NEW YORK STATE SENATE

THE STENOGRAPHIC RECORD

ALBANY, NEW YORK

January 6, 2021

12:34 p.m.

REGULAR SESSION

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR KATHLEEN C. HOCHUL, President

ALEJANDRA N. PAULINO, ESQ., Secretary

P R O C E E D I N G S

THE PRESIDENT: The Senate will come to order.

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

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

THE PRESIDENT: Today's invocation will be delivered by Reverend Kenneth J. Doyle, of the Church of St. Mary, Clinton Heights, in Albany.

REVEREND DOYLE: Let us pray.

Good and loving God, we ask Your blessing as we welcome the new year. And as for the year gone by, frankly, Lord, we are relieved to see it end. COVID-19 and racism have intersected our lives in painful ways, and we pray that both will fade far into the distance.

Since the earliest session of the Continental Congress, our nation's Legislature has opened with a prayer to the Almighty, and we follow in that tradition today.

When our own state's first Constitution was adopted in 1777, the New York State Senate consisted of 24 members, elected

from and by the freeholders of this state who possessed 100 pounds over and above all indebtedness. No such qualification governs today; only the desire to serve.

Wrap Your arms, Lord, around these worthy men and women of the present Senate. Guide them first to seek Your wisdom, to lay aside selfish desires and petty grievances, to speak respectfully and with humility one to another.

Protect them from the distractions of power and influence, to focus instead on the good of the citizens they have been elected to serve. Give them a particular sensitivity for those among us who are most in need.

And after enjoying the blessings of this life, Lord, welcome them one day into the joy that is eternal.

Amen.

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

I now ask all the Senators present,

in person or joining us by remote means, to please rise at this time to take the ceremonial oath of office.

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

ALL SENATORS: I do solemnly swear --

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE PRESIDENT: -- so help me God.

ALL SENATORS: -- so help me God.

THE PRESIDENT: Congratulations to all of you on your election to the Senate.

(Applause.)

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

THE SECRETARY: Senator Addabbo.

Senator Akshar.

Senator Bailey.

Senator Benjamin.

Senator Biaggi.

Senator Borrello.

Senator Boyle.

Senator Breslin.

Senator Brisport.

Senator Brooks.

Senator Brouk.

Senator Comrie.

Senator Cooney.

Senator Felder.

Senator Gallivan.

Senator Gaughran.
Senator Gianaris.
Senator Griffo.
Senator Harckham.
Senator Helming.
Senator Hinchey.
Senator Hoylman.
Senator Jackson.
Senator Jordan.
Senator Kaminsky.
Senator Kaplan.
Senator Kavanagh.
Senator Kennedy.
Senator Krueger.
Senator Lanza.
Senator Liu.
Senator Mannion.
THE PRESIDENT: A quorum is present, and the Senate may proceed.
In keeping with the tradition of this chamber, it is my honor as President of the Senate to welcome you to the 2021 legislative session. Which means one thing -- 2020 is over.
(Laughter; applause.)
THE PRESIDENT: On behalf of

Governor Cuomo and myself, I want to welcome our new members and our returning members as well.

Whether you're a rookie or a veteran, I hope you never lose that sense of awe that you feel each time you enter this chamber -- even if only virtually for this time. And never forget that we conduct business in this stunningly beautiful place only because the voters have conferred that privilege upon each of us.

And since I gaveled in on January 8, 2020 -- which seems so long ago -- our state and our nation have endured the unthinkable. It's been a year of tremendous loss. We've buried loved ones. We've seen businesses and dreams disappear. Milestones -- the birth of a child, a wedding, a graduation, holidays -- all missed.

We've lost that personal connection that makes us each human -- like the ability to hold my father's hand as he lies ill far away in another state.

But rather than dwell any longer in the depths of despair, my hope is that in this new year we experience an awakening, personally and as a nation. Because if this pandemic has

taught us anything, it is the harsh realization that life is indeed fragile and that we have a limited time to shape the future for next generations. For in less than one year's time -- one year ago, there were 360,000 people who thought they had more time, but because of COVID did not.

So in order to make sense of the chaos and the loss that we've experienced, we have to reorient our priorities, and do it soon.

How? First let's start by casting off the negative emotions that swallowed up most of 2020. Banish them forever. In its place, adopt something far more soul-enriching and productive: An attitude of duty and of gratitude.

