8 have mixed feelings about this one because we  
9 still have funding available through the four  
10 rounds that the Legislature approved for  
11 funding there. And I have to say so much of  
12 it is laying on the shoulders of both a  
13 little bit of -- many of these smaller fairs  
14 are volunteer organizations, may not have the  
15 expertise to navigate New York's SFS system  
16 or what used to be called Grant's Gateway.

17 So at the department we've dedicated a  
18 group of people to helping hold the hands and  
19 walk people through the process. That's been  
20 the holdup, largely. But we still have  
21 funding available to do that.

22 On the other side of the fence, we do  
23 have funding also to help with transportation  
24 of inner-city, generations of rural kids to

1 get to county fairs, to help them with  
2 marketing their fairs. And that's been very  
3 successful, appreciated, and that will  
4 continue. That we have additional funding  
5 for.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WOERNER: Thank you very  
7 much.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
9 Just looking through -- oh, hi,  
10 Senator Fahy, you've joined us. Do you have  
11 a question, since it's a Senator time?

12 SENATOR FAHY: Yes.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, three  
14 minutes for Senator Fahy.

15 SENATOR FAHY: Thank you.

16 I stepped away for a while to head to  
17 conference, and so I apologize if this was  
18 already asked, and you can just tell me it  
19 was.

20 But for Commissioner Ball, we've done  
21 a little work on conservation easements here  
22 in -- locally with Guilderland, Town of  
23 Bethlehem, and I know a number of other areas  
24 have done conservation easements. Does that

1 help? And is there something more that  
2 should be done with farmland protection and,  
3 you know, smart-growth planning?

4 And if you could answer that in  
5 relation to some of the debates that I know  
6 you referenced earlier to Senator Hinchey  
7 with regard to balancing and protecting  
8 farmland while moving on solar energy  
9 initiatives and more.

10 So how can we do this in a way that  
11 makes it workable for all and is protecting  
12 some of our best farmland while also growing  
13 the land trusts and others, if you would.

14 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yeah.  
15 So a great question. And in particular when  
16 it comes to this area, everyone pretty easily  
17 recognizes the encroachment of suburbia onto  
18 farmlands and the need to protect that  
19 farmland.

20 What's less understood is community  
21 gardens, urban farms, they also have  
22 conservation problems. And so we've expanded  
23 our thinking to include those groups, which I  
24 think is excellent. I think the use of

1 easements has proven and will prove to be an  
2 effective tool to help a beginner farmer, a  
3 new farmer, or a farmer that wants to expand,  
4 change their operation to invest in it again.

5 So those conversations are very live,  
6 and I very much appreciate the opportunity to  
7 look at it in this -- in your neighborhood in  
8 particular.

9 SENATOR FAHY: Thank you. And I'd  
10 love to pursue any of that a little further.  
11 They have been helpful here with at least  
12 giving options, particularly for every  
13 high-desired land and developments. As you  
14 said, there's encroachment from -- as the  
15 Capital Region continues to grow.

16 And then switching gears in my last  
17 few seconds, Commissioner Simons, just  
18 your -- commend you on the veterans' Lifetime  
19 Liberty Pass, which is just wonderful. Can  
20 you just talk a little bit about  
21 accessibility to state parks with those who  
22 may not have cars? I know that we've -- your  
23 numbers keep growing, but physical  
24 accessibility remains a challenge, in all of

1           20 seconds.

2                   PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

3           And so appreciate that question. It's  
4           something we've talked extensively on. We  
5           started piloting programs -- City of Albany,  
6           Tompkins County, even down at Jones Beach,  
7           partnering with local public transportation  
8           units to increase visits to parks -- "Nature  
9           Bus" in Tompkins and Albany County. We are  
10          finally collecting data to see that success,  
11          but we think we can implement it elsewhere  
12          across the state.

13                   SENATOR FAHY: Thank you.

14                   Thank you, Chair. Thank you.

15                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

16                   Assembly.

17                   CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblymember Ed  
18          Ra, the ranker on Ways and Means.

19                   ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

20                   So for Parks, you mentioned the Ryder  
21          Cup, and I have a couple of questions both  
22          pertaining to the Ryder Cup and to Bethpage  
23          in general.

24                   First, a lot of us downstate heard

1 from constituents when the ticket prices came  
2 out. Obviously there's a potential -- this  
3 is a great international event, potentially  
4 have a great home court advantage, so to  
5 speak, for the USA in it, and people are  
6 concerned they're being priced out. Is there  
7 anything being done with regard to that?

8 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

9 Yeah, so we've had extensive conversations  
10 with the PGA, and we expect to offer, you  
11 know, days that are significantly reduced,  
12 you know, at the cost to the public to  
13 attend, you know, some or part of that event.  
14 But it's something that is very much on our  
15 mind, being affordability. But we're having  
16 a lot of discussions and we'll have some news  
17 on that shortly, sir.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And then with  
19 regard to Bethpage Park in general and the  
20 multiple golf courses there, I'm sure you're  
21 aware of this, but I -- recently it was  
22 brought to my attention that there's a lot of  
23 concern that there are bots and computer  
24 programs that are taking advantage of the

1 booking system and making it very difficult  
2 for people to get tee times. Somebody did a  
3 very detailed analysis of this and basically  
4 it was seeing that like on Bethpage Black, I  
5 think in particular, there was a tremendous  
6 amount of cancellations, which indicated  
7 maybe people are booking them and then  
8 cancelling them if they can't sell them. And  
9 a lot of them were from out of state  
10 accounts, which my understanding is they're  
11 able only to book five days out as opposed to  
12 seven.

13 So I'm wondering what the  
14 Parks Department is doing with regard to that  
15 issue.

16 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS: So  
17 we have instituted sort of, you know, putting  
18 tee times aside for walkups and also, you  
19 know, spreading that across a number of  
20 different courses, the five different courses  
21 that we have.

22 We are investigating that and, you  
23 know, any misuse of our system we're drilling  
24 in on to identify if there is a misuse of

1           bots. And we'll take the appropriate action  
2           to reduce that opportunity.

3                       ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And is there a  
4           particular -- anything or maybe something we  
5           should be looking at legislatively, in  
6           particular, if somebody is not only using a  
7           bot but selling those tee times? Which this  
8           is something that is a publicly owned course,  
9           taxpayers are paying for it.

10                      PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
11           Because of -- it's affectionately called the  
12           People's Country Club. You know, certainly  
13           I'd love to sit down with the team and  
14           identify any, you know, concrete ideas. But  
15           it's a real problem. It's a real problem  
16           that we are looking into heavily.

17                      You know, the People's Course, the  
18           People's Country Club, it's -- we take great  
19           pride in that. And being that the Ryder Cup,  
20           we saw the PGA championship being held, the  
21           U.S. Open, it is a great venue and it's a  
22           great venue to host these events because of  
23           the fans and the public that come out to it.  
24           And we need to make sure that they have the

1 same accessibility to the course that  
2 everybody else has too.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. Thank you, I  
4 appreciate that. And I think we'll follow up  
5 with you and your staff with regard to that  
6 issue.

7 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
8 Absolutely.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: One of my other Long  
10 Island colleagues wanted to ask about that  
11 there are trail projects within this budget,  
12 and he was just wondering exactly how that  
13 money is going to be doled out, how it's  
14 going to be implemented and doing the trails  
15 within our parks.

16 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
17 Yeah, and I appreciate that. We can -- once  
18 finalized, we can share with some of the  
19 projects coming out of our own 200 million  
20 going towards trails.

21 Trails are important, right? I think  
22 when you look at the Governor's NY PLAYS and  
23 it's a focus on traditional playgrounds, you  
24 know, we will further expand that definition

1 of what a playground is, and we think in many  
2 cases trails could fall into a category --  
3 falls into a category within our own thinking  
4 as we build out our capital programs.

5 Because of sort of that mental and physical  
6 wellness, and particularly of our older  
7 youth, our teenagers and all those who use  
8 our parks, we find that trail usage goes up  
9 each and every year.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Great.

11 Quickly for the ag side, I know, you  
12 know, you're aware there was this piece of  
13 legislation last year to try to make sure  
14 that farms could take advantage of the tax  
15 credit when they were I guess utilizing  
16 different entities with regard to their  
17 payroll, that the Governor ultimately vetoed.

18 What's being done to make sure that,  
19 you know, these farms can take advantage of  
20 that tax credit? Which I think is vital to  
21 them with the new overtime rules.

22 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL:

23 Right. Well, discussions are ongoing, and  
24 right now we're talking with the industry.

1           It works pretty well for -- it works very  
2           well for partnerships, sole proprietors. But  
3           when you get into some of the complicated  
4           management forms that we have on some of our  
5           dairy farms, there's concerns about the exact  
6           language.

7                         We want to make sure that the entity  
8           who is paying the payroll for their workers  
9           on their farm is the entity that gets the tax  
10          credits. And sometimes when there's  
11          management corporations involved, et cetera,  
12          it can get confusing. So that language is  
13          being clarified.

14                        ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

15                        CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

16                        I think I am next, 10 minutes as the  
17          chair.

18                        So I'm going to start asking every  
19          government commissioner who comes here a  
20          variation on this question, but I'll start  
21          with you, with Parks.

22                        So we have 22 federal parks in  
23          New York State. If the federal government  
24          starts to defund them, what is the impact on

1 us and what are we going to do about it?  
2 Because they're still parks in our state.

3 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
4 You know, and it's -- we faced similar  
5 situations in the past with the State of  
6 Liberty and Ellis Island, and we've been able  
7 to be a partner in maintaining and keeping  
8 them open.

9 I think when you look at the magnitude  
10 of 22 parks, it's not a large number by any  
11 respect when you consider the size of  
12 New York, but it's an important number. And  
13 always open and willing to having  
14 conversations. Of course it comes at a great  
15 cost, the operational capacity. But we have  
16 many partnerships with our federal partners  
17 at other parks as well that, you know, it's a  
18 good relationship. And we like to think  
19 we're the great unifier, right? So maybe  
20 there's an outlier with parks and  
21 understanding that most people can appreciate  
22 the benefits of outdoors.

23 But we are watching and monitoring the  
24 temperature in Washington very closely. I

1 think when we look at the history, parks --  
2 New York State, you know, certainly has  
3 always been willing to put itself at the  
4 table as a partner and lead if need be. And  
5 I think that doesn't change with -- depending  
6 on the shift that may or may not happen.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 I think the rest of mine are for the  
9 Ag & Markets commissioner.

10 When I think -- you already partly  
11 answered the question before about concerns  
12 about workforce on the farms, given current  
13 federal policy. Are there other concerns we  
14 ought to have for our agricultural sector  
15 because of changes in federal policy?

16 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
17 we're going to watch this very closely.  
18 There's more to learn than we know today. We  
19 do have some reputable partners coming in;  
20 USDA, we're excited to see that, people that  
21 I know that we have relationships with. And  
22 largely it's relationships.

23 Concerns around the climate, some of  
24 the programs that have been in place for the

1 last several years. We were able to get a --  
2 advise Washington on a Nourish NY-style  
3 program, it's called the LFPA. We were able  
4 to distribute, you know, over \$50 million  
5 worth of funding like Nourish has done  
6 through their funds in New York State, which  
7 was great.

8 I think that we're in the relationship  
9 business. And the funding that comes to us  
10 from FDA is for food safety, for doing  
11 testing, for inspections and things like  
12 that. These aren't just fun projects, these  
13 are actual work. We contract with the  
14 federal government at FDA, at USDA, to be on  
15 farms doing inspections for them, carrying  
16 out the work that needs to be done. So it's  
17 not all fun and, you know, here is extra  
18 money kind of stuff, it's actual tasks that  
19 we perform for them.

20 So the nature of those and what goes  
21 around them, you know, we have more to learn.  
22 Certainly Farm Bill -- you know, is this  
23 administration going to be able to get the  
24 Farm Bill done in a timely fashion? Which is

1           probably the most far-reaching, most  
2           impactful farm bill to New York State this  
3           time. So those are things we're going to  
4           watch closely, we just have to pay attention  
5           to, because it's a little bit of the federal  
6           administration, a little bit of Congress.

7                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So it's my  
8           understanding that when it comes to food  
9           safety as far as, you know, meat and other  
10          things, it has been the USDA responsible for  
11          inspections.

12                   So we know that we're now in the  
13          middle of an avian bird flu crisis. I just  
14          read about I guess the duck farm on  
15          Long Island having to I believe kill off its  
16          entire flock of 100,000 ducks.

17                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yup.

18                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And so  
19          historically that would have been USDA doing  
20          inspections and making sure that our poultry  
21          was healthy. So does that -- are we  
22          concerned that they will no longer be doing  
23          this kind of work for us?

24                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,

1           that would be terrible. But we do have to  
2           look at those relationships.

3                       USDA-APHIS, who manages the meat side  
4           and manages the, you know, plant and animal,  
5           those are conversations we have -- we  
6           consider them partners with us in a very big  
7           way. I expect that partnership to continue.  
8           Will they roll back some of their partnership  
9           efforts? I don't know. I hope not. But we  
10          meet with them very regularly, work very  
11          closely with them.

12                      So meat is a little bit unique in that  
13          USDA-certified meat means something. We do  
14          not have a certification program in New York  
15          State.

16                      But when it comes to produce, grocery  
17          stores, food manufacturing facilities, dairy  
18          processing facilities, that's the Department  
19          of Agriculture in New York State that does  
20          those inspections for FDA, for example.

21                      CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22                      So we know under CLCPA law we have  
23          targets we have to reach on economy-wide  
24          greenhouse gas emissions, and it's my

1           understanding that unfortunately agriculture  
2           emissions have not decreased. Do we have  
3           plans to try to increase the decrease of  
4           emissions in our agricultural sector?

5                     AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: We  
6           sure do. And we're doing some really great  
7           work in that neighborhood.

8                     New York agriculture has -- was very  
9           happy and pleased and able to serve on the  
10          Climate Action Council. We had a chair  
11          there. I got to head up the Forestry and  
12          Agriculture Work Group, and I'm happy to say  
13          we were the only work group that came out  
14          with consensus on what was the thing to do.

15                    But in agriculture today we have the  
16          ability to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.  
17          We have the ability to sequester carbon. We  
18          have the ability to reduce nitrous oxide  
19          emissions on our farms. And we have the  
20          ability to make energy on our farms.

