NEW YORK STATE SENATE

THE STENOGRAPHIC RECORD

ALBANY, NEW YORK

January 6, 2016

12:26 p.m.

REGULAR SESSION

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR KATHLEEN C. HOCHUL, President

FRANCIS W. PATIENCE, Secretary

P R O C E E D I N G S

THE PRESIDENT: The Senate will come to order.

I ask everyone to once again please rise and repeat with me the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

THE PRESIDENT: Today we are joined by His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan, archbishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of New York. He will give our invocation.

CARDINAL DOLAN: You'll understand my dependence for prayer at this historic moment, and my dependence upon God's own inspired word in the Bible, the Jewish author of the Book of Wisdom, Chapter 9. Let us pray.

God of our ancestors, Lord of mercy, You who have made all things by Your word and in Your wisdom have established us to rule and to serve the creatures produced by You, to govern the world in holiness and justice, and to render judgment with integrity of heart. Give us wisdom, wisdom, the attendant at Your throne, and reject us not from among Your people, for we

are but Your servants, weak and short-lived, lacking in comprehension and judgment. Indeed, though one be perfect among people, if wisdom, who comes from You, be not with him, he shall be held in no esteem.

With You is wisdom, who knows Your works and was present when You made the world, who understands what is pleasing in Your eyes and what is conformable with Your commandments. Send her forth from Your holy heaven and from Your glorious throne dispatch her, that she may be with us and work with us, that we may know what is Your will. For she knows and understands all things, and will guide us discreetly in our affairs and safeguard us by her glory.

Let us pray. You heard us, dear Lord. We need wisdom as we open this legislative session. Wisdom to know right from wrong, to serve You and our people with integrity and honor. Wisdom to work hard for the sake of others, to keep our word and vindicate the trust of our people. Wisdom to listen attentively and speak civilly and purposefully to pursue justice, with special

attention to babies and children, the poor, the sick, our elders. Wisdom to pray often and ask the forgiveness of You and people we might harm.

To admit we need Your help and inspiration is the beginning of wisdom itself, dear God, and that we do this historic afternoon as we reverently open this legislative year.

You who live and reign forever and ever, amen.

Happy New Year.

(Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will call the roll to ascertain a quorum.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Addabbo.

SENATOR ADDABBO: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Akshar.

SENATOR AKSHAR: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Amedore.

SENATOR AMEDORE: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Avella.

SENATOR AVELLA: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Bonacic.

SENATOR BONACIC: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Boyle.

SENATOR BOYLE: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Breslin.
SENATOR BRESLIN: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Carlucci.
SENATOR CARLUCCI: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Comrie.
SENATOR COMRIE: Present.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Croci.
SENATOR CROCI: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator DeFrancisco.
SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Díaz.
SENATOR DIAZ: Present.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Dilan.
SENATOR DILAN: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Espaillat.
(No response.)
THE SECRETARY: Senator Farley.
SENATOR FARLEY: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Felder.
SENATOR FELDER: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Flanagan.
SENATOR FLANAGAN: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Funke.
SENATOR FUNKE: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Gallivan.
SENATOR GALLIVAN: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Gianaris.
SENATOR GIANARIS: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Golden.
SENATOR GOLDEN: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Griffo.
SENATOR GRIFFO: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Hamilton.
SENATOR HAMILTON: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Hannon.
SENATOR HANNON: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Hassell-Thompson.
SENATOR HASSELL-THOMPSON: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Hoylman.
(No response.)
THE SECRETARY: Senator Kennedy.
SENATOR KENNEDY: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Klein.
SENATOR KLEIN: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Krueger.
SENATOR KRUEGER: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Lanza.
SENATOR LANZA: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Larkin.
SENATOR LARKIN: Present.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Latimer.
SENATOR LATIMER: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator LaValle.
SENATOR LaVALLE: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Little.
SENATOR LITTLE: Here.
THE PRESIDENT: Senator DeFrancisco, a quorum is present.
SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Thank you, Madam President.
Could you please recognize Senator Flanagan for a moment.
THE PRESIDENT: Senator Flanagan.
SENATOR FLANAGAN: Thank you, Senator DeFrancisco. Thank you, Madam President. And welcome back, everybody.
But, Cardinal, I'm going to interrupt you for a moment. If you wouldn't mind just coming into the middle of the chamber for a moment, please.
Senator Akshar.
I understand that you have a penchant for good food, and this is a --

CARDINAL DOLAN: (Inaudible.)