Duty to serve the public, duty to make positive change, but also gratitude for people once taken for granted who have truly emerged as essential. And, finally, grateful for the gift of life itself. We have learned we can no longer take health, jobs, relationships, our positions -- or, indeed, time -- for granted.

And perhaps the gift we should be grateful for is that we've been given our World

War II moment in history, the forever-unifying bond that generations that lived through and survived a shared tumultuous experience. For it's in that bond that unifies us that we as representatives of this great state can now lead and show how New York can emerge even stronger, more resilient, and indeed even better.

We start by being recommitted to the long overdue reckoning with the injustices that still plague people in our country and our state. We act with urgency, in that the time to work together to solve problems is now. For the racial and cultural barriers to social and economic justice have only been amplified since the COVID crisis began. Higher infection rates, healthcare deserts, unemployment and food insecurity often feel preordained by the color of one's skin or the zip code they live in. This cannot be the existence that we leave for the next generation to inherit.

So how do we create the world we want our children and grandchildren to live in? Let's start with this simple premise: All New Yorkers are entitled to affordable healthcare, affordable childcare, a high-quality

education, and equal opportunities for success and jobs.

Our emergence from this dark time in our history lies on one common purpose. And first let's start, as the Governor has spoken about, to vaccinate our people as quickly as humanly possible and build back better, as we learn from lessons in our quest for true social and economic justice.

And finally, I suggest that we lean into and embrace the next challenges with the confidence and the swaggers that only New Yorkers know how to do, because we often have done the impossible. It's in our DNA. It's who we are.

So no matter what part of this fascinatingly diverse state that you represent, whether it's the most rural back roads, the Thruway corridor, our busiest expressways and avenues, all roads must lead to a better future for every New Yorker. And I look forward to being on that journey with you.

And at this time, if you'll allow me one small point of personal privilege, I'd also like to say to New York's team, to my friends across the state, first playoff game in 25 years,

can we all collectively say "Go Bills."

(Laughter; applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

Thank you, Senator Gianaris. You're next.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Thank you, Madam President.

We all wish the Buffalo Bills well this weekend and in the weeks to come, and hope that those watching the game are doing so safely.

I believe there's a resolution at the desk, Madam President. I ask that it be read and move for its immediate adoption.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 1, by Senator Gianaris, providing for the election of Andrea Stewart-Cousins as Temporary President of the Senate for the years 2021-2022.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Thank you, Madam President.

These are, as you pointed out, very unique, difficult and challenging times. And these times call for a very steady hand of

leadership to guide our state. I have the privilege of nominating someone to lead this body who has such a demeanor, such a respect and such a personality to do exactly that in this very difficult, difficult time.

I had the privilege of nominating Andrea Stewart-Cousins to become the first female leader of this body two years ago. And at the time, her leadership was a promise. We hadn't served in the majority yet. And it was a promise of the kind of compassion, the respect for New Yorkers, the desire to bring equality to our state that she was going to bring.

And now, two years later, that promise has turned into a record. And as I stand here to nominate her once again in the year 2021 -- to become the first Democrat in generations to be reelected as leader of the Senate -- we look back at the record of the last two years and see that that promise was fulfilled.

Greater protections for the women of our state, for members of the LGBT community, for tenants. Improvements to our criminal justice system. The best climate change legislation in

the country. The best gun safety laws in the country. The record we have established under Andrea Stewart-Cousins' leadership the last two years is unprecedented in the history of our state, and one of which I know we're all incredibly proud.

And now as we deal with a crisis the likes of which we've never seen, it is exactly that kind of leadership we need more than ever. Just last week we rushed back into session to make sure we provided protections for homeowners and tenants alike, to keep people in their homes at a time when we're telling everyone to stay in their homes.

And the year before us will be difficult, will require more of that good judgment, that value system, that moral core that she brings to guide this state forward. We have a very difficult budget ahead of us, with very difficult decisions to make. But I know that she will once again lead us in the right direction, and we will come out with a result that New Yorkers can be proud of.

Now, how do I know that promise became a record that fulfilled the promise?

Because the voters said so. We stand here today with the largest majority in the almost 250-year history of the New York State Senate, of any party: 43 members strong. The voters looked at what Andrea Stewart-Cousins did to lead this body, and they said we like that, please give us more.