21                    So I'm very optimistic about our way  
22          forward. We need to invest some, we need to  
23          work a little bit harder on this, we need to  
24          get back to cap-and-invest, which is -- got

1           tabled for a little while because of some  
2           extracurricular activities in all our  
3           governments. But I'm looking forward to  
4           getting back to that conversation, because  
5           agriculture is part of the answer here. We  
6           don't just make it less bad, we actually make  
7           it better.

8                         CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Good. We want  
9           you to.

10                        You know that I am a big supporter of  
11           the New York City farmers market system and  
12           the system in Hunts Point of moving New York  
13           State produced and grown products down to  
14           Hunts Point so that it can be sold throughout  
15           the city. How are those programs doing? Are  
16           we seeing increases in the sales? Do we  
17           measure that?

18                        AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: We  
19           have seen dramatic increases in sales, and we  
20           have to because we have a tremendous  
21           population, particularly in that big urban  
22           center, that doesn't know much about us.

23                        We're getting ready any day now --  
24           it's been a little bit delayed by New York

1 City -- in opening the food hub in the Bronx,  
2 which will be a New York Grown and Certified  
3 food hub, the biggest one down there, provide  
4 us access to the South Bronx, to Brooklyn,  
5 parts of Harlem, all the boroughs.

6 We're very anxious to get that done.  
7 The building is up, we need to get the  
8 certificate of occupancy, and waiting for a  
9 day to be there. I'd love to have you come  
10 join us there when we kick that off, because  
11 it's going to dramatically increase the  
12 accessibility of food for the boroughs.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

14 So I support selling wine in  
15 supermarkets, and basically the analysis is  
16 it will help New York wine producers sell  
17 more wine. I'm curious what your opinion is.

18 (Pause; laughter.)

19 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: I  
20 will say, first of all, not to pass the buck,  
21 but that's an SLA issue. And we've talked  
22 with SLA about it.

23 I think, if done properly, it could be  
24 a significant boon to New York producers and

1 consumers both. We were able in our last  
2 year to get direct shipment for our liquor  
3 producers in the state, which was an  
4 important step forward. This is a  
5 conversation that's been looming out there as  
6 long as you've been up here and before I came  
7 up here. So it needs to be carefully thought  
8 out.

9 But I look forward to that discussion  
10 and anything we can add to that.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm going to give  
12 back my one minute and 22 seconds to the  
13 Assembly. Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: We'll try not to  
15 use it.

16 We've been joined by Assemblywoman  
17 Jo Anne Simon.

18 Our next questioner will be  
19 Assemblymember Brian Cunningham.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN CUNNINGHAM: Thank you,  
21 Chair Krueger, for the additional minute and  
22 27 seconds.

23 (Laughter.)

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Nope, I just said

1           you couldn't have it. Three minutes.

2                   (Laughter.)

3                   ASSEMBLYMAN CUNNINGHAM: I can't help  
4 but try.

5                   And Mr. Chair, the chairmanship looks  
6 good on you. Congratulations on being  
7 appointed.

8                   I have a really quick question; I'll  
9 be under a minute. I just wanted to know if  
10 there are any current studies or research  
11 into climate-resilient crops and  
12 climate-smart farming practices right now in  
13 the State of New York.

14                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yes.

15                   ASSEMBLYMAN CUNNINGHAM: That was a  
16 short answer.

17                   And is there more to be done there,  
18 particularly looking at some of the  
19 climate-change things happening across the  
20 state and the country. Just wanted to know  
21 if there's more we can do on that front.

22                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yeah,  
23 continue to support this budget with  
24 climate-resilient funding in it. Because

1 we've been able to significantly increase  
2 that funding up to over \$17 million. And we  
3 have -- that helps farmers deal with  
4 droughts; you know, what to do and how to  
5 raise those crops successfully in a very dry  
6 year. And also it's something farmers deal  
7 with: The extremes, and what about flooding,  
8 what about too much moisture going on?

9 We work with our soil and water  
10 conservation districts all around the state  
11 to implement best practices. And that's a  
12 great program, and one that's oversubscribed  
13 every year.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN CUNNINGHAM: Perfect.

15 I am also going to give back a minute  
16 and 45 seconds.

17 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

18 Assemblywoman Paula Kay. For three  
19 minutes.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KAY: Thank you. Thank  
21 you, Mr. Chair.

22 So I have a question actually for both  
23 commissioners today. I'll start with  
24 Commissioner Ball.

1                   Mental well-being of farmers is  
2                   certainly important and imperative, so I was  
3                   interested in funding for FarmNet in the  
4                   budget.

5                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: We  
6                   are too. FarmNet, they've been great  
7                   volunteers, great partners with New York  
8                   State with regards to mental health in a big  
9                   way.

10                  I would add NYCAMH, which has been --  
11                  operates in a base in Cooperstown. It's been  
12                  so important and critical in helping to  
13                  educate farmers and farmworkers both.

14                  I think our conversations at Ag &  
15                  Markets with the Office of Mental Health,  
16                  looking at mental first aid and the need for  
17                  that amongst our population, amongst the  
18                  state government. And it's something we saw,  
19                  if you remember, you know, it was about a  
20                  decade ago, actually, when we saw suicides on  
21                  farms and we saw extreme stress in the dairy  
22                  industry in particular. And we were training  
23                  our inspectors, our animal inspectors, our  
24                  plant inspectors as we have interactions with

1 people on farms, to look for warning signs,  
2 look for things that we could do to help  
3 identify.

4 So I think you've highlighted  
5 something that's very critical in New York  
6 especially. Things have just gotten more  
7 challenging with social media, with  
8 cellphones activity. This is a real  
9 sensitive area. We all should be trained, as  
10 we are in fundamental first aid, in  
11 fundamental mental first aid.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KAY: So there's funds  
13 set aside for FarmNet?

14 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL:  
15 FarmNet has a line in our local -- local --  
16 Aid to Localities budget, I think it's a  
17 million dollars. I don't think that's  
18 unreasonable at all.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KAY: Thank you.

20 And very quickly, Commissioner Simons,  
21 parks. I'm very interested in the NY BRICKS  
22 program and wondering -- and maybe you can  
23 provide this in writing to me later because  
24 we don't have a lot of time. But it's --

1 municipalities and not-for-profits, it's the  
2 goal for them to work together? Or are those  
3 two separate grants that each would be  
4 competing for?

5 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS: So  
6 it definitely would be structured towards the  
7 municipalities. And again, with -- and I  
8 think -- the numbers are still being worked  
9 out, but I think it could be up to a  
10 \$15 million max cap on the grant program.  
11 I'll confirm that number with you.

12 But the idea is to create community  
13 centers or have the opportunity to repair,  
14 refurbish the current infrastructure to more  
15 promote that community engagement.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KAY: Love it.

17 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
18 Yeah, it's a great --

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KAY: Very interested,  
20 thank you.

21 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
22 Great. Thank you.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Is that it?

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KAY: That's it. Thank

1           you, Mr. Chairman.

2                   CHAIRMAN PRETLOW:   Assemblywoman Jodi  
3           Giglio.

4                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO:   Yes.   Good  
5           afternoon.   Thank you for being here.

6                   So I would like to speak a little bit  
7           about the Crescent Duck Farm located in my  
8           district.   The duck farm -- it's the last  
9           duck farm on Long Island.   It was established  
10          in 1908, over a hundred years old.   A  
11          fourth-generation farmer right now leading  
12          the charge, and children -- fifth and  
13          sixth -- on the way.

14                   So as you know, they had to euthanize  
15          100,000 ducks due to the avian bird flu.   It  
16          was a tremendous -- it still is a tremendous  
17          impact on them.   And I want to thank you,  
18          commissioner, and I really want to thank  
19          Dr. Bennett and Dr. Collins for working with  
20          the owners of the farm.

21                   But, you know, they just spent  
22          \$5 million on wastewater treatment and it  
23          costs a million dollars a year to run the  
24          wastewater treatment plant.   He's expended

1           \$500,000 so far in just the composting and  
2           remediation. And he's not asking the state  
3           for any money, which is shocking -- he's  
4           using his own capital.

5                         But what are we doing about the avian  
6           bird flu to prevent this happening now that  
7           it's moving into livestock in other parts of  
8           the country, and France is using vaccinations  
9           for the birds to prevent the avian bird flu  
10          from killing these flocks?

11                        And also about the spotted lantern  
12          fly. I mean, these are threats that we've  
13          been talking about for many years, and I'd  
14          like to know what research is being done to  
15          prevent this from happening to any other  
16          farmer.

17                        And again, I want to thank you for  
18          your continued cooperation of working with  
19          the Corwin family at the Crescent Duck Farm.

20                        AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
21          please give them my best when you see them  
22          and talk to them. I look forward to seeing  
23          them at food shows, where he's always there  
24          supporting Taste New York and New York Grown

1           & Certified stuff, so ...

2                   This is a very painful thing to watch  
3           and have to be a part of. And it's so  
4           random, because it's, you know, ducks and  
5           geese that are flying through the migratory  
6           pathways that are distributing this virus.  
7           They're immune to it, but they leave us with  
8           it.

9                   So it's been a great partnership. It  
10          occupied most of our weekend, you know, when  
11          it hit, talking with the USDA, talking with  
12          our people to get the job done to our  
13          satisfaction.

14                  Yeah, we'll do whatever we can to help  
15          him sustain the family farm, in any way we  
16          can be helpful in negotiating the  
17          indemnification with USDA.

18                  I will say, though, when it comes to  
19          high-path AI, the state departments of  
20          agriculture, all the commissioners across the  
21          country, all the state animal health  
22          officials, the Dr. Bennetts all around the  
23          country -- we talk with FDA, we talk with  
24          USDA. We're talking on this subject every

1 day. Everyone's looking at the vaccinate  
2 opportunities. We're testing milk across the  
3 country. We're doing everything we can in  
4 New York at least to keep the dairy side of  
5 it out of New York State.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Thank you. I  
7 just -- it's devastating, and I don't want to  
8 see it happen to any of our other cattle  
9 farmers or steer farmers or duck farmers.

10 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yeah.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: So thank you.

12 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Thank  
13 you. You bet.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Joseph  
15 Angelino.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN ANGELINO: Thank you,  
17 Chairman.

18 Commissioners, thank you very much for  
19 being here. I appreciate your time. And  
20 I'll stay in my legislative committee  
21 membership lane and direct my questions  
22 regarding parks.

23 I was happy to hear you're increasing  
24 or at least you've had a couple of classes of

1 police officers graduate for the Park Police.  
2 And hopefully that maintains your workforce,  
3 because I know you're at -- it's hard for you  
4 to do when there's no equity between the  
5 retirement systems of other officers.

6 My first question regarding the Park  
7 Police is, do you -- would you support or do  
8 you support the end of the New York State  
9 Police operational control of the  
10 Park Police?

11 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS: I  
12 support the best avenue for public safety in  
13 our parks. And I truly believe the  
14 Park Police are a crucial area of our  
15 workforce that maintain a sense of comfort  
16 and security in our parks because of their  
17 presence. They're in and around the parks  
18 and, in conjunction with our Park Rangers and  
19 our park staff, offer a much-needed resource  
20 in our parks to give the utmost public safety  
21 to our patrons, yes.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN ANGELINO: So currently  
23 the Park Police have put their investigators  
24 back into uniform and the New York State

1           Police BCI investigates major crime. Would  
2           you like to have your own officers back  
3           conducting your own park investigations?

4                       PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS: I  
5           think when you look at public safety you have  
6           to look at, you know, New York State  
7           resources and all the resources available to  
8           do, you know, the different jobs that are  
9           required in law enforcement.

10                      I value the tremendous partnership we  
11           have with the State Police, even our local  
12           law enforcement agencies. And together,  
13           together I think we can deliver, we have  
14           delivered better than ever, in the last few  
15           years, you know, the best public safety at  
16           our parks.

17                      But that discussion is ongoing, and we  
18           continue to have it. But I know the State  
19           Police in that area, they do it well. We do  
20           it well as well. And it's a matter of  
21           finding out what the right niche is between  
22           the two units. But I think we certainly have  
23           the ability to do so.

24                      ASSEMBLYMAN ANGELINO: I'm very fond

1 of the Park Police. They're the  
2 organization -- especially out in the  
3 Niagara Frontier, the specialties that they  
4 do, you know, the rope rescue, it's just  
5 amazing.

6 They're also, a lot of people don't  
7 realize, New York State's first state law  
8 enforcement agency.

9 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS: A  
10 hundred and forty years, yes, sir.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN ANGELINO: Real quick, I'd  
12 like to see more marketing, and tell me what  
13 you can do to highlight more our great  
14 veterans at the Purple Heart Hall of Honor in  
15 New Windsor. Please expound on that.

16 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
17 You know, so that is a very special place in  
18 our system, in our hearts. We -- you know, I  
19 think what we saw in the centennial year last  
20 year, we launched the most aggressive  
21 marketing campaign in the history of our  
22 agency. And we saw -- we had the data to  
23 back it up.

24 And you can point to the record

1           visitation, you know, in the 4.5 percent,  
2           88 million. But it's certainly -- we're now  
3           looking at different parts of the agency to  
4           incorporate into the marketing plan as well.

5                    ASSEMBLYMAN ANGELINO: Thank you,  
6           Commissioner. Appreciate your time.

7                    PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
8           Great, appreciate your questions.

9                    CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Next is Assemblyman  
10          John Lemondes.

11                   ASSEMBLYMAN LEMONDES: Thank you,  
12          Chairman.

13                    Thank you, Commissioners. Appreciate  
14          you being here today. My question is for  
15          Commissioner Ball.

16                    With respect to the annual increase in  
17          demand for New York's maple products, is  
18          there any discussion on easements for all of  
19          the maple that's locked up behind road  
20          frontage by different property owners?  
21          Similar to Senator Fahy's question on another  
22          topic.

23                    I'm just wondering if that -- if Ag &  
24          Markets would undertake that to enable, to

1 unlock that benefit for the whole state's  
2 economy.

3 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Well,  
4 that's an interesting question. We have gone  
5 down that path with regards to state lands.  
6 We have unlocked that door. We can get  
7 access for maple producers to get on state  
8 lands and find the maple trees.

9 Other private properties? I'd have to  
10 think about that one a little bit. You know,  
11 if there was a viable pathway that made  
12 sense, I guess we'd consider it. But that  
13 one looks problematic to me.