(Laughter.)

SENATOR FLANAGAN: I took a wild guess.

Senator Akshar, who's our newest member, just we want to, on behalf of the State Senate, present you with a token of our appreciation for your being with us today.

And just so everyone knows, these are personalized M&Ms --

(Laughter.)

SENATOR FLANAGAN: -- that not only say "Thank You," they say "Cardinal Dolan," there's a cross on a number of them. And most importantly, there's a lot of cardinal-red M&Ms in that bag.

CARDINAL DOLAN: Well, I'm still going to eat them.

(Laughter; applause.)

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Madam President, at this time would you please call on Senator Stewart-Cousins to introduce a new member of the Senate.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Stewart-Cousins.

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Thank you, Madam President.

It's my honor to introduce our newest Senate Democratic Conference member, Roxanne Persaud, 19th District in Brooklyn.

Senator Persaud.

(Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Floor Leader.

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Madam President, would you now again recognize Senator Flanagan for an introduction of a new member on this side of the aisle.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Flanagan.

SENATOR FLANAGAN: Thank you, Madam President.

It is my privilege and honor and great joy to welcome our newest colleague to our conference, a gentleman who hails from the Southern Tier, has distinguished himself already as a great member of our conference. His name is Fred Akshar, and he comes with a terrific background, very diverse experience, terrific family, steeped in law enforcement.

And the first time I met with Fred, I'm just going to say this, I asked him what his

top priorities were. And the first thing he said to me was heroin and opioid addiction. And I thought that was very telling and compelling that that would be what he would talk about, because that is in some sense unconventional. That just happened to be a private meeting.

He spent 15 years as a deputy sheriff, has distinguished himself in the public sector long before he joined the Senate.

So, Senator Akshar, welcome and thank you for being part of our conference.

(Applause.)

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Madam President, would you now proceed to the regular order of business.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr. Floor Leader.

As is custom, I am honored as Lieutenant Governor to have the courtesy extended to me to deliver brief welcoming remarks to this body. So I'm delighted to welcome all of you to the 239th session of the Senate. And I also want to tell you what a privilege it has been to work with each of you and our Governor, Andrew Cuomo.

And I hope that as you walk into

this magnificent room that you never lose the sense of awe that you must have felt your first time coming here to represent the people of your district. And whether you've been here 39 or so years, like Senator Farley or Senator LaValle, or just a matter of hours, like our newest members, Senators Akshar and Persaud, I want to make sure that you never lose that sense of honor and awe that you have in this room.

And also never forget what first drew you to public service, whether it was some injustice in your district that you wanted to right, whether it was some challenge your community faced that you felt you needed to fight for, or perhaps you simply had a desire to leave the world a better place.

And I, for one, drew my inspiration from my parents, who started life in a trailer outside Buffalo, New York, near the Bethlehem Steel plant. And on my refrigerator I'll never forget there was a little sign that said "Go into the world and do well. But more importantly, go into the world and do good."

So perhaps we can all unite behind the maxim of doing good for the world and doing

good for the people of this state, so we know when we enter these halls we can remain true to our values and to our constituents and to our geographic boundaries.

But ultimately we do share a common bond. And as the Governor frequently reminds us, we share a name, and that is New Yorkers. And through our willingness to set aside our differences, roll up our sleeves and work together, we will once again earn and deserve the respect of the people who sent us to this body, who put their faith in each of us.

As I traveled the 62 counties this past year, I can't forget the people whose faces I saw who touched my life profoundly, giving me a glimpse into their worlds. Sharing tears with the wife and children of someone being deployed from Fort Drum. Reading to a toddler in a homeless shelter in Buffalo. Talking to concerned business owners along Main Streets in Long Island. And watching in awe of a 30-year schoolteacher veteran as she embraced pre-K students in Plattsburgh to give them a new chance.

Those are the 19 million people that

we represent here today, not ourselves. They are the reason we are here.