And so on their behalf, Madam President, I stand here today to nominate once again, to be the Temporary President and Majority Leader of the State Senate, our leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

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

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(Response of "Nay.")

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

SENATOR LANZA: A show of hands is requested.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Madam President, by unanimous consent, we've agreed to waive the showing of hands and record each member of the

Minority in the affirmative on this vote -- oh, in the negative, excuse me.

THE PRESIDENT: Without objection, so ordered.

The Secretary will announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 42. Nays, 20.

THE PRESIDENT: The ayes have it.

(Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: And now it is a great privilege of mine to call on Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, someone that I have come to know and have the highest respect for, someone who has done an incredible job, not just for her district, but also leading her state. I ask her to come forward and be sworn in as the Temporary President of the Senate.

(The Lieutenant Governor and Senator Stewart-Cousins move to the center of the chamber.)

THE PRESIDENT: Left hand on the Bible. Raise your right hand and repeat after me: I do solemnly swear --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: I do

solemnly swear --

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

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- that I will support the Constitution of the United States --

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

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

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

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- and I will faithfully discharge the duties --

THE PRESIDENT: -- of the office of Temporary President of the Senate --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- of the office of Temporary President of the Senate --

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

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

THE PRESIDENT: -- so help me God.

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

THE PRESIDENT: Congratulations, Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Temporary President. Thank you.

(Sustained applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Thank you, Madam President.

Let me also offer my congratulations to our Majority Leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

And I offer a resolution at the desk to adopt the rules of the Senate. Can we please take that up at this time.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 2, by Senator Stewart-Cousins, Resolved, to adopt the Rules of the Senate for the years 2021-2022.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Lanza, why do you rise?

SENATOR LANZA: Madam President, Happy New Year.

Madam President, would you please recognize Senator Borrello and call upon him. He has some questions on the rules resolution before us.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Borrello.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you, Madam President. Happy New Year.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Will the sponsor yield for some questions -- for a question.

THE PRESIDENT: Will the sponsor yield for a question?

SENATOR GIANARIS: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you.

Happy New Year, Senator Gianaris.

That's not my question.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR BORRELLO: So these rules have changed, obviously many of them because of COVID and this crisis that we face, although there are some concerning changes that I believe will reduce the transparency of this body and the public's access.

So in Rule VI, Section 1, it reads, the change reads: "Bills shall be introduced in a manner or method in accordance with any other guidelines provided by the Temporary President."

"Any other guidelines" is a pretty

broad scope, and we're putting that into the hands of one person. And we've certainly seen the results of giving vague and broad powers into the hands of one person here in New York State recently.

So my question is, will this policy that's promulgated by the Temporary President be published?

SENATOR GIANARIS: Yes, that is the expectation, Senator.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Will the sponsor yield for another question.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris, do you yield?

SENATOR GIANARIS: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR BORRELLO: So as of right now, we don't know where or how it will be available to the public, to the Minority. How will be it published, and where?

SENATOR GIANARIS: Senator Borrello, the rules that we're about to adopt have not been adopted yet. So we need them in place before the guidelines are authorized to be provided.

But the idea is to provide more transparency by making clear that there shall be guidelines, as opposed to just acting by fiat.

SENATOR BORRELLO: So there's -- the answer is we don't know yet where it's going to be published, but it will be published, is that --

SENATOR GIANARIS: That's right.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Okay. All right. Madam President, will the sponsor yield for another question?

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris, do you yield?

SENATOR GIANARIS: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you.

This also -- the proposed change reads that allowing for Senators to be in attendance and participate in any proceedings of the Senate, including voting on any bill on the controversial calendar by remote means.

Now, does that also include debating by remote means?

SENATOR GIANARIS: No.

SENATOR BORRELLO: So there will be

no debate.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Senator Borrello, you've been with us a little bit now. I don't believe that the practice in the Senate chamber is going to change from the way we experienced it in the spring and towards the end of session last time.

So for purposes of debate, people would need to -- or to speak on a bill, the members would need to be present. But voting can take place and attendance can be remote.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you.

So will the sponsor continue to yield, Madam President?

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris, do you yield?

SENATOR GIANARIS: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR BORRELLO: So irrespective of any technical difficulties, will there be a continued practice for members to submit a voting sheet?