14 We are growing, we did invest more  
15 money in maple this year in the budget. You  
16 know, the research we're doing in New York  
17 State is great. As you know, we have more  
18 trees than Vermont, we have more producers  
19 than Vermont, and we can do more. And it's  
20 been a growing industry, so we're very proud  
21 of our maple industry.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN LEMONDES: Right,  
23 recognizing that it is difficult, that that  
24 would be difficult. I think that if we were

1           able to unlock that, though, even if it were  
2           only partially successful, it would still  
3           contribute greatly to the state's economy.

4                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL:   Yeah.  
5           Look forward to your ideas on that.

6                   ASSEMBLYMAN LEMONDES:   Thank you.

7                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL:   You  
8           bet.

9                   ASSEMBLYMAN LEMONDES:   Thank you,  
10          Chairman.

11                   CHAIRMAN PRETLOW:   Thank you.

12                   Assemblywoman Stefani Zinerman, three  
13          minutes.

14                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN ZINERMAN:   Thank you,  
15          Chairs Pretlow and Krueger.

16                   Commissioners, good afternoon.   How  
17          are you?

18                   PANEL:   Great.

19                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN ZINERMAN:   I have one  
20          question for each of you.   I missed you this  
21          summer at the State Fair, Commissioner Ball,  
22          so you're up first.

23                   My question is to follow up on the  
24          question asked by Senator Fernandez.   And I

1 appreciate your update on what happened with  
2 the Black and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers  
3 Fund. But it's been two years, so I'd like  
4 to know, how many people did we lose in that  
5 time? Because they were in the program  
6 because they were struggling. And so how  
7 many did we lose?

8 And would you be open -- although we  
9 have \$4 million, I assume those are for  
10 people who are already in the pipeline.  
11 Would you be open to asking for an additional  
12 million or 2 million for the people who are  
13 standing in line to enter the program?

14 As you know, in my little town in the  
15 56th Assembly District, we've got 15 out of  
16 19 schools growing food hydroponically and  
17 aquaponically and we've got people -- there  
18 are now 26 farms and gardens, you know,  
19 buying land upstate, and they need assistance  
20 too. So I know you said there's 4 million in  
21 the hopper, but we do have other people who  
22 are waiting. This program is a beacon of  
23 light, and for it to disappear in this year's  
24 budget is a little disarming to people,

1           especially as they look at the federal -- the  
2           adverse federal policies that are starting.

3                     AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL:  Yeah.  
4           Well, thank you for that question and for  
5           your passion about it.

6                     I've been able to visit a lot of  
7           schools in the New York City area, just  
8           recently in the Bronx and Brooklyn and even  
9           Manhattan.  And what they're doing through  
10          the Ag in the Classroom program is amazing.

11                    I'm not sure I could quantify how many  
12          people maybe got lost because of the delays  
13          in getting the funding and an administrator  
14          out, because we were able to, through our  
15          Nourish New York program and through the  
16          New York Food for New York Families program,  
17          which was part of the federal LFPA money, we  
18          were able to reach much further into the  
19          neighborhoods, the young farmers, the  
20          beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged  
21          farmers, and connect them with neighborhoods  
22          much more deeply even than Nourish, the  
23          pantries and the soup kitchens.

24                    ASSEMBLYWOMAN ZINERMAN:  So can we

1 talk offline about that?

2 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Yes,  
3 we can.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN ANGELINO: Just so I can  
5 ask the commissioner -- but I will say, you  
6 know, we're at about 139 and we used to have  
7 1 million Black farmers. So I really do not  
8 want to lose any more.

9 Commissioner, thank you so much for  
10 100 Years of Parks. I had a great time with  
11 my seniors in several parks this year.  
12 Please keep it up. Additional challenges --  
13 it doesn't have to be about a hundred years,  
14 but let's figure out how we can kind of keep  
15 it going.

16 My question to you is that I went to  
17 Barcelona, I saw some wonderful innovations  
18 for people with disabilities. So do you have  
19 plans to do any guided audio navigation or  
20 tactile pathways for visually impaired  
21 people? Talk about what you're doing for --  
22 to improve the parks for people with  
23 disabilities.

24 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:

1 Just people -- real quick, to people with  
2 disabilities, you know, just thanks for the  
3 funding. Right? So every new capital  
4 project takes into account our programming.  
5 It continues to, you know, bring up new and  
6 innovative ways to -- you know, to address  
7 accessibility. And also we're addressing  
8 some of those aspects, being as expansive as  
9 we are, just to improve accessibility. But  
10 it's one of the top priorities of the agency  
11 to improve this all across the board.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ZINERMAN: Say it again.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Sorry, we have to  
14 cut you off.

15 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you very  
16 much.

17 I just have a couple of questions,  
18 basically for Commissioner Ball.

19 You had mentioned earlier about the  
20 direct shipments. The naysayers had a lot of  
21 bad things to say about that proposed  
22 legislation, that, oh, the companies are  
23 going to come into New York and take over the  
24 industry. Did that ever come to fruition?

1                   AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: I  
2                   think I heard part of your question, but you  
3                   were -- it was about direct shipment of --

4                   CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: About the direct  
5                   shipment of cider and wine. The people that  
6                   were opposed to that legislation were  
7                   claiming that other companies would come from  
8                   out of state and set up shop and call  
9                   themselves New York companies and ship their  
10                  spirits in New York.

11                  Did that ever happen?

12                  AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: No.  
13                  My experience, actually we did direct  
14                  shipment of wine 20 years ago, and there were  
15                  the same predictions that things were going  
16                  to be very bad. And if anything, the wine  
17                  industry has grown both -- on every aspect of  
18                  it.

19                  So I don't expect any changes that  
20                  we'll see in direct shipment of cider and our  
21                  spirits. I don't think it's going to affect  
22                  that at all. It's going to be a success,  
23                  especially for the craft beverage producers  
24                  that we encouraged to get into the business

1 over the last decade.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay. And with the  
3 slow rollout of cannabis in New York, there  
4 was some talk about farmers that couldn't  
5 sell their product because there weren't  
6 enough licensed retail sellers, so they had  
7 to destroy their crops or they -- I don't  
8 know, I didn't know marijuana went bad. But  
9 it does, I guess. And there was a monetary  
10 loss to these farmers.

11 Were they ever made whole? Was  
12 anything ever done to alleviate the pressure  
13 that was put on them? Because that pressure  
14 was put on them by the state. We forced them  
15 to do certain things, we told them how to  
16 grow, when to grow and where to grow. And  
17 then we had nobody allowed to buy their  
18 product, they had to sit on it. And my  
19 understanding is it was like tens of millions  
20 of dollars. Was anything done to take the  
21 stress and the pressure off of those farmers?

22 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: You  
23 know, that's a complicated question. You've  
24 got a federal issue there, you've got a state

1 issue, and you have another agency, the  
2 Office of Cannabis Management. Their mission  
3 is much bigger than simply growing a crop.

4 But my understanding is that very few  
5 of them actually found satisfaction with what  
6 they lost. But today's a new day, and we've  
7 been -- recently, in the last two years, I  
8 know they've been working very actively to  
9 get more opportunities for them. That's the  
10 Office of Cannabis Management; I'd have to  
11 defer the specifics to them.

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: So they just burned  
13 their crop and moved on to the next time,  
14 next year?

15 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: Some  
16 did, yeah.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: They're coming to  
18 the Economic Development hearing.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Oh, they are?

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So you can ask  
21 them the question.

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay, we will.

23 Another thing on cannabis also, I've  
24 heard complaints that the odor emitted by the

1 crop as it's growing has been objected to by  
2 neighbors. Is that true, first of all, and  
3 if it is, is there anything that can be done  
4 to make it better, make the air better for  
5 the surrounding communities?

6 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: We  
7 anecdotally hear reports that the odor is  
8 objectionable to neighbors. I would defer  
9 what's being done about that to the Office of  
10 Cannabis Management. But that is a concern  
11 that we have heard.

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: So that's also  
13 Economic Development, I guess.

14 I just have one quick question for  
15 Commissioner Simons. You'd mentioned the  
16 swimming program, and you mentioned children.  
17 Is there anything being done for people like  
18 myself, adults, that need swimming lessons?

19 (Laughter.)

20 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
21 You know, we have a number of programs in our  
22 parks that certainly, while the concentration  
23 has been on our youth, there are certainly  
24 opportunities and considerations to expand,

1           you know, the program in the future.

2                     But right now it is targeted to the  
3 youths -- you know, it's a lifelong skill.

4                     But yeah, Riverbank, I know there are  
5 adult swim programs. So that select parks do  
6 have adult swim programming, and we find  
7 they're booked to capacity, as you can  
8 imagine. And it's looking to expand that in  
9 some of the other areas. And Riverbank,  
10 what's nice about that, that's a year-round,  
11 our only year-round swimming facility. But  
12 certainly trying to, you know, get that into  
13 the calendar on a regular basis on our summer  
14 pools that are open seasonally.

15                    CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: So the adult  
16 lessons are booked to capacity. Are the  
17 youth swim lessons also booked to capacity,  
18 or is there some space there?

19                    PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
20 Yeah, so we have signups, you know, around  
21 May, June of every year, and they book up  
22 pretty fast. You know, I know people are  
23 lining up, families are lining up on sign-up  
24 day. But what's nice about that is, you

1 know, two years ago we taught 400 kids to  
2 swim over a summer. With the tripling of the  
3 program, that jumped to over 2,000. But  
4 those programs are not only popular, but they  
5 are needed. And we're looking at expanding  
6 it in different parks across the system as  
7 well because they're very, very utilized.

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay, thank you.

9 And I just have one quick question for  
10 Commissioner Ball again.

11 Equine slaughter, something that's  
12 been near and dear to my heart for several  
13 years, and we recently did legislation that  
14 the Governor signed having to do with human  
15 consumption of horses and monitoring at the  
16 auctions that these horses are being shipped  
17 through New York. It is -- I believe it's a  
18 felony to transport horses for human  
19 consumption, but they're going through  
20 New York into Canada where they're being  
21 slaughtered and sent out to other countries  
22 in Europe and Asia.

23 I know the bill talked about a  
24 good-faith effort by Ag & Markets. Is it the

1           intention -- I hope your answer is a big  
2           yes -- that Ag & Markets will actually go and  
3           attend these auctions -- there's only one, I  
4           think it's Uniondale. You don't have to go  
5           to a lot of different places -- and just  
6           monitor these? Because the individuals that  
7           are selling these horses, it's the same  
8           person or persons, there's not very many of  
9           them. And we'd really like to stop that. I  
10          mean, these horses could be humanely  
11          euthanized and not tortured and sent to  
12          Canada to be, you know, whacked into horse  
13          steaks.

14                 So my question is, is it the full  
15          intention of Ag & Markets to actually monitor  
16          these auctions and make sure that horses are  
17          not being shipped off to other places for  
18          slaughter?

19                         AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: At  
20          this point that's a police activity. We are  
21          able to post, and we have people at auctions.

22                         But I think we need a more thoughtful  
23          conversation about the legality of someone --  
24          you know, when a horse is sold at an auction,

1           there needs to be a veterinary signature,  
2           there needs to be, you know, some legal  
3           documents signed, a purchase agreement,  
4           et cetera. And I think that's probably the  
5           vehicle that we need to have a thoughtful  
6           conversation about.

7                       CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Well, I have those  
8           papers, I have where horses were sold in  
9           Pennsylvania, auctioned through New York, and  
10          the papers, their final destination was the  
11          slaughterhouse where they make horsey steaks.

12                      So we know it's happening. And the  
13          paperwork that you're referring to is  
14          available. And I think that if we took --  
15          made a good-faith effort to stop this, that  
16          it would stop.

17                      But to turn the other -- you know, the  
18          blind eye to it doesn't really work.

19                      AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: It's  
20          not -- it's not really about turning a blind  
21          eye to it. We are engaged in conversations  
22          with Gaming to talk about putting more teeth  
23          into that law, so.

24                      CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay. Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

2 And to close for this panel, Senator  
3 Hinchey, chair of Agriculture, with a  
4 three-minute second round.

5 SENATOR HINCHEY: I'm so happy to kick  
6 off and close. Good for me.

7 (Laughter.)

8 AG & MARKETS COMMISSIONER BALL: What  
9 an honor.

10 SENATOR HINCHEY: Thank you all.  
11 Again, thank you for your time and for your  
12 answers today.

13 I'm going to close my last question  
14 with our commissioner for Parks, Mr. Simons.  
15 Thank you, Commissioner Simons.

16 In the 41st District some of the most  
17 beautiful areas, I would say, in the world,  
18 and wonderfully, Parks is a great partner on  
19 a lot of those places. However, they also  
20 all need capital improvements and capital  
21 projects, one of them being the Harlem Valley  
22 Rail Trail, which we're told the state is  
23 going to support -- without \$25 million for  
24 helping close the section of trail. I'm

1 hopeful -- I didn't see that in the budget.  
2 It's a smaller number in comparison to budget  
3 numbers, so I'm hopeful that that is  
4 happening.

5 But I'd like to just take a second to  
6 ask if this is on your radar: The  
7 Hudson-Athens Lighthouse. So that is  
8 nationally recognized as one of the seven  
9 historic landmarks to save across the  
10 country. It is an incredibly important  
11 historic landmark in our area, but really for  
12 our state.

13 Minority Leader Schumer has allocated  
14 significant federal dollars to help restore  
15 the lighthouse, but there is a state share.  
16 And that is something that I've also not seen  
17 in the budget, so I just want to check and  
18 see if that's on your radar and what the  
19 plans might be.

20 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS: So  
21 thank you. And you heard it here first,  
22 right? The Hudson {sic} Valley Rail Trail,  
23 there is that gap. And we are, you know --  
24 an existing \$200 million in providing the

1 gap -- it's 2.5, providing that it doesn't  
2 escalate. But we are prepared, under the  
3 Parks budget --

4 SENATOR HINCHEY: Thank you.

5 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS: --  
6 to close that gap and get that moving. So  
7 we're very excited about that.

8 SENATOR HINCHEY: Thank you.

9 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
10 We're watching the Hudson-Athens Lighthouse  
11 very closely. Many discussions with the  
12 Army Corps, who have been greatly involved in  
13 sort of -- you know, there's been dredging  
14 around that that impacted and is really  
15 expediting the erosion, you know, of that  
16 lighthouse and the foundation.