And I will close by saying last week I watched as Cardinal Dolan welcomed all of us to St. Patrick's Cathedral for a very sad occasion. It was the mourners of Detective Joseph Lemm, who we lost in conflict in Afghanistan. But afterward I noticed that the Cardinal wrote a column, and he called it "A year of trials gone by, a year of hope ahead." Interesting title.

But His Eminence said: "We have a God of second chances, a Lord who never tires of giving us a fresh start." Well, that is why we stand here today. We're closing the door on 2015, optimistic about the promise of this new year, our fresh start.

And while it may seem an eternity away on this cold day, let's look with anticipation to that day six months from now when we close this chapter and we ask ourselves, did we make a positive difference in the lives of New Yorkers while we sat in this room? And I say let the answer be a resounding yes, we did.

Thank you for the privilege of addressing you today.

Senator DeFrancisco.

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Yes, can we now proceed to the regular order of business.

THE PRESIDENT: Presentation of petitions.

Messages from the Assembly.

Messages from the Governor.

Reports of standing committees.

Reports of select committees.

Communications and reports from state officers.

Motions and resolutions.

Floor Leader.

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Madam President, there's a resolution at the desk. And I'd ask that it be read in its entirety and move for its immediate adoption.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution by Senators Flanagan and Klein, directing the Temporary President to appoint a committee of three to inform the Governor that the Senate is organized and ready to proceed with business.

"RESOLVED, Directing the Temporary

President to appoint a committee of three compromised of Senator Akshar, Senator Savino, and Senator Comrie, for the purpose of informing the Governor that the Senate is organized and ready to proceed with business."

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

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed, nay.

(No response.)

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

Senators Akshar, Savino and Comrie are appointed to inform the Governor that the Senate is assembled and ready to proceed with business.

Mr. Floor Leader.

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Madam President, I believe there's another resolution at the desk. I request that it be read in its entirety and moved.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution

by Senators Flanagan and Klein, directing the Temporary President to appoint a committee of three to wait upon the Assembly and inform that body that the Senate is assembled and ready to proceed with business.

"RESOLVED, Directing the Temporary President to appoint a committee of three comprised of Senator Croci, Senator Carlucci, and Senator Persaud, for the purpose of waiting upon the Assembly and informing that body that the Senate is assembled and ready to proceed with business."

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

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed, nay.

(No response.)

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

Senators Croci, Carlucci and Persaud are appointed to wait upon the Assembly to inform them that the Senate is assembled and ready to proceed with business.

Mr. Floor Leader.

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Madam President, would you now recognize Senator Stewart-Cousins for opening remarks.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Stewart-Cousins.

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Thank you, Madam President.

And again, it's wonderful to be back. And Happy New Year to all. It's certainly an honor to welcome you, Senator Akshar, and to once again welcome Senator Roxanne Persaud.

When we began the introduction, I didn't tell you that she came to us by way of the Assembly and by way, before that, of tremendous community service. She has been a committed advocate, and I think we might have even had an opportunity to see how she conducts herself. Because there's been a difficult time, and she's been the topic of many conversations, and the professionalism, the courage that she shows I think is incredible.

So again, welcome her. Her family is here. And we expect great things from you and certainly from all of us here today.

Senator DeFrancisco, good to see you

in your new role. Congratulations. And look forward to working with you as deputy leader with, of course, my deputy.

And it's wonderful again to be back, Senator Flanagan and Senator Klein. I'm looking forward to a very, very good year. It's clearly the time that we have to come together. It's a new year, it's a new session. And as always, it serves as a restart button. It's a time to refresh our commitment to this great state and to the people we serve.

And we are pressing a restart from a year that -- last year was extremely interesting. And I don't have to tell you it was a year that was filled with scandal. And I believe it was a year that would make all of us, as elected officials, angry.

The people of this State of New York are looking at us to take concrete action. So we have a responsibility and an opportunity, once again, not to bury our heads in the sand and act like nothing is wrong. This is the time to get serious. This is the time to express our anger and to turn that anger into legislative action. It's time for us to have a major rehaul of our

Ethics Law and finally -- finally -- let Albany be an example of good government.

We have to restrict, limit outside income, because we're here to serve the public. We need to do that. We have to stop using our campaign funds as ATM machines, those of us who do. Again, the majority of us are here doing what we have to do for the public. But the public needs to know that we hear what they're saying and that we reflect what they're thinking.