SENATOR GIANARIS: Yes.

SENATOR BORRELLO: And that will be done before session.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Correct.
SENATOR BORRELLO: Okay. All right. Madam President, will the sponsor continue to yield?
THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris, do you yield?
SENATOR GIANARIS: Yes, I do.
THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.
SENATOR BORRELLO: There are some questions about quorum and that essentially the Temporary President can determine if we have a quorum or not. Again, the numbers are the numbers, but they can determine the quorum.
So the question is, will there be a record of those members who constitute that quorum?
SENATOR GIANARIS: Yes.
SENATOR BORRELLO: Okay. Madam President, will the sponsor continue to yield?
THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris, do you yield?
SENATOR GIANARIS: Yes.
THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.
SENATOR BORRELLO: So if it's very

clear that we have members that have been counted, and the numbers are the numbers, so why is it necessary to give the president the ability to determine whether or not we have a quorum, if it's clearly a numbers question?

SENATOR GIANARIS: Senator Borrello, that is just to provide consistency with the rest of the rules, which is that the presiding officer determines if the rules of the Senate are being complied with.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you. Thank you, Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Thank you.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Madam President, on the bill, to speak on the bill.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Borrello on the resolution.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Yes, thank you, Madam President.

You know, we've all seen the impact of this pandemic across this state and across this nation. Now, during this time, we are taking this opportunity -- for safety reasons -- to make changes to the rules. But these rules are really permanent changes that we're seeing.

And in this process we are making this body essentially less transparent, less accountable to the people.

We'd like to also consider ourselves essential workers. We hear that a lot, we're essential workers. And, you know, when the Governor went to Georgia and was shaking hands and, you know, hugging people and came back and was asked, Why aren't you quarantining, he said, I'm an essential worker, so I don't have to quarantine.

Yet we are making rules that essentially are going to restrict this body from doing essential workers' work. You know, we expect somebody making a sandwich at Subway to stand side by side with their colleagues, with their coworkers, to deliver you that sandwich, to serve you. But we're not going to be in this chamber to serve the people.

That concerns me. We should be here. We should be doing the work of the people. And if we are considering ourselves essential workers, then we take those same risks that we ask of all those other people on the front lines -- medical workers, our first responders.

We expect them all to be doing their job because they are essential workers.

So if we are essential workers, unless there is a severe medical need, we should be here doing the work of the people. And what these rules have done, and the changes in these rules, very subtly, is created an environment where we really don't have to be here to do our job.

That's not what the people expect. The people expect us to be here to do the job we were elected to do. And that's why I object to these rule changes.

Thank you, Madam President.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Thank you, Madam President. On the resolution, just briefly.

I do want to point out that the rules specifically say that the remote process is only in place during a declared emergency such as the kind we're in right now. I think it behooves us to be prudent and not create super-spreader events in the middle of our legislative chamber.

We have shown, over the course of

2020, that we are capable of doing our work and legislating through this use of technology. And I don't know why we would want to put our staff or the members at risk of infection, especially when we are so close, hopefully, to putting this whole experience of the pandemic behind us as the vaccines are disseminated.

So I would encourage a yes vote on the resolution, Madam President.

THE PRESIDENT: Any other Senator desire to be heard further?

Seeing no one else wishing to be heard, the debate is closed.

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

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(Response of "Nay.")

SENATOR LANZA: A show of hands is requested.

THE PRESIDENT: A show of hands has been requested and so ordered.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Madam President, by unanimous concept, we've agreed to waive the showing of hands and record each member in the

negative -- of the Minority.

THE PRESIDENT: Without objection, so ordered.

The Secretary will announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 42. Nays, 20.

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is adopted.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: There's another resolution at the desk, Madam President, calling for the election of the Secretary of the Senate. Would you please call that up.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 3, by Senator Stewart-Cousins, Resolved, that Alejandra Paulino of Albany, New York, be, and she hereby is, elected Secretary of Senate for the years 2021-2022.

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 resolution is adopted.