17 But watching that closely, working  
18 with our historic preservation partners, and  
19 just having active discussions. But like  
20 anything else, it's -- if it comes down to a  
21 capital request, it's just what's the nature  
22 of the capital request and how can we  
23 partner. It's, you know, much to -- a lot of  
24 the questions today were about communities,

1 and where we can help, we will.

2 SENATOR HINCHEY: Our understanding,  
3 just so that we're all on the same page, our  
4 understanding is that Minority Leader Schumer  
5 has allocated the \$50,000 for the Army Corps  
6 of Engineers to start doing the study, it's  
7 in that pipeline. And then the total  
8 anticipated cost is about \$30 million, with  
9 the federal government taking about  
10 two-thirds, but would require the state to  
11 take a third. So that, should it not  
12 increase, would be about 10 million.

13 So happy to continue the conversation  
14 with you, thank you, but want to make sure  
15 that we're tracking that.

16 PARKS COMMISSIONER PRO TEM SIMONS:  
17 Absolutely. Thank you.

18 SENATOR HINCHEY: Thank you.

19 And thank you, Madam Chair.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, and we were  
21 wrong, don't go anywhere. We have another  
22 Assemblymember.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Nope. The question  
24 was answered.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Never mind.

2 Okay, then we all -- we want to thank  
3 you very much for your participation today,  
4 and free you from this hearing.

5 And we will call up, as you leave --  
6 oh, sorry, you're our first panel for the  
7 year. If people want to grab these  
8 commissioners, do it outside. We don't want  
9 you having conversations on either side where  
10 we can't continue with the next panel.

11 So we appreciate you, but now go away.

12 (Laughter.)

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And we're going  
14 to call up the New York Farm Bureau, the  
15 Northeast Dairy Producers Association, the  
16 Northeast Organic Farming Association of  
17 New York, and the Adirondack Food Network.

18 (Pause.)

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Hello, everyone.  
20 Welcome. And so we now get to the part of  
21 the hearings where everyone only gets  
22 three minutes. So we always advise people,  
23 even if you have a 20-page document, don't  
24 try to read it. Just highlight your most

1 important bullets. We all have all of the  
2 testimony, and it is up online for everyone  
3 to read.

4 So in my experience, those people who  
5 have mastered their key issues, not reading  
6 really fast, are the ones who win.

7 So I will let you start on this side  
8 of the table (pointing), introduce yourself,  
9 do your three minutes, and then we'll keep  
10 going down.

11 Okay? Thank you. Please.

12 MS. BAILDON: Thank you so much for  
13 this opportunity to speak with you. The  
14 Northeast Organic Farming Association has a  
15 few priorities for the 2026 fiscal year  
16 budget that I'm going to share with you.

17 My name is Katie Baidon, policy  
18 manager with Northeast Organic Farming  
19 Association, also called NOFA-NY. We've been  
20 around since '83 and have been leading the  
21 growth of the organic regenerative  
22 agriculture movement across the state. We  
23 provide farmer-to farmer education, technical  
24 assistance, and advocate for resilient food

1 systems. As a USDA-accredited organic  
2 certifier we also certify about 1,000 organic  
3 farms and food businesses.

4 And as you know, New York is a  
5 national leader in organic agriculture,  
6 ranking third in the number of organic farms,  
7 and we're also leaders in field crop and  
8 organic livestock production.

9 So I'm going to move on to -- past  
10 contracts that we've had have expanded access  
11 to organic certification and increased our  
12 ability to provide support with certification  
13 and the implementation of organic  
14 climate-smart practices.

15 We're thankful to the Legislature for  
16 their support, and request additional funding  
17 this year to help build a more inclusive,  
18 resilient network of New York farmers.  
19 Specifically, NOFA is requesting 250,000,  
20 including 40,000 to expand access to our  
21 programs for underserved producers, 50,000 to  
22 supplement USDA funding for NOFA events, and  
23 160,000 to expand our capacity to meet an  
24 increasing demand for our technical

1 assistance support services.

2 With the change in presidential  
3 administrations, the future of one of our  
4 USDA grants is uncertain, and without it we  
5 won't be able to run our Climate Smart  
6 Farming and Marketing program as it currently  
7 exists, but with some support from the state  
8 we can keep offering that climate-smart  
9 technical assistance at a smaller scale.

10 And then, lastly, we have an  
11 opportunity this year I think to address an  
12 unexpected \$800,000 federal funding gap for  
13 New York farmers and to sustain a really  
14 valuable program that might otherwise be  
15 unfunded.

16 So since the beginning of the USDA  
17 Organic label, the Organic Certification Cost  
18 Share Program has allowed farms and  
19 businesses to recover some of the expenses  
20 associated with certification, and this year  
21 that funding was not included in the  
22 Farm Bill extension. So there's around 2,000  
23 farms and food businesses in New York State  
24 that have organic certification and have been

1 depending on these funds. So we would  
2 appreciate the inclusion of that in this  
3 year's state budget.

4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Next?

6 MR. WALLACH: Good afternoon. My name  
7 is Kyle Wallach. I'm the associate director  
8 of public policy at New York Farm Bureau.  
9 And, first off, I'd like to say thank you all  
10 for being here.

11 New York Farm Bureau is the state's  
12 largest general agricultural advocacy  
13 organization. Our members represent a  
14 variety of commodities and provide  
15 significant revenue streams for our local,  
16 state, and national economies.

17 As most of you know, New York's farm  
18 economy has been struggling and farmers are  
19 working with razor-thin margins as input  
20 costs and labor costs continue to increase.  
21 That being said, we see many bright spots in  
22 the Governor's proposed budget. However,  
23 there are still funding gaps that need to be  
24 addressed.

1           To further support various agriculture  
2 commodities within the industry, farmers rely  
3 heavily on research and promotion programs  
4 like apple research, maple research and hops  
5 breeding, to name a couple of many. These  
6 programs are dependent on support from the  
7 Legislature each year.

8           Additionally, I would like to stress  
9 the importance of Cornell's College of  
10 Agriculture and Life Science, CALS, and the  
11 many programs under their umbrella. These  
12 are a lifeline to many farmers throughout the  
13 state.

14           CALS provides key research and  
15 critical expertise that we cannot afford to  
16 lose right now. Key lines include PRO-DAIRY  
17 and PRO-LIVESTOCK, as well as the diagnostic  
18 labs, and funding to support operations at  
19 Cornell AgriTech and its research there.

20           I would also like to mention the  
21 refundable investment tax credit from  
22 previous budgets for on-farm investments from  
23 tractors and equipment to milking machinery.  
24 This has triggered an incredible amount of

1 investments on farms.

2           However, we are hopeful that this year  
3 the Legislature, along with the Governor,  
4 will add the construction of housing to be  
5 eligible, or the rehabilitation of current  
6 housing. As you can imagine, farm housing  
7 can be very expensive to build, and those  
8 that work on farms need and deserve  
9 high-quality, comfortable housing.

10           Along similar lines, we are strongly  
11 supportive of the Governor's proposal to  
12 increase the Farmworker Housing Revolving  
13 Loan Fund by \$5 million. We are requesting  
14 that the per-project cap be increased from  
15 200,000 to 400,000 due to the high cost of  
16 construction.

17           I would also like to highlight the  
18 importance of extending the current Farm  
19 Workforce Retention Tax Credit that expires  
20 at the end of this year. This tax credit has  
21 been major in helping farmers deal with  
22 ever-increasing labor costs.

23           We look forward to working with the  
24 Legislature and the Governor on these

1 proposals, along with additional legislation  
2 like the low-carbon fuel standard, creating  
3 an equine advisory board, and wine in grocery  
4 stores, among others.

5 Thank you all for your support of the  
6 agricultural industry.

7 MS. JONES-BRIMMER: Good afternoon.  
8 I'm Allyson Jones-Brimmer, with the Northeast  
9 Dairy Producers Association. Thank you to  
10 Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, Hinchey and Lupardo  
11 for holding this important hearing.

12 We are excited about many of the  
13 investments the Governor has proposed in the  
14 Executive Budget, ranging from workforce and  
15 employee housing to transportation and  
16 climate initiatives. However, there is one  
17 glaring omission in the Governor's budget  
18 which was a disappointing surprise to our  
19 members, in that it did not include a  
20 proposal to fix the Farm Employer Overtime  
21 Tax Credit to ensure all farms are eligible  
22 to receive this critical tax credit.

23 Thanks to your leadership, the  
24 Legislature unanimously passed a bill last

1 session that would fix an interpretation  
2 technicality that prevented some farms from  
3 accessing this credit. However, the Governor  
4 vetoed this legislation and in her message  
5 directed the departments of Tax and Finance  
6 and Agriculture and Markets to work with the  
7 Legislature during this year's budget  
8 negotiations to develop an appropriate  
9 overtime tax credit structure which would  
10 ensure all farmers can access the credit  
11 regardless of their business structure.

12 We respectfully encourage the Senate  
13 and Assembly to advance legislation in their  
14 one-house budgets to provide a retroactive  
15 fix for this crucial overtime tax credit.

16 Other aspects of the Governor's budget  
17 that we appreciate include the \$5 million  
18 addition to the Farm Worker Housing Program.  
19 This revolving loan fund ensures farmers have  
20 support to build adequate housing facilities  
21 for employees. This program is  
22 oversubscribed, and we believe the need is  
23 even greater than the Governor's proposal and  
24 would respectfully encourage adding a total

1 of \$15 million to the program, which would  
2 ensure long-term solutions to challenges  
3 facing recruiting and retaining employees on  
4 New York State family farms.

5 We also agree with Farm Bureau that  
6 the cap on per-project is too low and would  
7 encourage increasing it from \$200,000 to  
8 \$400,000 per project.

9 We also appreciate the Governor's  
10 support of Cornell's farm labor specialists  
11 in the New York Center for Agriculture  
12 Medicine and Health. Both programs provide  
13 farms with trainings that are essential to  
14 recruit, retain, and train a high-quality  
15 workforce.

16 And finally, we also appreciate the  
17 Governor's support of PRO-DAIRY, including  
18 Cornell's climate leadership specialist  
19 position as well as the Executive's funding  
20 of the Cornell University Ruminant Center.  
21 This is a major step forward. Research done  
22 at this center helps inform farm  
23 decision-making and could further advance  
24 agriculture's impact on reaching the state's

1 climate goals.

2 We respectfully encourage that the  
3 Legislature continue to increase support for  
4 PRO-DAIRY to allow the program to add two  
5 farm business specialists, a dairy nutrition  
6 specialist, and an animal well-being  
7 specialist.

8 Thank you for taking the time to  
9 consider our remarks, and happy to provide  
10 more information.

11 MR. STEPHANI: Thank you. Good  
12 afternoon, and thank you for allowing me to  
13 speak on some budget priorities for the  
14 North Country communities.

15 My name is Josh Stephani, and I  
16 represent the Adirondack Food System Network,  
17 a collaborative effort across North Country  
18 communities to address the challenges, gaps,  
19 and opportunities within our food system.  
20 Since 2020, our network works to broaden  
21 collaboration across the region and bring and  
22 build capacity to organizations.

23 As you are aware, the most recent  
24 USDA census highlights the disappearance of

1 New York farms and an aging farmer  
2 population. Hamilton County, one of the most  
3 sparsely populated counties in our state, has  
4 watched nearly all its farms disappear. This  
5 means that access to fresh and healthy food  
6 grown in the county for its communities  
7 remains a significant burden for residents.

8 Moreover, New York must invest in  
9 resources to address and prepare for a  
10 changing farmer landscape, including  
11 succession and transition plans for the next  
12 generation.

13 Yet with recent flooding and drought,  
14 AFSN sees it as a priority to assist our  
15 farmers in preparation for extreme and  
16 inconsistent weather. We ask that this  
17 Legislature continue to prioritize our  
18 North Country farming communities through  
19 programs such as the Farmland Protection  
20 Program, the Farm Worker Housing Program, as  
21 mentioned by my colleagues, and the  
22 Environmental Protection Fund. It is  
23 critical we expand these programs to shore up  
24 our vulnerable assets.

1                   Healthy and local food is directly  
2                   linked to supporting our farmers. A few  
3                   weeks ago a farmer in Herkimer County  
4                   remarked that more value is placed on a bag  
5                   of potato chips than a potato. Herkimer  
6                   County remains one of the most food-insecure  
7                   counties for New York adults. Emergency  
8                   feeding programs like food pantries and  
9                   backpack programs are struggling to meet a  
10                  growing demand.

11                  AFSN joins the call to raise both  
12                  budgets of Nourish New York and HPNAP to  
13                  \$75 million each and broaden the ability of  
14                  local and direct contracts with these food  
15                  pantries to ensure the food economy in our  
16                  communities matches with our local farms.  
17                  These programs place agriculture grown in our  
18                  region back into our communities, supporting  
19                  families and farmers in the process.

20                  AFSN is excited to see a commitment to  
21                  provide healthy and universal meals to our  
22                  children in the Executive Budget, and we  
23                  support continuing our Farm-to-School grants  
24                  and 30 percent Farm-to-School reimbursement

1 programs. These programs provide critical  
2 links between healthy food, our children, and  
3 our farms.

4 Additionally, these programs directly  
5 incentivize and offset the cost of purchasing  
6 local food for our regional children.

7 We applaud recent efforts by the  
8 administration and Legislature to support,  
9 grow and sustain our farms, emergency  
10 feedings, local and regional food economies.  
11 The Adirondacks is often seen as the last  
12 mile of service, a place to visit but not to  
13 live. But despite this, our communities are  
14 resilient and vibrant, and many people call  
15 these places home.

16 Thank you for your time, and I look  
17 forward to furthering these conversations.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very  
19 much.

20 And our first questioner is  
21 Agriculture Chair Michelle Hinchey -- oh,  
22 sorry, everyone gets three minutes. There's  
23 no special favors for the chairs or rankers  
24 anymore.

1 (Laughter.)

2 SENATOR HINCHEY: All right. Thank  
3 you so much, and thank you all for being here  
4 and for your work.

5 Josh, I appreciate the comments on  
6 Nourish. And I think it's important for  
7 everyone to hear, you know, even if you live  
8 in an agricultural community, that doesn't  
9 mean that everyone who lives there then has  
10 access to the food that is grown just down  
11 the street.

12 And so things like the Nourish NY  
13 program, HPNAP, Double Up Food Bucks and the  
14 Farm-to-School program are really important  
15 to make sure we continue to fund -- like,  
16 adding breakfast to the Farm-to-School  
17 program would be a great place to start.