We have to close the outrageous LLC loopholes, and we have to change our campaign finance system. We can move on ethics right away. We can show the people of New York we're about doing their business and deserving of their trust. You know, year after year our conference presents new ethics -- we have so many different things we could do. We've just got to come together and start doing something. This is the time.

And when we do that and when we prove that we can come together because we recognize what people care about, we can also, also do the other things people care about. We know what we're dealing with in terms of raising

the minimum wage yet again, because we are still talking about millions of New Yorkers in bone-crushing poverty. And we have to lift people up.

And I'm happy that the Governor has joined this fight and is leading it. I hope that we will not disappoint impoverished working New Yorkers once again. Let's raise the minimum wage, let's index it, let's make work dignified.

We also have to go back, dare I say, to health and equality of women in New York. I'd like to pass a real -- not watered-down -- entire Women's Equality Act.

We need to -- and I know, Senator Akshar, you care about addiction. And so we have to help those struggling with addiction, including the horrible heroin scourge that's devastating our communities across the state. I hope we can get together and do those things.

And then we have our children. We have to make sure that all New York children have access to quality education. They deserve everything we can do to help them build a foundation in this global economy. And we have to make sure that higher education is accessible

and affordable to all of our kids.

We have to make sure that everyone has an affordable roof over their heads that they can call home. And when we invest in crumbling infrastructure, let's not forget to rebuild not only our roads and bridges but our schools across New York State, and truly make New York the Empire State.

Senator Flanagan, the Democratic Conference stands ready to work with you on these and all of the issues. Together we will give all New Yorkers the responsible and productive government they deserve. The Democratic Conference stands ready to work with all of our Senators regardless of party affiliation.

So that being said, let's get to work. Happy New Year. Thank you.

(Standing ovation.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Senator Stewart-Cousins.

Senator DeFrancisco.

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Madam President, would you please recognize Senator Klein for a brief -- I don't know if they're brief or not, but for opening remarks. Thank

you.

(Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Senator Klein.

SENATOR KLEIN: Thank you, Madam President. Thank you very much.

I want to say a very special thank you to our Majority Leader, John Flanagan. I want to thank him most of all for his spirit of bipartisanship, and also for the new furniture.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR KLEIN: I also want to thank the Minority Leader of our institution, Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, for her leadership as well.

And I too want to welcome the new members of the Senate. First, Senator Roxanne Persaud, I thank you for your leadership and your courage, and I look forward to working with you on Day One on meaningful and effective gun control laws. I thank you for that.

I also want to welcome Senator Fred Akshar. Your law enforcement background I think is going to prove very, very useful in making sure New Yorkers are safer when they go to sleep

at night. Thank you for your service.

I also want to thank our Lieutenant Governor, Kathy Hochul, who has spent, I think since we left here, each and every day visiting every area of the state. She truly is probably one of the most hardest-working public officials I ever met.

I also want to thank Cardinal Dolan for addressing us today. He's certainly an inspiration to all of us.

And I also want to thank the hardest-working members, I believe, of the New York State Senate, the members of the Independent Democratic Conference. I want to thank Senators Valesky, Savino, Carlucci and Avella. Thank you for your dedicated service.

I think it was said before, but I think we are really entering, I think, sort of a turning point in the State Senate. And I think it's incumbent upon all of us to work together to sort of regain the voters' trust. I think the way we do that is by getting to work and doing the people's business. But I also think we need to reform this very institution, both the Senate as well as the Assembly.

The Independent Democratic Conference this summer has been working on a whole host of different issues, but one thing I want to single out is something I got involved in, along with my colleague Senator Valesky, in fighting K2, otherwise known as synthetic marijuana. This is something that is killing our young people throughout our state, unfortunately is still legal in New York.

I have passed in the State Senate overwhelmingly for the past three years a way we can ban all types of synthetic drugs. But now I think the clarion call has to go to the Assembly to finally pass this analog bill and keep our young people safe.

The Independent Democratic Conference also laid out this year -- and we're officially doing it tomorrow, but this is sort of a preview of a blueprint for a better New York which we're calling New York 2020. We have Educate New York 2020, House New York 2020, Work New York 2020 and of course Live New York 2020.