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

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

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: So repeat after me: I, state your name --

MS. PAULINO: I, Alejandra Paulino --

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

MS. PAULINO: -- do solemnly swear --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- that I will uphold the Constitution of the United States of America --

MS. PAULINO: -- that I will uphold the Constitution of the United States of America --

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

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

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- and that I will faithfully discharge the duties --

MS. PAULINO: -- and that I will faithfully discharge the duties --

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: -- of the office of Secretary of the Senate --

MS. PAULINO: -- of the office of Secretary of the Senate --

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

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

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

MS. PAULINO: -- so help me God.

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Congratulations.

MS. PAULINO: Thank you.

(Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Congratulations

to our Secretary of the Senate, Alejandra Paulino.

Madam President, there's now also a resolution at the desk calling for the election of the Sergeant-at-Arms. Would you please call that up.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 4, by Senator Stewart-Cousins, Resolved, that Benjamin M. Sturges III be, and he hereby is, elected Sergeant-at-Arms of the Senate for the years 2021-2022.

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

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(No response.)

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is adopted.

For the record, Benjamin Sturges has been elected Sergeant-at-Arms for the years 2021 to 2022. It is my honor to present to you the Sergeant-at-Arms.

(Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Madam President, there's a resolution at the desk appointing Catherine Kirkland as the Senate Stenographer. Can we please take that up.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 5, by Senator Stewart-Cousins, Resolved, that Catherine Kirkland be, and she hereby is, elected the Official Stenographer of the Senate for the years 2021-2022.

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

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(No response.)

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is adopted.

For the record, Catherine Kirkland has been elected Official Stenographer for the Senate for the years 2021 to 2022. It is my honor to present you the Official Stenographer of

the Senate.

(Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Madam President, the next resolution sets forth the hours of the Senate for the years 2021 and 2022. Can we take that up, please.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senate Resolution 6, by Senator Stewart-Cousins, providing for the hours of meeting by the Senate for the years 2021-2022.

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

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed?

(No response.)

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is adopted.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: At this time, Madam President, can you recognize Senator Ortt for remarks.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Ortt.

SENATOR ORTT: Good afternoon, Madam President. Go Bills.

And I certainly would like to thank Senator Gianaris for wishing the Bills, the only team that plays in the State of New York -- and they're playing in the State of New York this Saturday. So I certainly accept the well wishes, and I know that is shared certainly by my constituents and I think a lot of folks across the state.

But I want to wish everyone a Happy New Year. Madam President, I want to wish you a Happy New Year.

And certainly my colleague, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, congratulations on your reelection. Though we have differing philosophies and differ on many pieces of legislation, there is no differing on the significance of your election and on the significance of your leadership of this body. So I want to congratulate you again on that and thank you for your partnership.

Senator Gianaris, Happy New Year to you.

And I certainly want to wish a Happy New Year to my colleague and Deputy Leader of the Republican Conference and Floor Leader, Senator Andrew Lanza.

And I want to thank and wish Happy New Year to my colleague Senator George Borrello, who is here.

I do want to just take a moment if I may, Madam President. We have several of our members in our conference who are not on the Zoom, but they are here in Albany. They are in either their offices or they're in the Conference. I just wanted to be able to just recognize them, they're here today. I think in this time that we're in, I think it is important for our constituents -- for all of our constituents -- to know that we're here doing the job, whether it's remote or whether it's physically here in Albany.

Senator Borrello, as I said; Senator Boyle is here. Senator Helming, Senator Jordan, Senator Lanza, Senator Martucci, Senator Mattera, Senator Oberacker, Senator O'Mara, Senator Palumbo, Senator Stec and Senator Weik are all physically here. The other

members of our conference are remote or are via Zoom.

But we are here to do the work of our constituents and the work of the people of the State of New York. And I think we are at a critical time. We are living and are tasked with leading at probably one of the most remarkable moments in the history of our state and the history of our country.

And sometimes I think when you're in these moments, it's hard to grasp the significance of the moment because you're living through it. And it will only be years later that we will look back and look at this moment for what it is, a seminal moment in the history of our country and our state.

And whenever you go through seminal moments like this, whether it's conflicts, a pandemic, significant economic crises -- and of course it seems like we have all those things happening at once -- there's always questions about our democratic institutions and how they survive those events. And it's on us, the people who are elected to defend them, to make sure that despite all the technology advancements and the

pandemic and everything we're going through, that we come out the other side of this with our republic intact.