18 But I do have a couple of questions.  
19 First for NEDPA, you probably heard me talk  
20 earlier about the tax credit that we were  
21 hopeful would get done. We were told it had  
22 to be in the budget. We too were surprised  
23 to not see it in the Executive's budget.

24 How have the conversations been with

1           Ag and Markets? And does it seem like on  
2           your end that you're close to coming up with  
3           a solution like we just heard from the last  
4           panel?

5                       MS. JONES-BRIMMER: Yeah, we've had --  
6           we have a great working relationship with Ag  
7           and Markets and really appreciate their  
8           team's efforts. We've presented something  
9           that we think could work, and from our  
10          understanding of the issues of what was  
11          presented last year, we think it could solve  
12          those problems.

13                      We haven't received much feedback on  
14          that so far. But we're, you know, ready and  
15          willing to continue those conversations.

16                      SENATOR HINCHEY: Great. Well, and  
17          hopefully this will spark responses to that  
18          feedback so we can hopefully have an answer  
19          for that soon in our budget all going  
20          forward.

21                      Also agree with everyone's comments on  
22          the Farmworker Housing and the Retention Tax  
23          Credit. Those are really important programs  
24          and ones we could fund more.

1                    Kyle, you mentioned -- I'm taking a  
2                    book from Senator Krueger here, or a page  
3                    from Senator Krueger here -- but you  
4                    mentioned in your comments about wine in  
5                    grocery stores. I'm not taking a position on  
6                    that plan, but I'm curious how it would help  
7                    New York farmers and the New York wine  
8                    industry.

9                    MR. WALLACH: Sure. A lot of our  
10                   local New York wineries have trouble getting  
11                   their products into liquor stores, and this  
12                   would give them another avenue and another  
13                   opportunity and a place with good foot  
14                   traffic and good availability for them to  
15                   sell their products.

16                   SENATOR HINCHEY: Do you think there  
17                   should be specific language around promoting  
18                   New York products specifically?

19                   MR. WALLACH: We would absolutely  
20                   support that.

21                   SENATOR HINCHEY: All right. Thank  
22                   you so much.

23                   And then I would just like to kind of  
24                   open the question in my last few seconds on

1           what concerns anyone -- probably NEDPA and  
2           Farm Bureau, but any -- NOFA as well --  
3           anybody on farmworkers and farmers, the  
4           concerns they're hearing from changes at the  
5           federal level as it pertains to farmworkers.

6                     MS. JONES-BRIMMER: Yeah, this is a  
7           really challenging question and something  
8           that our farms are facing. And I think,  
9           quite frankly, workers are scared. They  
10          don't know what's to come, and they don't  
11          know if their job and their world is secure.

12                    So trying to get through  
13          misinformation and help them with facts and  
14          what they need to know for their rights is  
15          what we're focusing on.

16                    SENATOR HINCHEY: Thank you very much.

17                    CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

18                    Assembly.

19                    CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Donna  
20          Lupardo, chair of Agriculture.

21                    ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Yes, thank  
22          you.

23                    Senator Hinchey covered most of what I  
24          was about to take up, so thank you for

1 highlighting, again, the housing revolving  
2 loan and giving us an actual dollar figure to  
3 handle the oversubscription. You sort of ran  
4 out of time. I'd like to give you an  
5 opportunity to finish discussing some  
6 additional adds from -- from NEDPA. NEDPA,  
7 yes.

8 MS. JONES-BRIMMER: Regarding --

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Right, toward  
10 the end you were sort of -- ran --

11 MS. JONES-BRIMMER: Toward the end I  
12 was talking about PRO-DAIRY's budget. They  
13 have several new positions they would like to  
14 fill -- farm business specialist, dairy  
15 nutrition specialist, and animal well-being  
16 specialists, as well as some education --  
17 outreach and extension funding that they  
18 could have bolstered to make sure their  
19 program is fully functioning and fully  
20 capable of seeing the benefits -- of farmers  
21 seeing the benefits of their work.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: A PRO-DAIRY  
23 focus.

24 And Katie, I know you had a \$200,000

1           appropriation last year; you're looking for  
2           250 this year. You outlined some of the  
3           things you wanted to do with that. It's not  
4           really going to take care of the federal  
5           pause, which is likely a cut which is  
6           impacting you on the Climate-Smart  
7           Commodities Program, a subsection of that  
8           having to do with marketing.

9                     Can you just explain in this last  
10           minute how you utilize those funds?

11                    MS. BAILDON: Sure. So we're part of  
12           the regional project that's run by PASA in  
13           Pennsylvania, and it's called the Climate  
14           Smart Farming and Marketing Program. And  
15           essentially it's providing technical  
16           assistance to farms that want to adopt NRCS  
17           climate-smart practices and offers them  
18           up-front funding to make some of those  
19           changes.

20                    So we have a couple of staff right now  
21           that are helping with that project, and it's  
22           on pause, so we really don't know what's  
23           coming next.

24                    ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: The additional

1 funding that you're asking for in this year's  
2 budget, is it connected to that or is it more  
3 about your infrastructure?

4 MS. BAILDON: A little bit of both.

5 So technical assistance on-farm is  
6 something we've always offered. We've been  
7 building up our virtual technical assistance  
8 offerings, and we would like to still have  
9 capacity there for helping farms with  
10 climate-smart practices.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Gotcha. Okay,  
12 thanks.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Borrello.

14 SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you,  
15 Madam Chair.

16 Thank you all for being here.  
17 Appreciate what you do for agriculture here  
18 in New York State.

19 I guess I'll start off with Allyson.  
20 I think in last year's budget there was  
21 \$24 million to help with farm milk, fluid  
22 milk processing. It was supposed to  
23 essentially improve a number of things  
24 including, you know, stabilizing that supply.

1 I know these things don't happen  
2 overnight, but can you just kind of give us  
3 an update as to where this is and if it's  
4 been helping your members?

5 MS. JONES-BRIMMER: So that -- the  
6 request for proposals is open right now, and  
7 I believe those are due mid-February. So  
8 farms are undergoing the process of getting  
9 their applications submitted.

10 So we don't know, really, what that  
11 will look like, if that will be  
12 oversubscribed, which is very likely, because  
13 the projects are often very expensive to  
14 undergo. We don't know what kind of interest  
15 is fully out there, but I know a lot of our  
16 members were really excited about the program  
17 and looking forward to submitting  
18 applications.

19 SENATOR BORRELLO: You know, we always  
20 hear, you know, small dairy farms versus the  
21 big farms. And, you know, I guess my concern  
22 is that 24 million is going to be gobbled up  
23 by the big farms.

24 Is there any guardrails that were put

1 in place so that it would ensure that there  
2 are small dairy farms that have access to  
3 that as well?

4 MS. JONES-BRIMMER: I can't really  
5 speak to that. I'm not sure.

6 SENATOR BORRELLO: Okay. So as of  
7 right now, your members are in the process of  
8 putting those RFPs in.

9 MS. JONES-BRIMMER: Yes.

10 SENATOR BORRELLO: Okay. Well, so  
11 hopefully that improves and those -- so would  
12 you say -- obviously you're afraid of it  
13 being oversubscribed. So in this year's  
14 budget, then, you think perhaps another round  
15 would be helpful for additional funding?

16 MS. JONES-BRIMMER: Yeah, definitely.  
17 I believe there was 10 million put in this  
18 year to fill out the program. But if  
19 24 million in the first year isn't enough,  
20 then --

21 SENATOR BORRELLO: Yeah. So we step  
22 it down pretty considerably for that second  
23 one, but it's still -- there's still money in  
24 the program for the second year. Thank you.



1           wines, which typically are a little more  
2           expensive. You're going to see those, you  
3           know, Two-Buck Chuck things dominating the  
4           shelves in New York grocery stores if we  
5           don't put in some kind of guardrails to  
6           ensure that our wineries and our farmers get  
7           that.

8                        So thank you.

9                        CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
10                      Assembly.

11                     CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman  
12           Carrie Woerner.

13                     ASSEMBLYWOMAN WOERNER: Thank you.

14                     Kyle, you mentioned that one of the  
15           Farm Bureau's priorities is the low-carbon  
16           fuel standard bill. Could you reflect on how  
17           that particular bill would be -- would  
18           benefit New York farmers?

19                     MR. WALLACH: Sure. So the low-carbon  
20           fuel standard we think would be a great way  
21           to help reach our climate goals while also  
22           being -- giving the opportunity for biofuel  
23           markets and other ways that agriculture can  
24           be part of this solution.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WOERNER: In specific,  
2 are you talking about hard-to-electrify  
3 vehicles like farm equipment being able to  
4 use low-carbon fuels to reduce their carbon  
5 footprint? Or are you talking about farms  
6 being able to generate electricity by  
7 converting manure into first a gas and then  
8 into electricity?

9 MR. WALLACH: I think there is  
10 opportunity for both, but specifically  
11 converting manure into electricity would be  
12 something that our membership would be  
13 interested in, and I think there is a lot of  
14 room there to grow that industry.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WOERNER: Thank you  
16 very much. For the -- and I'm so sorry, I  
17 forgot your name -- Northeast Dairy  
18 Producers, you talked about the need for --  
19 and actually Kyle did as well -- for  
20 increasing the project cap from 200,000 to  
21 400,000 for farmworkers' housing.

22 Do you have some sense of what is the  
23 backlog of projects that are not getting done  
24 because the fund has been depleted as well as

1 the cap is too low?

2 MS. JONES-BRIMMER: I don't have exact  
3 numbers on that, but I know just from talking  
4 to our membership there are many farms that  
5 are interested in doing projects that would  
6 fit in this revolving loan fund. And if  
7 they're not able to get traditional financing  
8 for it or if it's not the highest priority on  
9 their farm's project list, then it doesn't  
10 get done. It gets pushed off.

11 So I think there would be a great  
12 need, a great interest if this were expanded  
13 to have more farms involved.

14 I do know that some of the farms that  
15 have done projects that is new housing for  
16 many -- for, you know, 20 or so staff  
17 members, they're looking at a million or  
18 slightly over a million dollars to build that  
19 housing. And so that's kind of looking at  
20 that \$200,000 cap -- the construction costs  
21 have gone up so much, and farms are looking  
22 to build larger housing units now.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WOERNER: Right. And  
24 access to traditional financing is limited.

1           It was sort of implied in your answer. Is  
2           that correct?

3                   MS. JONES-BRIMMER: Yeah, I think they  
4           just have to make decisions based on what  
5           their priorities are, and that fits within  
6           their traditional financing options.

7                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN WOERNER: Great. Thank  
8           you very much.

9                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

10                   Any more Senators? Then I'm turning  
11           it back to the Assembly.

12                   CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay.  
13           Assemblymember Chris Tague, the ranker on  
14           Agriculture.

15                   ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: Thank you,  
16           Mr. Chairman and Ms. Chairman.

17                   I wanted to start off right from the  
18           beginning with Allyson. If you could tell  
19           me, do you think that there would be an  
20           economic difference in agriculture if we  
21           legalized whole and 2 percent milk back in  
22           our schools?

23                   MS. JONES-BRIMMER: Yeah, our members  
24           would definitely be in favor of that. And

1 really the science supports it in giving the  
2 students choice to wholesome and nutritious  
3 products.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: Well, I really  
5 appreciate hearing that, because I've had a  
6 bill for the last four years that just can't  
7 seem to get out of committee for some reason.  
8 But boy, everybody's in favor of it.  
9 Hopefully this session we'll get it passed.  
10 But thank you very much.

11 Secondly, what I thought I would do is  
12 individually ask each one of you -- because  
13 we don't have much time -- but ask each one  
14 of you what is the biggest thing needed in  
15 this budget, and how much is needed to, you  
16 know, to make that work for you folks, I  
17 think is my question.

18 Although the budget's at \$252 billion,  
19 I was a little saddened to see that the  
20 ag budget is knocked down by 7 million. We  
21 seem to have money to spend in other areas,  
22 but agriculture is 7 million less than it was  
23 last year.

24 So I would like to hear from you folks

1           what we need to make your operation  
2           successful, and how much money do you need to  
3           do it.

4                   MS. BAILDON: Thanks for the question.  
5           So in terms of NOFA's number-one priority for  
6           the state budget this year, it is for our  
7           line item for \$250,000 that would really help  
8           us to continue the work that the state's been  
9           investing in over the past several years,  
10          increasing access to our services and our  
11          technical assistance capacity.

12                   ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: Thank you.

13                   MR. WALLACH: I think adding housing  
14          as an allowable expense to the refundable  
15          investment tax credit would be huge for us,  
16          as well as making sure that we don't let the  
17          Workforce Retention Tax Credit sunset.

18                   MS. JONES-BRIMMER: I would agree that  
19          labor workforce retention and recruitment is  
20          the greatest need that our farms have, so  
21          increasing that revolving loan fund for  
22          housing would be a great addition, along with  
23          what Kyle had mentioned.

24                   MR. STEPHANI: And I'll echo the same

1           thing with worker retention as well as those  
2           transition plans for farmers, as a lot of our  
3           farmers are not only struggling with labor  
4           and finding adequate labor for their farms,  
5           but also being able to prepare for future  
6           generations.

7                     ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE:    Would all of you  
8           agree with me that without any farms we don't  
9           have any food?

10                    (Laughter.)

11                    ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE:    Thank you.  Thank  
12           you very much.

13                    (Laughter.)

14                    CHAIRMAN PRETLOW:    Assemblywoman Anna  
15           Kelles.

16                    ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES:  Thank you so  
17           much.

18                    One initial question.  Your  
19           experience, like from across the board, is  
20           that the Farmland Protection and Agricultural  
21           and On-Point programs and the Soil and Water  
22           Conservation programs are all overprescribed  
23           and underfunded?  Would you say that pretty  
24           consistently across the board?

1                   Do you have a sense of how much money  
2                   would be needed to fully fund these to meet  
3                   the existing demand?

4                   MR. WALLACH: I think -- I think we  
5                   would have to go back to the individual  
6                   districts and hear from them what, you know,  
7                   each district needs.

8                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Are we getting  
9                   close? Or are we like nowhere near what  
10                  actually we need? Because these can be used  
11                  for capital improvements to address climate  
12                  change issues.

13                  MR. WALLACH: Yeah, I'm not sure how  
14                  overprescribed they are. I know they are,  
15                  but I'm not sure by how much.