And I think one of the things that we start off with is our bold education plan. I

think it's a way to invest in our students, a very important way to invest in our students, through expanding after-school opportunities. Our program will allow 1.2 million children in New York State to attend an after-school program of real, meaningful activity, which they don't have right now.

We also have to make sure that we don't stop just with lower-level education, but with college. I think we've been saying this time and time again, it's not only a New York problem, but probably a problem across the United States, of the high cost of college education. We're proposing something that I think is going to finally deal with the problem.

We're introducing a zero-interest loan program called the New York Achieve Loan Program, which will actually create no-interest loans for students to actually achieve the American dream of a college education.

We also have a House New York plan which calls for more investment in the New York City Housing Authority developments, as well as to revamp the Mitchell-Lama 2020 program, which we effectively got into the budget last year.

The best way we can actually make sure that we have affordable housing is to reinvigorate this very important program, which allows various income levels, different tiers, to live under one roof and live affordably.

One of the things that I think is extremely important, that we can no longer ignore, is making sure we get more and more New Yorkers back to work. We need to do paid family leave. It's become, I think, something that is crucial to New Yorkers. This is a national issue. I've been pushing it now for the past three years. And I think what we need to do is finally get it done now.

There's no way we should put New Yorkers in a position to act accordingly to what their heart tells them to do but what their pocketbook allows them to do. They have to be able to take care of a sick loved one -- a parent, a grandparent. They have to be able to bond with a newborn. This is something that's crucial. So we're calling for a 12-week paid family leave program to happen finally here in New York State.

Last year we were probably one of

the first that talked about the infrastructure needs, not only in downstate but upstate and really everywhere in between. And I think the way we actually finally invest in our infrastructure across the State of New York is to do it in a way where we create a revolving loan fund so the money is there year after year and we tie it to good-paying jobs.

This is the New Deal. I know some of my Republican colleagues maybe don't like that word. But you know something, I think now is the time to not only create or recreate the New Deal, but actually improve our infrastructure statewide and make sure we create good-paying jobs in the process.

We have to do something about childcare. Childcare is beyond the reach of most couples. And at the same time we have to not only guarantee that childcare is affordable, we have to make sure it's safe. That's something that the Independent Democratic Conference is pushing for as well.

As I said before, I think this is the way we restore the voters' trust, by truly doing the people's business in a bipartisan way.

But at the same time we really have to restructure our institution.

When we left here I called for a ban on outside income. I tried to lead by example by divesting from my law firm which I had for 15 years. I love practicing law, and I know many of you love it as well. But at the same time, I think we've come to a time where we have to make a choice: Are we going to be full-time legislators and serve the people full-time, or are we going to do it part-time? I think clearly what the voters want and what the people deserve is a full-time legislature and banning all outside income.

So I think we laid out, I think, a robust agenda. I think if any year is the year that we have to truly get to work, it's now.

So again, I want to thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle. And I think the way we restore the voters' trust is to once again do the people's business and do it quickly.

Thank you, Senator Flanagan.

(Standing ovation.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you,

Senator Klein.

Senator DeFrancisco.

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Madam President, would you now recognize Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan for his opening remarks.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Flanagan.

SENATOR FLANAGAN: Thank you. Thank you, Senator DeFrancisco.

Madam President, it's nice to see you presiding today. I wish good things for you this year and for your colleague, commonly known as Governor Andrew Cuomo. We have proven that we can work together, and when we do so on behalf of the people of this great state, things tend to work out much more positively.

I don't know if he -- I don't see him in here, but I want to speak about a couple of people first.

Senator Persaud, I apologize for not properly recognizing you before. Welcome. I hope you have a prosperous 2016.

I want to thank my colleagues Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Senator Jeff Klein, the leader of the IDC, Floor Leader Mike

Gianaris for their work in the past. And I think there are a number of things that we need to reflect on and keep in mind.

But before I go into that, there's a gentleman who actually helps run this place. He's commonly known as the Secretary of the Senate. Frank Patience does a great job on behalf of all the members, and a lot of the good things that you've seen done are with he and his crew. So to the Secretary of the Senate, who is now coming right back into the chamber.

(Sustained applause.)