And we may have differences of what that always looks like or how best we go about doing that, but the end goal is the same. The end goal, I believe, is the same: The defense of the republic of the United States of America, the defense of the Constitution and of our institutions that quite frankly people have fought and died for to make sure that they endure.

Our conference announced yesterday our priorities. Our priorities will continue to be restarting New York, resetting New York, getting our economy back on track. We have -- we are going to get through the public health crisis that we are in right now, Madam President.

And to my colleagues who are out there, we have the best R&D, we have some of the best companies in the world. And sure enough, they're coming up with vaccines that are going to save people's lives. And sure enough, our health system is going to deliver something that's going to save people's lives the world over as well as,

obviously, right here in New York.

Now, hopefully we can get it out to those folks in a way that is effective. But at the end of the day, we're going to get through this public health crisis, I am confident of that.

But there is a socioeconomic crisis that awaits us on the other side of the public health aspect of this. Whether it's our children who are -- yes, learning remotely, but many of our children, whether it's in inner cities or in rural communities, they are falling behind. There's no denying that. They are not getting the same level of education via Zoom that they would be in the classroom. Our teachers, as good as they are, are not as effective, always, via Zoom as they would be in person.

And then I think about our economy, our businesses that have been put on life support with the lockdowns, with the restrictions, without a real end in sight. And I think it is incumbent upon this body to make sure that we are looking towards that crisis as well, the socioeconomic crisis, and coming up with solutions that get people back to work, that stem

the flow of outmigration, that restore safety to our communities, that make people want to live here, want to invest here.

And yes, even the ultra-wealthy, they need to want to invest here. Because that investment creates jobs for people in my district -- people who aren't ultra-wealthy. But it allows them to put food on their tables. And every time we chase one of those employers out, we chase those employees as well.

So my conference is here to work so that New Yorkers can go back to work. We're here to work to protect those who protect us. And we're here to make sure that the Empire State comes out of this pandemic better than it was when it went into it. Because there were a number of ills before this pandemic that needed to be rectified, and that's only going to be magnified when we come out of this.

So we stand certainly at times as the voice of opposition, but also as an open hand to the Majority. I believe there will be a number of areas where we can work together for the betterment of the people of this state, and we look forward to doing just that.

So Happy New Year, Madam President. Happy New Year. Look forward to a tough but constructive session. And again, of course, Go Bills.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Senator Ortt.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Madam President, at this time please recognize our Majority Leader and Temporary President of the Senate, Andrea Stewart-Cousins, for her opening remarks.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Thank you so much, Madam President. And it is really good to be in your presence yet again, in another historic opening. And I do thank you for all that you bring to the State of New York -- all your advocacy, all your leadership, all your championing.

And of course in a show of bipartisan display and support for the home team, Go Bills. Okay?

(Laughter.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: So

everybody's -- we can start off like that.

Also, Senator Gianaris, you have been a great partner in every aspect of this journey, and I could not thank you for all that you do for this conference, for the types of partnerships that we've been able to forge. And I am happy to say that the promise has been fulfilled, but very much because of the partnership that we have in terms of being able to move in the direction that we know the people of New York want. So thank you again for always being there.

And I wanted to thank you, Senator Ortt. Thank you for, again, your comments and for, you know, being a partner in this very, very important mission that we are doing. I am so happy to hear that you too believe in the republic and the Constitution. Thank you for that.

And that again, we can agree right now that there are certain things that we need to hold together our democracy and our belief in a system that brings people like you and people like me to the table so that we are able to actually come up with the best solutions.

So I look forward to working with you and your team, Senator Lanza as your deputy. Again, we are in the same class, he reminded me, so we will have a lot of classmate things that not only we remember, but we will make good memories for this state going forward.

And welcome, Senator Borrello.

I also want to make note of the fact that yes, my conference is on Zoom, but that's not because they're not present. Many of them indeed are present in this -- in the Capitol. And we all know the importance of being at work however we attend. But please know that we, like you, are very, very interested in making sure that nothing stands in the way of doing the people's business.

I want to also thank Governor Cuomo for his leadership during this pandemic. You know, I look forward to continuing the work that we must do as partners to tackle the challenges ahead. And I also want to thank Speaker Heastie, who has been a tremendous partner for me in the Assembly.