16                  ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Okay.

17                  MS. BAILDON: I have some numbers on  
18                  that --

19                  ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Yeah.

20                  MS. BAILDON: -- that I can follow up  
21                  with. I don't want to say them right now,  
22                  just because I don't want to get it wrong,  
23                  but I can follow up with you --

24                  ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Okay.

1 MS. BAILDON: -- on the Climate  
2 Resilient Farming Program in particular.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Okay. That  
4 would be great.

5 And a question about manure on farms.  
6 What percentage do you think -- estimate --  
7 of farms in New York have biodigesters?

8 MR. WALLACH: We can get numbers.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: And what  
10 percentage of a farm's operating budget do  
11 you think are the fertilizer? Is it a tiny  
12 small fraction, or is it a pretty big cost?  
13 The cost of fertilizer.

14 MS. JONES-BRIMMER: The cost of  
15 fertilizer, I think that varies by type of  
16 farm. So those with animal agriculture are  
17 able to recycle nutrients and bring that cost  
18 down, but it still is a substantial cost to  
19 make sure they're putting the right nutrients  
20 on the right crops.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: So it's the  
22 recycling of the manure that's really helping  
23 the cost come down, that particular cost.

24 I ask only in particular because if

1 the manure is being used for other purposes  
2 rather than being used in biodigesters,  
3 creating biosolids that are really stable  
4 molecular structures that then could be  
5 tilled into the ground to bind with nitrogen  
6 and phosphorous to retain those nutrients in  
7 the soil and reduce runoff -- those things,  
8 you know, significantly reduce the cost of  
9 fertilizer.

10 They also, right, improve the  
11 stability and nutrient value of the soil.  
12 That would add, maybe -- give them funding in  
13 one direction but cost them money in other  
14 directions, right? Potentially.

15 MR. WALLACH: I -- I don't want to say  
16 just because I'm not a hundred percent sure  
17 of the --

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: But then the  
19 manure would be diverted, and that would be  
20 true since it is used as a nutrient source  
21 right now.

22 MS. JONES-BRIMMER: Typically there  
23 still is material that can be used as  
24 fertilizer in those processes even if it's

1 used for another use first and then --

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: I say that  
3 about fertilizers because they are both  
4 petroleum based and very expensive. So  
5 having manure as a resource for nutrient  
6 loading is a great use of it on-site on  
7 farms. Thanks.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Jodi  
10 Giglio.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Yes. Thank  
12 you.

13 I'd like to go back to the ag worker  
14 housing, because I know that there were a lot  
15 of grants that a lot of farmers utilized last  
16 year but they were unable -- they had to  
17 return the money, essentially, because the  
18 process in order to get permits for the  
19 upgraded sanitary systems and for  
20 enhancements to the buildings and creation of  
21 workforce housing, was just -- the time was  
22 too long and they couldn't meet the  
23 deadlines.

24 So I want to hear from you as to

1           whether or not there is still tremendous need  
2           for ag worker housing and enhancements to ag  
3           worker housing that should be in the budget  
4           and is not currently in the budget.

5                     MR. WALLACH:  There is absolutely a  
6           need for new farmworker housing as well as  
7           updating farmworker housing that's existing.

8                     ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO:  Okay.  And did  
9           you hear some of the same things when it came  
10          to the funding and whether or not any of the  
11          money that was returned is being  
12          reappropriated for grants for enhancements  
13          and upgrades?

14                    MR. WALLACH:  I didn't hear  
15          specifically about funding that had to be  
16          returned.  But as far as the need for it, we  
17          have heard a lot of.  And as far as being  
18          able to fund that, it's a huge expense for  
19          any farm to take on.  So having funding  
20          opportunities is important.

21                    ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO:  Yeah, and I  
22          think so, too.  I think so that with the  
23          housing opportunities, that it also works  
24          towards the worker retention and knowing that

1           they have a pillow to put their head on at  
2           night.

3                       So if you could just chime in on that  
4           a little bit, that would be great.

5                       MR. WALLACH: Absolutely. Farmers  
6           want their employees to have a comfortable,  
7           safe place to live. They make their best  
8           efforts to do so, and, you know, we need to  
9           help them how we can.

10                      MS. JONES-BRIMMER: And I think  
11           there's a lot of choices for places to work.  
12           People could go work in a lot of different  
13           lines, and agriculture isn't always the most  
14           attractive, but we do -- our farmers do what  
15           they can to provide high-quality training,  
16           high-quality -- good salary, good benefits.

17                      And one of those benefits is having  
18           housing near the farm and it being  
19           up-to-date, clean, and, like Kyle said, just  
20           a nice place that they have to go home. It  
21           really helps in worker retention.

22                      ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Thank you.

23                      CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: All right, we've  
24           completed the questioning. Just

1 double-checking.

2 I want to thank you all very much for  
3 your participation today, and you may have  
4 followup questions from us later. Thank you  
5 very much.

6 MR. WALLACH: Thank you.

7 MS. JONES-BRIMMER: Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And our next  
9 panel -- if the American Society for the  
10 Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is here,  
11 please come down. We don't think you checked  
12 in. Humane Society of the United States, and  
13 New York State Animal Protection Federation.

14 Oh, good, so all three of you are  
15 here. Great, okay. Good.

16 Okay. So we're going to start from my  
17 left with Libby -- oh, you want me to  
18 start -- is that Bill? Okay, we're going to  
19 start from my right, your left: Bill Ketzer  
20 first.

21 MR. KETZER: Good afternoon,  
22 everybody, and thank you very much for your  
23 time.

24 I'm Bill Ketzer. I'm the senior

1 legislative director for the American Society  
2 for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

3 And as you've mentioned, you have my  
4 written testimony, so I will keep my comments  
5 brief and related to the Companion Animal  
6 Protection Fund that's in the  
7 Executive Budget proposal.

8 I began my career in government about  
9 25 years ago -- right here in this  
10 building -- as a policy analyst, and soon  
11 after I was doing agriculture policy. Which,  
12 you know, most of you know, I think, includes  
13 animal welfare policy.

14 In that era, New York was definitely  
15 behind the curve when compared to other  
16 states in the northeast when it came to  
17 animal sheltering. We were definitely seeing  
18 improvements at that time -- better access in  
19 funding for spay and neuter programs for  
20 example, more effective working relationships  
21 between shelters and rescue organizations.

22 But ultimately, at the end of the day,  
23 the goal was to be able to get them to  
24 drastically reduce euthanasia and increase

1 liabilities rates. That was the name of the  
2 game at the time.

3 But there was very minimal oversight  
4 of animal shelters, and absolutely no  
5 oversight of animal rescue organizations. In  
6 fact, no one could even tell you how many  
7 there were or what they did or where they got  
8 their animals from. We just had no -- simply  
9 no idea as policy people.

10 You changed that in 2017 by passing a  
11 law to create a registry for these entities  
12 so that we could know. And this was the same  
13 year that you established the first Companion  
14 Animal Capital Fund, the first of its kind in  
15 the nation -- and still is, to my  
16 knowledge -- and currently it provides \$33  
17 million to support capital projects for more  
18 than 70 animal shelters thus far.

19 And that in turn helped generate  
20 support for another thing New York didn't  
21 have, which was uniform peer-reviewed  
22 facility standards in law for the  
23 400 not-for-profit organizations and  
24 municipal entities providing sheltering

1 services in every region of the state every  
2 single day.

3 You passed this law in 2022, and it  
4 goes into effect in December of this year.  
5 That's why we are asking you not only to  
6 support Governor Hochul's \$5 million  
7 Executive Budget proposal for that fund, but  
8 we ask that you renew your commitment with a  
9 legacy allocation of \$5 million, in addition  
10 to the Governor's 5 million, bringing the  
11 fund to a total of \$10 million. The  
12 outstanding capital need is still well over  
13 \$77 million as we look towards the standards  
14 being implemented at the end of the year.

15 And finally, I just want to say thank  
16 you for all of that good work. That can't be  
17 understated. It's like night and day from  
18 the time I was sitting behind you as a  
19 staffer, so thank you very much.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Inaudible.)

21 MR. SHAPIRO: Thank you so much. My  
22 name's Brian Shapiro. I'm the New York  
23 director for the Humane Society of the  
24 United States.

1           I would like to thank everyone here  
2           for all of the work over the past few years  
3           really putting shelter issues and animal  
4           protection at the forefront.

5           I'm the New York state director, but  
6           when I go to our national conferences,  
7           everyone is absolutely wowed and floored at  
8           what we've been able to accomplish. And many  
9           of you who are in leadership positions here  
10          have helped us get those bills and those  
11          budget measures over the finish line.

12          I'm here with my wonderful colleagues  
13          to ask for support for the Companion Animal  
14          Capital Fund, which is a very popular program  
15          which helps to boost and bolster our animal  
16          shelters with capital improvement programs  
17          for matching grants.

18          In my years of lobbying I have seen  
19          photographs and heard many stories of the  
20          wonderful animals that many of you have  
21          adopted from shelters, but shelters provide  
22          so much more than just adoptions. You have  
23          surrenders. You have pet retention programs,  
24          food pantries for the duly incorporated

1 humane societies and SPCAs, you have Humane  
2 Law enforcement, low-cost spay and neuter,  
3 and the list goes on.

4 These are essential services. And  
5 unless we have the infrastructure where our  
6 shelters can operate effectively, we would  
7 not have these programs. Again, these are  
8 essential services that are very important to  
9 members of the community.

10 I recall when I was the shelter  
11 director in Ulster County for many years,  
12 just fretting over where's the money going to  
13 come from for new kennel doors, to replace  
14 pipes that have been decades old. So we are  
15 asking for \$5 million combined from the  
16 Legislature to match what the Governor has  
17 kindly put in, for a total of \$10 million.

18 Additionally, I want to express  
19 support for an Animal Crimes Fund. There  
20 currently is a process that impounding  
21 agencies, Humane Law, can take advantage of  
22 to get reimbursed for the cost of holding  
23 onto live evidence.

24 But I will say this, there are no

1 other examples where a not-for-profit -- it's  
2 the not-for-profit's responsibility to hold  
3 onto evidence in criminal court cases, and  
4 often not get reimbursed for that. It's  
5 crazy, quite frankly.

6 So we are asking for support for an  
7 Animal Crimes Fund. The bonding process  
8 works, but it doesn't always work. I've seen  
9 cases where we have judges in rural parts of  
10 the state, and they have no idea about this.  
11 And sometimes the shelters are very lucky if  
12 they can get a DA to assist with that.

13 I see time is running out. I just  
14 want to also give a tip of the hat to  
15 Chair Pretlow for his work on the  
16 horse issues, with horse slaughter, and the  
17 issue you mentioned. We are following it and  
18 interested in talking with you more about  
19 that.

20 Thank you so much for your time.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22 Libby Post, New York State Animal  
23 Protection Federation.

24 MS. POST: Good afternoon.

1           I just wanted to say, first, todah  
2           rabah to Senator Krueger for mentioning that  
3           it's Holocaust Memorial Day.

4           And also a very hearty mazel tov to  
5           Assemblymember Pretlow for becoming the new  
6           chair of the Ways and Means Committee. So  
7           it's a really -- you know, it's a great  
8           thing.

9           So, yes, we also want to see  
10          \$5 million from the Legislature for the  
11          Companion Animal Capital Fund. We've all  
12          seen the good this money has done across the  
13          state. We're going to have at least  
14          50 applicants for the RFP that is due at the  
15          end of this month.

16          Now, when you look at the budget  
17          you're going to see reapprops after reapprops  
18          after reapprops, and I'm asking you not to  
19          hold that against giving us more money,  
20          because -- we can all laugh about this -- as  
21          we know, and as the Comptroller's office put  
22          out in a recent report, the contracts are not  
23          being let quickly. The RFP from January of  
24          2024, those contracts will hopefully be



1 Survey that we do. Of the 28 cases that have  
2 been reported, the cost of care was over  
3 \$604,000. The shelters only recouped  
4 109,000, which is 18 percent of the total  
5 cost.

6 And so we are asking the Legislature  
7 for a \$2.5 million Animal Crimes Fund that  
8 would help defray these costs as a -- it  
9 wouldn't be a grant, but it would be a  
10 reimbursement program.

11 And it really is very, very important,  
12 because it is costing the shelters more and  
13 more money. And with the Companion Animal  
14 Care Standards Act coming into effect at the  
15 end of this year, we're going to see even  
16 more of a need. So, please.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Perfect timing.  
18 Thank you.

19 Questions from the Senate? Everyone  
20 was very articulate.

21 Questions from the Assembly? Oh, I'm  
22 sorry, and you have another Assemblywoman  
23 down there.

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Donna?

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Yes.

4 Thank you for being here. Understand  
5 what you're saying about increasing the  
6 funding. Let me -- why have the funds not  
7 been spent out? You kind of breezed through  
8 that.

9 MS. POST: That's a really good  
10 question. The money has been awarded, okay,  
11 year after year. Some of the money has been  
12 totally expended out. But like as an  
13 example, the money that was awarded in  
14 January of 2024, awarded -- you know, oh,  
15 you're going to get this grant -- the grants  
16 are just being executed hopefully this week.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Oh, I see.  
18 Bureaucratic doings.

19 MS. POST: It's -- right.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Gotcha.

21 MS. POST: It's not the shelters'  
22 faults. It's the process.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: And then you  
24 mentioned about the need for the Animal

1 Crimes Fund. You talked about one case, and  
2 you said that they had eventually recouped  
3 some funding. Who did they recoup it from?

4 MS. POST: So there's a -- the  
5 mechanism is a security bond posting  
6 mechanism that Brian talked about where you  
7 can go and ask the judge in the case to tell  
8 the perpetrator of the animal crime to either  
9 give up their animals or they have to pay.

10 That doesn't always work. The lawyers  
11 have been very good at going around the  
12 process and not getting the money to the  
13 shelters, that they're not being paid for it.  
14 And many times there is no restitution.

15 Many times there's just -- there's no  
16 security bond posting, DAs don't want to do  
17 it on behalf of the shelters even though  
18 they're holding the animals for criminal  
19 cases. But still they're saying, Oh, you've  
20 got to find your own lawyer. So here, the  
21 shelter's got to pay for the care plus that,  
22 right? So they're just not doing it.

23 And it would be much better if there  
24 was a dedicated fund to help reimburse the

1           shelters for these costs, because they're  
2           astronomical and they're just going up.