SENATOR FLANAGAN: The Cardinal is in his office, so the Cardinal heard his name being taken out, so he made him come out here. But, Frank, thank you for all the work that you do.

And we have -- I'm reflecting on a number of different things. I'm going to focus on some very positive things. First of all, we have proven that we can work together. Not a hundred percent, but we have proven we can work together. And that's a good thing. When we listen to our constituents, when we listen to the taxpayers, when we work in a collegial capacity,

good things happen for the people of the State of New York.

And I know we can do it because we've done it already. We've proven that we can have an on-time budget. We've proven that we can have a spending cap at the state level which is self-imposed but not statutorily imposed. Those are things that we need to be focusing on.

I can look back to last year, see some things that we did really well. I believe that one of the things we need to do is take credit for the things that we actually get done. A perfect example: We extended the property tax cap last year for another four years. That is still wildly popular with the taxpayers. It saves billions of dollars for New York State residents. And that was a very good thing, and we should talk about it.

We also gave a record increase in aid to education, $1.4 billion, 6 percent, the largest increase in the history of the State of New York, I believe. We commit over $27 billion a year in aid to education, appropriately so. And we will continue to have debates on that. So no one should apologize for that.

And by the way, we all know this. That's where we put all our money. That's where the single largest increase is every year. So we do have accomplishments that we can and should point to.

And in that vein, I want to talk about public service for a moment. I actually believe in public service. I come from a family steeped in public service, and I'm very proud of it. I'm proud to serve in the Legislature, proud to work with my colleagues even when we have our differences. So when I look around the room, I see faces of integrity. I see people who really care about the communities that they represent. And that includes the elected officials and the incredibly hardworking staff that happens to be with us.

So we should not apologize for the good work that gets done. We should not apologize for the fact that we've chosen a noble profession and being involved in public service. And I think we need to stand up for the traditions of the Senate in particular and speak proudly about this institution and the good things that we actually do do.

We'll take the body blows. I get it. And that's going to come even when we're doing good things.

But I'm going to talk about my colleagues. So I did a little homework. You're going to have to bear with me a second; I've got to put the glasses on for this.

I know everyone has pride in their districts, so I'm just going to run off -- I'm not including or excluding anybody on purpose, but I did some checking on everybody's district, notable parts of everyone's district.

Senator Bonacic, Roscoe, New York, commonly known as Trout Town, USA. It's very popular. I know it is.

Senator Espaillat, Riverside Park. I happen to know Riverside Park quite well because my daughter lives in Washington Heights.

Senator Felder, Sunset Park.

Senator Funke, Wegmans, Wegmans' flagship Pittsford store. Everybody knows Wegmans.

Senator Gallivan, home to one of my favorite places in the world, Letchworth State Park.

Senator Gianaris, Astoria Park.

Senator Griffo, Utica tomato pie.

Senator Hannon, Bethpage State Park.

Senator Klein, Pelham Bay Park.

We've got a heck of a lot of parks in the State of New York.

Senator Lanza, Royal Crown Bakery.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR FLANAGAN: The fact that you live there is worthy enough. But just picking out things in people's districts.

Senator LaValle, the Hamptons.

Senator Little, Lake George.

Senator Marchione, Saratoga Racetrack.

Senator Montgomery, Brooklyn Children's Museum.

Senator Ortt, Niagara Falls State Park.

Senator Parker, Prospect Park Zoo.

Senator Peralta, a very proud year to be representing Citi Field. A great year for the Mets. So Senator Peralta.

(Laughter; applause.)

SENATOR FLANAGAN: Now, we had a

very interesting debate not too long ago about yogurt. But now I have learned that in LeRoy, New York, which is represented by Senator Ranzenhofer, that is where Jell-O was created, in 1897.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR FLANAGAN: I'm telling you, I did some homework here, all right?

Senator Rivera, the Bronx Zoo.

Senator Robach, Ontario Beach Park.

Senator Savino, Coney Island.

Senator Serino, Culinary Institute of America.

Senator Serrano, Yankee Stadium.

Senator Squadron, the famous Peter Luger Steak House.

Senator Stewart-Cousins, the Untermyer Gardens Conservancy.

Senator Valesky, Liverpool-Onondaga Lake.

And last but by no means least, Senator Young, who has the hometown of Lucille Ball in her district.