I am proud to begin this year, as Senator Gianaris said, with 43 members in the

Democratic Majority, who represent communities from Buffalo, Syracuse, Rochester, the Capital Region, the Mohawk and Hudson Valleys, Westchester, Rockland County, New York City and Long Island.

I'm proud to have the first super-majority in modern history and the largest majority ever.

I said in my first remarks as Majority Leader, this chamber must always take the path of creating opportunities rather than the path of putting up barriers. And the people of New York have overwhelmingly agreed with that path. This mandate from New Yorkers of all different backgrounds and backyards is an incredible responsibility to deliver, one that we stand ready for.

We are excited -- and we have, I think, 14 new members in this chamber. And we in the Democratic Majority are very, very proud of our seven new members. And I want to just take a brief moment to let you know who is joining us.

Senator Jabari Brisport. Senator Brisport is a schoolteacher and he's a devoted community activist. I know that Jabari will

bring his years of work and passion to help the community and he will be a fierce representative.

We have Senator Reichlin-Melnick. And it's wonderful to welcome Senator Reichlin-Melnick, who's moved from the side benches of this chamber to a well-deserved desk. It's also special to have a member of the Senate family reach the height. And I know that your work as a staffer and as a local official will be a great tool in getting the job done.

I also want to welcome Senator Michelle Hinchey, who will be representing the 46th District, which stretches from Ulster County to Montgomery County. You all may remember that district.

Michelle is the daughter of the late and beloved Congressman Maurice Hinchey. And we're excited for the new generation of leadership she brings to the Senate and her passion for helping upstate communities thrive.

Senator John Mannion. Senator Mannion had to run what seemed like a race that would never have a finish line. But Senator Mannion, you're here, and we are thrilled to have you bringing your experience as a high school

teacher and a union leader to this chamber.

Senator Samra Brouk. I'm excited to welcome Samra Brouk. She's the daughter of Ethiopian immigrants who was born and raised in the community she will now be representing. Excited for her to bring her life experiences from the Peace Corps, to help build more environmentally sustainable communities, to this body.

I also welcome Senator Jeremy Cooney. It is incredible to imagine that Senator Cooney was born in an Indian orphanage, and today sits here representing parts of the great City of Rochester. Senator Cooney's an attorney, and he's dedicated his career to public service. And I know that this is the start of a new and successful chapter.

And finally, last but not least, Senator Sean Ryan. Many of us already know Senator Ryan from his great work in the Assembly since 2011, fighting for the economic well-being of Buffalo and Western New York. Welcome, Senator Ryan, and I look forward to your ongoing leadership.

And welcome to all of the new

members of this body. Our work will be enhanced by your efforts, so thank you all.

And of course my returning members, thank you for continuing to work alongside of me.

So this day, the kickoff of a two-year term, is always a day filled with hope and promise. Usually the chamber would be buzzing with activity, the hallways filled with smiling faces. This year, as you know, it's different. But while we don't have the crowds in the gallery or our friends and families roaming the hallways, we're still holding on to that hope and that promise.

I think everyone understands from the last year how challenging it's been for all of us. We've seen the COVID pandemic ravage our communities, our state, our nation and the world. It is chilling to think about what all of us have been through in these last 10 months.

Here in New York, tens of thousands of our family members, friends, colleagues and constituents have died. Businesses have closed. Jobs have been lost. People are hurting. We're a changed state, and we're a changed nation.

But, Madam President, there is hope

and promise on the horizon. Vaccines have begun to be distributed. A new president that we can trust to help New York, not hurt us, will soon be in office.

And we get to say goodbye to Mitch, because we won Georgia. And my good friend Chuck Schumer, from New York, who aspires, he always says, to be me, the Majority Leader, will be the Majority Leader. And Chuck, we need you.

And today, despite the seditious actions of a few extremists, we are confident Congress will do its job and allow the government to get back to work.

We need a functional, effective federal government if we are going to climb out of this economic and health crisis New York faces -- in fact, our whole country faces. And we all have to understand that. But we in the Senate also have our part to play, and we have shown and will continue to show that we are ready to push a bold progressive agenda to meet the challenges of the times.

I think back to that March, that night when we came back into session to provide immediate funding to fight this pandemic. It was

the first time that I as Majority Leader called back the session after we had gaveled out. But no one on that night could have imagined the horror that we would see over the next few months -- more than a million New Yorkers infected, and more than 30,000 who have lost their lives to this pandemic.