3                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO:   Gotcha.  Thank  
4           you.

5                   CHAIRMAN PRETLOW:   Assemblywoman Anna  
6           Kelles.

7                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES:   Thank you so  
8           much.

9                   Two questions, one multipart.  But  
10          about the Companion Animal Capital Fund, what  
11          would make that easier to get that money out  
12          the door?  Is there anything that we can do  
13          to make that easier to get out the door?

14                   MS. POST:   I don't pretend to be an  
15          expert in how the state financial system  
16          works in total.

17                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES:   The things that  
18          people are finding to be barriers.

19                   MS. POST:   It's really about making  
20          sure that the various entities that have to  
21          approve this do it in a timely manner, and  
22          that there's staffing in all the various  
23          offices that need to do it.

24                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES:   Gotcha.  And

1 about --

2 MS. POST: Without throwing anyone  
3 under the bus.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Absolutely.

5 About the second fund, the Crime --  
6 Animal Crime Fund, I think that --

7 MS. POST: Yeah.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: I'm not sure  
9 I'm getting the name right.

10 Do we know what the total cost is? Do  
11 you have any estimate? I saw in your  
12 presentation there was a total of I think  
13 883,000 just from last year were the amounts  
14 of money that it cost. You're asking for  
15 2.5, but then I saw all of these amounts  
16 throughout that were like 1.7 million, you  
17 know, 1.5 million.

18 It seems like 2.5 million won't even  
19 cover remotely the cost of taking care of --  
20 and all the criminal -- trying to recoup the  
21 costs that they're putting into it. So I'm  
22 trying to rectify all of that.

23 MS. POST: Well, I think that the  
24 2.5 million is a place to start. As I said,

1           our rolling Animal Crimes Fund -- and I don't  
2           get all the information from everybody. I'm  
3           not getting a lot of information from  
4           municipal shelters about their costs of  
5           holding live evidence. But right now, from  
6           2021, it's over \$600,000. I know it's much  
7           more than that, because we're not getting all  
8           the information.

9                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Has it put any  
10           of these shelters out of business?

11                   MS. POST: Has it put them out of  
12           business? No, it's made them have to go and  
13           fundraise to cover these costs.

14                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: And have there  
15           been cases where animals have not been --  
16           have been turned away, there wasn't any  
17           entity to take care of them and they've been  
18           euthanized instead?

19                   MS. POST: There have been cases where  
20           shelters are no longer entertaining municipal  
21           contracts and are no longer working with  
22           local law enforcement because it's too  
23           expensive and they're not getting any money  
24           back.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: And so local  
2 law enforcement will still then have these  
3 cases, but then where do those animals go?

4 MS. POST: I don't -- I can't tell you  
5 that.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: So no one  
7 knows.

8 MS. POST: Yeah.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: So they may be  
10 more traumatized --

11 MS. POST: Mm-hmm.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: -- and in a  
13 worse situation, even though they've been  
14 taken away. And if they're in a really bad  
15 traumatized situation, they need tremendous  
16 veterinary care, as Anir {ph} mentioned,  
17 correct?

18 MS. POST: There's another bill that's  
19 going to come up that's not fiscal, called  
20 the Civil Remedies bill. So that we can get  
21 hoarders, the mentally ill, seniors who get  
22 over their heads, out of the criminal justice  
23 system and into the civil part of  
24 Supreme Court, where a judge will just say

1           you can't -- after a process, you have to  
2           relinquish your animals, they go to the  
3           shelters, the shelters can turn them right  
4           around, vet them, care for them, and get them  
5           out the door through adoptions, instead of  
6           having to hold them as live evidence.

7                    ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Thank you.

8                    CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We have to cut  
9           this conversation off, sorry. There's one  
10          more Assemblymember.

11                   CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Chris  
12          Tague.

13                   ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: Thank you. Thank  
14          you.

15                   First of all, Bill, Brian and Libby,  
16          thank you for the work that you folks do.  
17          Near and dear to my heart. I have worked  
18          with Libby on a lot of cases. And that's  
19          kind of what I wanted to ask Libby. I don't  
20          know if -- I just want to make sure that my  
21          colleagues here understand what you folks go  
22          through and what you do in our communities  
23          all across New York State protecting animals  
24          and animal rights.

1                   So I thought maybe in the two minutes  
2                   and 35 seconds that I have on the record, if  
3                   you could explain to my colleagues exactly  
4                   some of the situations that you and your  
5                   folks have come into and the reason why this  
6                   is so important.

7                   MS. POST: Sure. In 2021,  
8                   Hudson Valley Humane Society, there was  
9                   24 huskies and husky-mix adult dogs that were  
10                  removed from a small home. They cared for  
11                  them for 18 months at a cost of over  
12                  \$334,000.

13                  There have been hoarding situations.  
14                  Erie County SPCA, 39 small dogs were found  
15                  matted and in need of extensive medical and  
16                  dental care. It was in their care for seven  
17                  and a half months, \$27,000.

18                  Lollypop Farms, 65 cats, in 2024, from  
19                  an unsanitary cat rescue. I don't know if  
20                  they were registered or not. They were there  
21                  for 70 days, cost Lollypop almost \$69,000.  
22                  They got \$3100 back in restitution.

23                  These are the kinds of cases that we  
24                  see over and over and over again. And the

1           shelters have to raise the money  
2           philanthropically. And, you know, it's great  
3           that there are so many people who love what  
4           the shelters are doing and recognize their  
5           importance and will give money. But still,  
6           it's not easy to raise that money when it's  
7           not -- when it really should be coming from  
8           government to help offset those costs.

9                        So there's lots of different -- and  
10           honestly, I need to give you guys -- and I  
11           don't know how to do this -- updated  
12           testimony, because I have new information.  
13           So I'd like to -- I'll just get it to  
14           everybody on each of the committees. Because  
15           I have new -- I got more updated information  
16           since I submitted the testimony on Friday.

17                       And I also would like to just take the  
18           chance to thank Senator Hinchey,  
19           Assemblymember Lupardo, Chris Tague,  
20           Assemblymember Tague, you know, for all the  
21           work that they've done and how supportive  
22           they've been for the Companion Animal Capital  
23           Fund and for the shelters in the State of  
24           New York. It really -- it has made a

1 difference.

2 And the fact that the three of us work  
3 together so well is why we have gotten so  
4 much done for companion animals in New York.  
5 And, you know, people think, Oh, New York,  
6 you guys don't get along. Well, we do. And  
7 it's made a big, big difference.

8 (Inaudible comment from dais.)

9 MS. POST: Yeah, well, you know how it  
10 is. Talk to my neighbor from Missouri.

11 (Laughter.)

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Inaudible.) You  
13 can adjust your testimony by submitting it to  
14 the same email site --

15 MS. POST: Same thing? Okay.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- that you  
17 submitted your testimony to.

18 MS. POST: Right. Thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

20 And then thank you, all three, for  
21 joining us today.

22 And I'm going to call out the last  
23 panel for this afternoon -- trust me, this  
24 will be the only budget hearing that ends in

1 the afternoon: Parks & Trails New York,  
2 American Farmland Trust, and Scenic Hudson.

3 Good afternoon. Which order -- do you  
4 have a preference?

5 MR. COTÉ: As you like.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Well, then, we'll  
7 start with my left, your right. Hello.

8 MR. COTÉ: Good afternoon. Thank you  
9 for the opportunity to speak with you all  
10 today. I'm really excited it's this early.

11 My name is Will Coté. I'm senior  
12 director of public lands at Parks & Trails  
13 New York. PT&Y is New York's leading  
14 advocate for our public lands, parks,  
15 historic sites, greenways and open spaces.

16 In the 40 years since our founding, we  
17 have strived to improve our health, economy  
18 and quality of life through the use and  
19 enjoyment of our iconic public lands.

20 And it's with this core mission in  
21 mind that I'd like to encourage you all to  
22 support the Governor's proposal of  
23 \$200 million in capital funding for  
24 State Parks. As you heard the interim

1 commissioner mention, we have record  
2 visitation this year reaching 88 million,  
3 which is the twelfth straight year of  
4 increased visitation, and this capital  
5 funding is essential to make our park system  
6 accessible, welcoming, and as pleasant an  
7 experience as possible, and also to chip away  
8 at the \$2 billion backlog that exists in the  
9 parks system.

10 After the successful centennial  
11 celebration last year, I think we should also  
12 anticipate additional visitation in 2025.  
13 And as Assemblymember Kim, Chair Kim  
14 mentioned, continued investment delivers  
15 profound benefits statewide because the park  
16 system is an economic powerhouse, with every  
17 1 million invested yielding 10 million in  
18 sales, 4 million in labor income, and  
19 7 million in state GDP. And to put it in  
20 perspective, this is now on par with the  
21 agricultural sector.

22 Turning to the Environmental  
23 Protection Fund, I'm going to stand with many  
24 of my colleagues over the next couple of

1           nights calling for an increase in the  
2           Environmental Protection Fund to  
3           \$500 million. The real estate transfer tax  
4           is a reliable revenue stream, with over  
5           \$1 billion collected in 2024 alone. With  
6           uncertainty surrounding federal leadership on  
7           environmental protection, this is a pivotal  
8           moment to demonstrate New York's  
9           nation-leading commitment to environmental  
10          stewardship and broader liveability here in  
11          New York State, not to mention that it would  
12          help rectify the gap between available  
13          funding and the oversubscription to nearly  
14          all EPF programs that benefit every corner of  
15          the state.

16                 Two examples to that point. I ask  
17                 that you increase the Park and Trail  
18                 Partnership Grant program within the EPF to  
19                 \$4 million from its \$2.5 million allocation  
20                 proposed by the Governor. Since 2015, this  
21                 program has awarded \$10 million to  
22                 24 projects across the state, leveraging  
23                 nearly \$5 million in private funding. How  
24                 much more impactful could this program be if

1 we didn't have to deny half the applications  
2 we receive each year.

3 Another example is the Connect Kids to  
4 Parks program, which since 2016 has enabled  
5 800,000 children to come to the outdoors,  
6 those opportunities to visit public lands and  
7 engage in meaningful scientific, historic,  
8 cultural programming.

9 Since the program has grown by  
10 500 percent since 2021, expanding that  
11 program to 5 million and allowing  
12 250,000 more students the opportunity to  
13 directly connect with nature and experience  
14 our state's best science classroom seems like  
15 a wise investment.

16 With 12 seconds left, I'm going to go  
17 off-course a little bit here and say that I  
18 strongly encourage you all to dedicate an  
19 extra 10 million in DEC's capital funding in  
20 this year's budget. It's important that we  
21 expand accessibility to all of our public  
22 lands. Users don't differentiate between  
23 parks or DEC properties. They just want  
24 outdoor recreation.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Next?

2 MS. FRACCAROLLI: Hi. Good afternoon.

3 My name is Carli Fraccarolli. I want to  
4 thank Chairs Pretlow and Krueger,  
5 Chairs Hinchey and Lupardo, Chairs Serrano  
6 and Kim -- who I do not see but still  
7 appreciate -- ranking members of both  
8 committees, and members of the Joint  
9 Legislative Budget Committee for the  
10 opportunity to testify today.

11 This is my first time testifying in my  
12 five years at Scenic Hudson, so I'm really  
13 excited about this opportunity.

14 I'm the government relations manager  
15 for Scenic Hudson. And if you're not  
16 familiar with our organization, Scenic Hudson  
17 is a land trust and environmental advocacy  
18 organization. We're the largest  
19 environmental organization in the  
20 Hudson Valley.

21 We've created over 45 parks and, since  
22 1992, we've protected almost 23,000 acres of  
23 farmland on 150 family farms. And we work  
24 really closely with farmers and partners like

1           Cornell Cooperative Extension and Soil and  
2           Water Conservation Districts to provide  
3           technical and financial assistance to  
4           farmers, conserve farmland, and connect  
5           people with fresh, local food.

6                        So you'll see that my written  
7           testimony identifies key areas in the  
8           proposed state budget that will meaningfully  
9           support Scenic Hudson's efforts to advance  
10          the state's agricultural and open space and  
11          environmental goals in the Hudson Valley and  
12          beyond. So with that said, I want to use my  
13          time today to flag a particularly impactful  
14          program that Scenic Hudson feels would merit  
15          your further attention.

16                       So we are encouraging the Legislature  
17          to increase the allocation for the Climate  
18          Resilient Farming program within the  
19          Environmental Protection Fund to \$33 million  
20          in your one-house budgets. And that would be  
21          up from the Governor's proposed  
22          \$15.25 million. And we're asking this, like  
23          Will said, in the context of our ask in  
24          partnership with a coalition of environmental

1 organizations to increase the EPF to  
2 \$500 million.

3 The reason we're advocating for an  
4 increase in funding for the Climate Resilient  
5 Farming program this year is that last year  
6 the New York State Department of Ag and  
7 Markets received an infusion of funds from  
8 USDA's Partnerships for Climate Smart  
9 Commodities grant to expand the New York  
10 Climate Resilient Farming program. And  
11 because of this, Ag and Markets was able to  
12 disburse approximately \$33 million in grants  
13 to farmers implementing regenerative  
14 agricultural and farming practices and  
15 reducing on-farm carbon emissions.

16 But even though the funds available  
17 for climate resilient farming programs and  
18 projects were more than doubled with this  
19 boost provided from the federal funding, the  
20 one-time grant, the program was still not  
21 able to fulfill every funding request, the  
22 total of which we believe totaled  
23 approximately \$49 million.

24 So we are respectfully submitting that

1           \$33 million should be the new floor for the  
2           climate resilient funding program, given the  
3           amount of funding requests, potential future  
4           lack of federal funding, and the fact that  
5           \$33 million was put directly to work on farms  
6           to fund practices that made positive impacts  
7           for both the climate and the farms and  
8           farmers themselves.

9           Thank you.

10          CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: {Mic off.}

11          MR. MANGANO: Good day, everyone.

12          Thank you so much for the opportunity to  
13          testify today.

14                 My name is Julian Mangano, and I'm the  
15          New York policy manager for American Farmland  
16          Trust, the nation's leading conservation  
17          organization dedicated to protecting  
18          farmland, promoting sustainable practices,  
19          and supporting farmers.

20                 New York's farmland anchors an  
21          \$85.8 billion farm and food economy  
22          supporting nearly 300,000 jobs across over  
23          6 million acres and over 30,000 farms.  
24          However, this vital resource is under threat.