Fun facts about the Senate and our districts. But my point, in fairness, is

everybody's proud of where they represent, and we should be. And when we fight for our districts, that's what our calling is. So we have a lot of things that we should be speaking about.

So let me just touch on a couple of priorities, if I may. I believe that we have to do a lot more in terms of economic development. Our sort of one-dimensional focus, from our Republican conference, is going to be about jobs and jobs and jobs. We want economic opportunity for every single New Yorker. No matter what their ethnicity, no matter what their venue, their demography, their geography, their income, we want to have everyone have equal opportunity. That's our fundamental job.

Because I look at it this way. The more jobs we create, the more we stimulate economic development, the more revenue we generate for the State of New York. We can invest in wise and prudent programs. And if we do it properly, we may be actually able to do things like tax cuts, real tax cuts. I love the idea of a rebate check, but frankly I'd like to be doing tax cuts instead of giving people back their own money which they should have had in the

first place.

So the priority is jobs. That's incredibly important.

We're also going to be talking about the GEA. It is very, very, very important that we eliminate the GEA in its entirety. That has been a priority of this conference. It will be our number-one priority in terms of education. And I have said this very clearly, we will not have a budget if the GEA is not eliminated. It's been there way too long.

(Applause.)

SENATOR FLANAGAN: So the GEA.

Now, in terms of other stuff, I had a chance to travel a lot around this state. And it's a big state and, by gosh, it's a beautiful state. There are so many wonderful areas. And I just think of all the trips that I've made going out to Buffalo, going out to Rochester. I was up in Betty Little's district recently, visiting Bombardier and Nova Bus. So there's a lot of good things going on in the State of New York.

And I have to say, here's a perfect example. Had no idea how much interaction we have with Quebec and Montreal. But by going up

to Plattsburgh and hanging out with Betty Little and listening to her local residents, learned a lot. You can read about it, but going and seeing it and meeting the people makes all the difference in the world.

So our priorities, again, are going to be jobs, the GEA. We believe there should be a spending cap. The Senate has passed a statutory state spending cap, the Assembly has not. With all due respect, Madam President, the Governor has not offered the state spending cap, although we have lived within an artificially imposed one. Which is good, but it's time that we passed a state spending cap. And we will pass that again this year in the Senate.

I want to just talk about one or two other things. There was a lot discussed about ethics and budget priorities and things of that nature. The minimum wage is a very important issue, and we should all be clear that the Senate, in a bipartisan capacity, has passed increases in the minimum wage. Because it sounds like everybody's talking about the minimum wage as if we've done nothing. The minimum wage has gone up 75 percent since 2004. And that was done

working with the Governor, working with Republicans and Democrats.

Are we going to have a healthy discussion about this? Of course we are. But it can't be done in isolation. If we're not talking about the regulatory environment, the economic development environment, if we're not looking for relief for businesses on energy taxes, manufacturing taxes, all those kinds of things -- we have to have a complete discussion. And I know we will.

But it's very interesting because a lot of people have been opining on this subject, and I have been circumspect and judicious in large part because nobody has seen a proposal. Until we see an actual proposal and get to digest what's in there, and perhaps more importantly what is not, we have to be careful in terms of what we say.

We, as I said before, we want to have economic opportunity for everyone. And in that vein, Senators Amedore and Martins have done great work on workforce development. I was up in Rochester in Senator Robach's district. We met with the Rochester Business Alliance. And I

remember very clearly they talked about the fact that they have a number of significant job openings but they don't have the people with the skills to fill the jobs. So when we're talking about minimum wage, we should be talking about job training, retraining, workforce development. All that has to go together.

The quality of life issues I'll touch on very briefly, and they are all very important. Every person in this chamber has spoken about addiction and how pervasive and terrible it is. We need to do more. That's one example.

Second issue, Senator Serino, quality of life, she heads up a task force on Lyme disease. That's a very significant issue. And we will do more in that area. It is very problematic in many of our communities -- Senator LaValle's district, Senator Serino's district. She showed us a map; it's scary to see what's out there.

Another thing. I'm wearing -- you guys have all heard me talk about this. If I'm a one-note Johnny, everyone's got to get used to it. I have my green bracelet on for organ

donation. Senator Hannon has been a leader in this area. And we've done a little better, but this is an area where we can make so much improvement. And this is one thing we can do that will actually and truly save people's lives.