But despite these overwhelming conditions, the members of this chamber stepped up time and time again to help the people of our state make it through this unprecedented catastrophe. In the earliest days of the pandemic, Senators took on the responsibilities none of them likely ever imagined as part of their jobs when they took office. They secured refrigerated trucks for local hospitals, set up massive food banks for constituents, checked on people stuck in quarantine, held Zoom town halls, fought to get an unprecedented number of unemployment claims approved, and delivered PPE to our front-line workers and to our communities.

And as our members stepped up in their communities, they also stepped up in the halls of government. As a body, we held hearings on the effects of COVID on our workforce, on

small businesses, on hospitals, on nursing homes, on schools, on minority- and women-owned businesses. We passed legislation providing help for small businesses struggling, for workers, and for our front-line responders who were desperate for resources. We passed laws to make sure our democracy continued to function and voting would be accessible and safe for everyone.

Just last week we enacted the strongest eviction moratorium in the nation while at the same time helping homeowners, small landlords, and our seniors. We need to do the same for our small businesses too, and we will.

I said in my first remarks as Majority Leader we must always take the path of creating opportunities rather than the path of putting up barriers. We need look no further than Washington over the past four years to see what devastation can occur when a government chooses the latter path.

But here in New York this Senate, working with our partners in government, has shown what we can do when we take the path of creating opportunities. And I know Senator Gianaris mentioned some of them, but it's worth

mentioning again that we strengthened voting rights, we passed campaign finance reform, we made sure that New York's laws recognize women's rights as human rights.

We stood up for our LGBTQ community. We stood up for immigrant brothers and sisters. We stood up for victims of abuse and harassment. We stood up for tenants and homeowners. We stood up for Black and Brown New Yorkers who have disproportionately suffered because of inequities in policing in our criminal justice system. We stood up for victims of gun violence who have been ignored by Washington for decades.

We did all this while battling a horrific pandemic that has devastated our communities, our economy, and our way of life.

And now as we begin a new year and a new legislative session, we have more work to do and more opportunity to create. Our state's finances are in desperate shape, and we have a budget deficit to tackle. We are up to the task, and we can do it without moving towards austerity or balancing our budget on the backs of our working families.

We need to get serious about making

sure that everyone shares the burden. We need to make sure that more of the millionaires and billionaires who have gotten even richer step up during this pandemic. We need to create new revenue streams by legalizing mobile sports betting and marijuana.

But even with these measures, our economy cannot fully recover until we put the COVID-19 crisis behind us once and for all. We must continue to improve our testing capacity and speed, while ensuring that our vaccination rollout reaches as many New Yorkers as quickly as possible.

And we need to help our small businesses stay open. As we did with our tenants, we have to protect those that have lost revenue due to COVID-19 from eviction.

We must ensure all our students are able to learn virtually, and that means broadband access across New York State.

And while we fix our economy, we must continue improving our democracy, which is the heart of everything else we do. Universal mail-in voting, early voting helped bring record numbers of New Yorkers out in November. And

while we celebrate this historic turnout, we must also fix the problems that led to long lines and weeks of vote counting that left our elections unresolved long after the rest of the country's were over.

And finally, we must continue to, as Dr. King -- who we will be celebrating later this month -- might say, bend the arc of the moral universe towards justice. That means that the Senate will continue to look for ways to tear down barriers, to create new opportunities for the marginalized, the persecuted, the disenfranchised, and to combat systematic inequality that has gotten -- has really been exacerbated during this pandemic.

This is a bold mandate and a daunting list of priorities to take on. But bold action is what the times require and what the people who sent us here demand. And from everything I've seen from my colleagues in this chamber over the past year, I know, working together, we are up to the challenge.

Thank you again, Madam President.

(Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Senator

Stewart-Cousins, for those much-needed and appreciated words of hope and promise. Very inspirational.

Senator Gianaris.

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

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

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

THE PRESIDENT: The handup is received and shall be filed in the Journal.

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

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

SENATOR GIANARIS: There being no further business, I move we adjourn until Monday,

January 11th, at 3:00 p.m., intervening days being legislative days.

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

The Senate is adjourned.

(Whereupon, at 1:28 p.m., the Senate adjourned.)