1 From 2017 to 2022, New York lost nearly  
2 364,000 acres of farmland. At this rate, we  
3 risk losing another 452,000 acres by 2040,  
4 jeopardizing 2500 farms and 7,000 jobs.

5 To sustain New York's agriculture and  
6 address urgent challenges like food security  
7 and climate change, I urge the Legislature to  
8 act on the following priorities. For  
9 farmland protection, raise the Farmland  
10 Protection budget to \$25 million within a  
11 \$500 million Environment Protection fund.  
12 This investment will safeguard farmland,  
13 support farm transitions, and promote  
14 climate-smart agriculture.

15 We'd also like for an additional  
16 \$10 million in EPF funding to support the  
17 Article VII Part 00 amendments to the  
18 Executive Budget. To support transitioning  
19 and beginning farmers, we'd like to see  
20 Farmland for a New Generation be funded at  
21 \$1 million. Right now, with 60 percent of  
22 New York producers over age 55, and  
23 90 percent lacking transition plans, this  
24 increase in funding is critical to addressing

1 the demand to support farmland transition.

2 As Senator Hinchey has mentioned  
3 multiple times today, for Farm-to-School  
4 programs we'd like to include breakfast in  
5 the 30 percent initiative to make it more  
6 administratively feasible for schools to  
7 participate and increase local food purchases  
8 statewide.

9 We'd also like the maintaining of  
10 funding for Farm-to-School grant programs to  
11 strengthen farm-to-institution connections  
12 and improve student access to nutritious  
13 meals, following the lead of  
14 Governor Hochul's support for universal  
15 school meals for all.

16 For enhancing climate resilience, we  
17 would like to see an expansion in programs  
18 that support conservation practices like  
19 cover cropping and reduced tillage to combat  
20 climate change, improve soil health and  
21 preserve farmland. And we would also like to  
22 see an integration of AFT smart-solar  
23 principles to prevent farmland loss while  
24 supporting renewable energy development.

1                   And lastly, we'd like to see the  
2                   deployment of the \$150 million allocated in  
3                   the Environmental Bond Act for farmland  
4                   protection, ensuring these resources directly  
5                   contribute to long-term viability of  
6                   New York's agriculture. New York's farmland  
7                   fuels our economy, feeds our communities, and  
8                   combats climate change. By prioritizing  
9                   farmland protection and agricultural  
10                  initiatives in this Executive Budget and the  
11                  one-house budgets, we can secure a thriving  
12                  and equitable food system for our future  
13                  generations.

14                 Thank you for your time and continued  
15                 support for these critical issues.

16                 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very  
17                 much.

18                 Any questions from the Senate?

19                 Michelle Hinchey.

20                 SENATOR HINCHEY: Hi, everyone. Thank  
21                 you so much for being here and for all of  
22                 your work.

23                 First, to Julian, thank you for  
24                 flagging the Farm-to-School programs among

1 all of the important programs that you've  
2 cited. Can you also talk about why  
3 increasing the cents from 19 to 25 cents  
4 would be important, how that would be  
5 impactful?

6 MR. MANGANO: Yes. So to my  
7 understanding, like, local food procurement  
8 could cost a little bit more than the SYSCO  
9 food and just general, like, food we can get  
10 throughout the nation. So that additional  
11 reimbursement of 6 cents from the 19 cents  
12 will help just assist the school budgets and  
13 increase their capacity to --

14 SENATOR HINCHEY: -- to actually make  
15 it possible to buy farm fresh food --

16 MR. MANGANO: Yes.

17 SENATOR HINCHEY: -- into the schools  
18 for all those programs.

19 MR. MANGANO: Precisely.

20 SENATOR HINCHEY: Great. So yes, that  
21 nominal cent increase feels important.

22 You mentioned also smart-solar  
23 principles from AFT. Can you talk a little  
24 bit about those?

1                   MR. MANGANO: So currently we're  
2                   working on defining a definition for  
3                   agrivoltaic so it can be included with Ag and  
4                   Markets. And we're hoping to have that put  
5                   forward. We have a draft. We're in  
6                   discussion right now to get that moving. And  
7                   that is what I have at the moment.

8                   SENATOR HINCHEY: Great. Well, we  
9                   look forward to seeing those, because  
10                  we've -- obviously there's all that confusion  
11                  about what agrivoltaics mean, and dual use.  
12                  And is it -- sheep grazing, does that count  
13                  as agriculture? Where sometimes there's a  
14                  lot of loopholes that solar developers use to  
15                  be able to continue to move forward on a  
16                  program that doesn't actually maintain the  
17                  ability and access to farming on prime  
18                  farmland.

19                  So thank you for that.

20                  For Carli and Scenic Hudson, could you  
21                  talk a little bit -- and my colleague  
22                  Senator Fahy might mention this, but can you  
23                  talk a little bit about the farmland  
24                  preservation efforts that you're working on

1 and what we could be doing better in that  
2 space?

3 MS. FRACCAROLLI: Yeah. So like I  
4 said, we partner with farms to put  
5 conservation easements on their farms so that  
6 they're preserved in perpetuity so that we  
7 don't lose any more farmland. I think --

8 SENATOR HINCHEY: Would you say we  
9 have a lot -- where a lot of farmland is at  
10 risk of being lost today?

11 MS. FRACCAROLLI: Yeah, we are seeing  
12 farmland being lost every year,  
13 unfortunately. And we're also losing farmers  
14 themselves; they're aging out of being  
15 farmers.

16 So I think having a system in place to  
17 be able to keep farmland in farming for  
18 future generations of farmers, and also  
19 making sure that there's funding available  
20 for these farmers to conserve their land, is  
21 really important and something that we can  
22 definitely utilize at Scenic Hudson.

23 SENATOR HINCHEY: All right, thank  
24 you. Yeah, I mean, we were talking up here

1 before about the fires happening in  
2 California and have for the last number of  
3 years. We've all been talking about the  
4 importance of New York ag land and how we are  
5 going to be the breadbasket of our country  
6 once again. And so it's incumbent that we  
7 fund all of these programs and do a lot more  
8 to make sure we have our farmland protected.

9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman  
11 Lupardo.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO: Sure, thank  
13 you. Thank you for being here.

14 Julian, a quick question. You quickly  
15 said that you were supporting the Article VII  
16 changes, Part 00. Is that where the Governor  
17 adds urban agriculture and regional system  
18 support to current farmland protection  
19 activities?

20 MR. MANGANO: There is that part of  
21 the amendment. But just holistically, as the  
22 amendment is written, there is no true, like,  
23 fiscal designations. So we're just inserting  
24 that at least 10 million for those programs

1           should be instituted.

2                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO:   And could you  
3           just remind us -- I know you're calling for a  
4           500 million EPF.   But what did the  
5           Governor -- what does the Governor have in  
6           the budget to start with?

7                   MR. MANGANO:   Four hundred million.

8                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUPARDO:   Four hundred  
9           million.   And you're looking to supplement  
10          the climate resiliency and soil health from  
11          that additional funding.   Because it looks  
12          more than likely the funding has been put on  
13          pause.

14                   Senator Hinchey and I worked very hard  
15          years ago to create the soil health standards  
16          through that legislation and have been very  
17          proud that it's been funded on a regular  
18          basis.   It's interesting to find out that it  
19          was supplemented to that extent by federal  
20          dollars that are likely to go away.   I would  
21          hate to go backwards on that important  
22          program, so I appreciate your highlighting  
23          it.

24                   Thank you very much.   I'm good.

1                   CHAIRMAN PRETLOW:  Senate?

2                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER:  I'm sorry.  Any  
3                   other Assemblymembers?

4                   CHAIRMAN PRETLOW:  I have two more.

5                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER:  Two more?  Oh,  
6                   keep going.

7                   CHAIRMAN PRETLOW:  Assemblyman Chris  
8                   Tague.

9                   ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE:  Thank you, sir.

10                  Julian, my question's for you.  And it  
11                  was brought up during this -- you know, the  
12                  turnover of farms.  But my understanding is  
13                  that American Farmland Trust actually has a  
14                  program where you bring in young folks who  
15                  maybe were not grown up -- did not grow up on  
16                  a farm, and you try to match them with a  
17                  retiring farm whose kids or loved ones are  
18                  not interested in farming.

19                  Is that program still in place?

20                  MR. MANGANO:  Yes.  I mentioned in my  
21                  testimony that we would like to actually  
22                  increase the funding for that program from  
23                  700,000 to a million, just so we can have a  
24                  more robust impact with our regional

1 navigators and enhance that connection  
2 between the transitioning and new and  
3 beginning farmers.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: The other thing is  
5 I think it's very important for my colleagues  
6 to understand this, and anybody else that may  
7 be watching. Can you repeat the numbers on  
8 the amount of acreage in New York State that  
9 has been eaten up, that is no longer in  
10 productive farmland?

11 MR. MANGANO: Yeah. I mean, just to  
12 put it in perspective from, like, preparing  
13 for this testimony, some of the recent  
14 language was that New York had 9 million  
15 acres in farms, but now we're at 6 million  
16 acres in farms. But just between 2017 and  
17 2022 we've had 364,000 acres of land lost,  
18 and that's based on U.S. Ag census data.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN TAGUE: To me that is  
20 troubling, very troubling.

21 As I said earlier to the commissioner  
22 of Agriculture, I have this feeling, and I  
23 have for the last few years -- number one,  
24 the State of New York took local control away

1 from our local governments and the people  
2 that actually live in these communities. We  
3 no longer feel that it's necessary for them  
4 to have an opinion, or the other local  
5 farmers. And what this does is when you take  
6 that farmland away, it doesn't just hurt the  
7 farmer but it also hurts the farmers around  
8 them that may rent that property because they  
9 don't have enough.

10 This is a serious problem. This is  
11 much more serious than people are letting on  
12 to. Again, I'm going to repeat what I said  
13 to the commissioner: The left hand does not  
14 know what the right hand's doing. We're  
15 going to get to a situation here in New York  
16 State, one of the greatest agricultural  
17 states in this country, and we're not going  
18 to be able to sustain ourselves in  
19 agriculture. People need to smarten up at  
20 the top and figure out that we cannot  
21 continue down this road.

22 I really want to thank the three of  
23 you for your testimony today. And I see that  
24 you're passionate, as I am, about saving our

1 farmland. New York State should be the  
2 leader, the leader in agriculture in America.  
3 Best quality control, four growing seasons,  
4 the greatest five universities in  
5 agriculture -- we should be leading.

6 So thank you very much.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: One more.

9 Assemblywoman Anna Kelles, to close.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: I wanted to  
11 thank you all. Your testimonies are amazing.  
12 The research you did, amazing.

13 A couple of things. And I agree, the  
14 real estate transfer tax being the source of  
15 funding for the EPF means that we just do not  
16 have justification for not increasing it to  
17 500, given that it's a billion. And it's not  
18 coming from taxpayer dollars, particularly  
19 given the federal cuts. So thank you so much  
20 for bringing that up.

21 One question, on the other -- you  
22 know, I agree with you about the funding for  
23 the parks, the Park and Trail Partnership  
24 grants, capital funding. We should also make

1           sure that we connect it to an incredibly  
2           great source of therapy for mental health,  
3           especially for children. And we've failed to  
4           do that enough. And it is a huge boon to  
5           improve mental health, and I think that we  
6           could all use that as well.

7                     You brought up 2 trillion as a backlog  
8           of capital for parks. Where did that number  
9           come from? Because I've asked that earlier  
10          today, and I was told that we don't have that  
11          or wasn't given that information.

12                    MR. COTÉ: The number that I have been  
13          using is 2 billion, and that is solely an  
14          estimation that Parks & Trails New York has  
15          made. That is not necessarily substantiated  
16          by the agency --

17                    ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: I'd love to  
18          see --

19                    MR. COTÉ: -- it's just our best guess  
20          on the math.

21                    ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: I'd love to see  
22          that.

23                    So just a question about the school  
24          meals. And the data that I have shows that

1 we have 10 million a year, we've never spent  
2 more than 4 million a year, so we are  
3 reallocating every year. New York City does  
4 not reach the 30 percent threshold, so they  
5 wouldn't qualify right now. They'd have to  
6 build up.

7 So if I added breakfasts and I added  
8 25 cents and I added the entire state, would  
9 we even come close to meeting that 10 million  
10 threshold that is currently allocated for  
11 this, for school meals?

12 MR. MANGANO: No, I don't think so.  
13 The last I calculated, we would need  
14 11 million total meals, total lunch meals  
15 reimbursed, to get to that \$10 million at  
16 25 percent.

17 The data from the 2023-2024 purchasing  
18 was two-point -- no, \$3.1 million in  
19 reimbursement at the 19 cents. So if we went  
20 up to 25-cent reimbursement, it would take us  
21 to 4.1 million.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: So we could  
23 actually get 6 cents per meal back to  
24 farmers.

1 MR. MANGANO: Yes.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: With no more  
3 additional funding required by the state.

4 MR. MANGANO: Yes, correct.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: We would just  
6 have to start allocating the funding we  
7 actually have --

8 MR. MANGANO: Yes.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: -- distributed.

10 MR. MANGANO: And hopefully the  
11 inclusion of breakfast would increase overall  
12 school food authority participation by making  
13 it less --

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Universal.

15 MR. MANGANO: -- less administratively  
16 burdensome for them to participate in the  
17 program.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Right. So we  
19 could do breakfast and lunch and 25 cents and  
20 it would still fit within our budget.

21 MR. MANGANO: Yes.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Great.

23 Farmland for a New Generation, the 1  
24 million, that is for the navigators, correct?

1 MR. MANGANO: Yes.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Great. Thank  
3 you so much.

4 MR. MANGANO: Yeah, thank you.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Appreciate it.  
6 Thank you so much. This is wonderful.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: All right. Just  
8 double-checking. No more Assemblymembers or  
9 Senators with questions.

10 Then I want to thank the three of you  
11 for participating, and I want to officially  
12 close the first budget hearing of the  
13 2025 budget year.

14 We will be back here tomorrow morning  
15 at 9:30 with the EnCon and Energy hearing.  
16 It will go longer than today.

17 But I appreciate everybody's  
18 attendance and patience. Thank you very  
19 much.

20 (Whereupon, the budget hearing  
21 concluded at 5:06 p.m.)  
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23  
24