Lastly, going back to ethics. Let's be clear about some of the things that we have done. And I am not going to apologize, I'm going to be unabashed in suggesting that in the last seven or eight years we have made major sweeping changes in our laws in the State of New York.

I believe that all the members in this body and the Assembly provide more transparency and more disclosure and more personal and more professional information than any other Legislature in the country. We made significant changes where there was a lot more disclosure. And that's part of what we do in terms of being here.

We've also made changes in the Senate. We made changes that are important to the running of this body. Much to my chagrin, we have imposed term limits for legislative leaders. We have done it in our rules, and we will pass legislation to do that. So we've already taken

positive steps.

And last year, by way of example, we had a three-way agreement on pension forfeiture. And by the way, we've already enacted laws to protect in that area, and they are good, hard, stringent laws. But we had a three-way agreement, and the Senate passed what was agreed upon. The Assembly chose not to. They need to do better. Because if we're going to be talking about restoring the public trust, it's our actions that speak much louder than our words.

So in terms of ethics and professional responsibility, I believe a couple of things. Number one, if we're doing our job in meeting the needs of the people of this state, that is the most important thing that we can do. Do it collegially, do it the right way, and things will generally take care of themselves.

We have -- we just have a lot more work that we need to do. We will engage in whatever discussions that are necessary and have them appropriately. I listened carefully to Senator Klein and Senator Stewart-Cousins.

I'll give you a perfect example. Our conference has been philosophically and

stridently opposed to public financing of campaigns. We're not going to change that position. I'd rather spend $300 million on education or highways, roads, bridges, the environment, healthcare, than funding political campaigns. So that's -- for us, that's something we just want to make clear that we still are stridently opposed to.

Having said that, the obligations in terms of the public's view of this institution and government generally, it's incumbent on every one of us -- Senator Stewart-Cousins, you, me, Senator Gianaris, Senator Klein, Senator Valesky, Senator Young, everyone who serves in this chamber -- we have to keep our house in good order. And if we do so and we do it properly, the confidence that the people have in us will not only be restored, it should grow.

I am desperately proud to be working in the Senate. I still feel very humbled and privileged to be able to serve as legislative leader. I enjoy working with Senator Stewart-Cousins and Senator Klein, have every reason to believe that we're going to have a very prosperous and productive year.

And think about it -- I said this to Senator LaValle before -- how bad a year could it possibly be when we have Cardinal Dolan open our session? So I look at that as an auspicious beginning.

I thank everyone for their patience and indulgence. And as some of our colleagues said, let's get to work.

Thank you, Madam President.

(Standing ovation.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Senator Flanagan.

Senator DeFrancisco.

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Yes. On behalf of Senator Flanagan, I ask that the following committee assignments be handed up and such assignments be filed in the Journal.

THE PRESIDENT: So ordered.

Floor Leader.

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Before I ask if there's any further business, something that Senator Flanagan said troubles me greatly. I can't understand why, if Senator Ranzenhofer's district is the home of Jell-O, that yogurt is our state snack.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: I just -- I can't understand it.

With that said, is there any further business at the desk?

THE PRESIDENT: Nothing that important.

(Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: No further business at the desk.

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: That being the case, the Senate -- excuse me. Okay, we have guests. We have members of the Assembly here to inform this body of who will be greeting the Governor as well as they're greeting the Senate.

So if you'd like to say anything, gentlemen.

ASSEMBLYMAN OAKS: Thank you, Senator DeFrancisco.

Assemblyman Farrell and I would like to inform you have that the Assembly has convened for the new year -- after adjourning, actually, sine die, I guess, for last year, taking care of that business. But we are organized and ready to conduct business for the year ahead.

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Thank you, gentlemen. We appreciate that. We're looking forward to working with you and the rest of the members of the Assembly.

That being said, there being no further business, I move that we adjourn until Monday, January 11th, at 3:00 p.m.

THE PRESIDENT: On motion, the Senate stands adjourned until Monday, January 11th, at 3:00 p.m., intervening days being legislative days.

SENATOR DeFRANCISCO: Intervening days being legislative days.

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