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NEW YORK STATE SENATE

THE STENOGRAPHIC RECORD

ALBANY, NEW YORK

January 5, 2022

12:19 p.m.

REGULAR SESSION

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR BRIAN A. BENJAMIN, President

ALEJANDRA N. PAULINO, ESQ., Secretary

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 THE PRESIDENT: The Senate will
3 come to order.

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

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

8 THE PRESIDENT: Pastor David
9 Traynham, chairman of the board of the
10 ALERT Partnership in Albany, will deliver today's
11 invocation.

12 PASTOR TRAYNHAM: Thank you,
13 Lieutenant Governor.

14 Heavenly Father, we come today as
15 servants of both the people of this great state
16 and You, as sovereign over this world. Thank You
17 for calling each of these public servants by Your
18 will and by Your purpose.

19 We invoke Your presence in these
20 chambers today, and we acknowledge our need for
21 help beyond our own gifts, talents and our
22 abilities. As they conduct the business of the
23 people, Father God, we ask that You will take
24 charge by leading them, guiding them, and
25 directing the steps of Your servants so they can

1 accomplish the mandates that are before them.

2 Father, as King Solomon asked for
3 wisdom to judge Your people, I ask the same for
4 each of these great men and women gathered in
5 these chambers.

6 Hear from heaven, O Lord: Forgive
7 our sin and heal our land of COVID-19, of
8 violence, hatred, of bitterness, division, racism
9 and murder. Father God, heal our land of the
10 hopelessness that many people may feel.

11 Father, renew our faith in You,
12 renew our hope in You, and renew our love for
13 You. Let Your elected officials govern as
14 fine-tuned instruments in Your hand. Let their
15 moral and ethical convictions guide their
16 decisions every day. Let godly character give
17 each of them the longevity in these offices that
18 they hold.

19 We pray that You will have the
20 preeminence in this season. Let Your unity
21 amongst the leaders, O God, prevail as they put
22 aside the things that would distract them, and
23 that they may operate as one people under Your
24 guidance.

25 We pray for their safety as You

1 guide them through this COVID pandemic, as they
2 travel the roads, and when they meet in public
3 assemblies. We pray for their families as they
4 serve our families. We trust that You will bring
5 health and healing to their lives. Father, give
6 them strength and endurance as they give their
7 lives to make the lives of our residents of this
8 great state even better.

9 And lastly, we pray that these
10 servants would have spiritual eyes to see from
11 Your perspective, spiritual ears to hear what You
12 would have to say, and give them a tongue like
13 that of a skillful poet and use them as Your
14 spokespersons in the earth.

15 We ask these things in Your mighty
16 name, and we thank You for it.

17 Amen and amen. God bless you.

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

20 THE SECRETARY: Senator Addabbo.

21 Senator Akshar.

22 Senator Bailey.

23 Senator Biaggi.

24 Senator Borrello.

25 Senator Breslin.

1 Senator Brisport.
2 Senator Brooks.
3 Senator Brouk.
4 Senator Cleare.
5 Senator Comrie.
6 Senator Cooney.
7 Senator Felder.
8 Senator Gallivan.
9 Senator Gaughran.
10 Senator Gianaris.
11 Senator Gounardes.
12 Senator Griffo.
13 Senator Harckham.
14 Senator Helming.
15 Senator Hinchey.
16 Senator Hoylman.
17 Senator Jackson.
18 Senator Jordan.
19 Senator Kaminsky.
20 Senator Kaplan.
21 Senator Kavanagh.
22 Senator Kennedy.
23 Senator Krueger.
24 Senator Lanza.
25 Senator Liu.

1 Senator Mannion.

2 THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris, a
3 quorum is present.

4 In keeping with the tradition of
5 this chamber, it is my honor as President of the
6 Senate to welcome you to the 2022 session.

7 It is great to be back. And I just
8 want to start off with a few acknowledgements.

9 To our Majority Leader, Andrea
10 Stewart-Cousins, who has just been an amazing
11 force for good in the state, helped me to get to
12 where I am now, and will continue to do great
13 work for our state. Thank you, Majority Leader.

14 To our Minority Leader, Robert Ortt,
15 who is continuing to fight for his constituents
16 and for this state and who I believe understands
17 that you can disagree without being disagreeable.

18 To our floor leaders, Mike
19 Gianaris -- who has just been a rock -- and to
20 Senator Lanza, who's not here but has worked well
21 with the Democratic side of the aisle, thank you
22 for all of your hard work.

23 You know, one of the things that I
24 had the pleasure to do for a few years was to be
25 Acting Temporary President up here. And I spent

1 so much time hearing from so many of the Senators
2 in this chamber. And the one thing I'm convinced
3 is that every Senator cares about their district,
4 takes their job seriously. And I got the
5 opportunity to watch and participate as you did
6 that.

7 And so as I have now moved on to
8 become Lieutenant Governor, just know that behind
9 me is a Senator from Harlem, her name is Cordell
10 Cleare, and she takes her oath very seriously.
11 And she will join you in making sure that this
12 body, the New York State Senate, continues to be
13 a place where ideas can be debated, conversations
14 can be had. We can disagree, but we can do so
15 respectfully. That is, at the end of the day,
16 what our constituents want us to do.

17 A couple of priorities. First,
18 COVID. The reason why we're gathered here
19 remotely in most of the chamber is because COVID
20 has really taken a serious impact on our state.
21 First it was COVID-19 itself, then Delta, now
22 Omicron. I'm hearing of a new variant.

23 So COVID is going to be with us.
24 The question is what are we doing to make sure
25 that we fight back and we protect as many lives

1 as humanly possible and we reduce
2 hospitalizations and deaths across this state.

3 We have provided tests, we have
4 provided the vaccine, everyone can get boosted,
5 we have on our N95 masks. We are doing the
6 things we need to do. But we have to work
7 together, across party lines, to make sure that
8 communities that are resistant to the vaccine,
9 resistant to being boosted, resistant to wearing
10 masks, that we convince them that our future, our
11 kids' future, is only going to be strong if we
12 fight through this together and we do the
13 uncomfortable things that need to be done.

14 Second, public safety. COVID is not
15 the only epidemic that we have been dealing with.
16 Gun violence has been a scourge on our state, on
17 our nation. And the one thing that I have seen
18 as I have traveled around this state is how many
19 communities are impacted by gun violence, knowing
20 fully well that in no part of this state are we
21 manufacturing guns.

22 Guns are being brought to our state
23 and they are being used to hurt too many of us,
24 particularly in communities of color. Rochester
25 just has declared a state of emergency because of

1 this. State of emergency is the natural course
2 when it comes to gun violence.

3 What are we going to do about it?
4 Couple of things. One, we must support and work
5 with law enforcement to track down these guns and
6 root them out wherever they are. Secondly, we
7 must focus on prevention. One of the things that
8 I feel very strongly about is when you think
9 about issues of poverty, you think about mental
10 health, you think about addiction issues, there's
11 a correlation between those issues and some of
12 the violence that we see.

13 We have to invest in our community
14 centers, education, workforce development and
15 give people a chance to do something with their
16 lives. And that is something that we are going
17 to focus on. And one of the things I want to
18 commend Pastor David Traynham on is that he's
19 been working on these issues. He just spoke as
20 pastor, and those community partnerships with our
21 religious leaders, our violence interrupters, are
22 a part of the solution -- not the solution, a
23 part of the solution. And we all have a role to
24 play.

25 Next I want to talk about economic

1 development, something that should be a
2 bipartisan issue. We need jobs, jobs, and more
3 jobs. But what we need to make sure is that as
4 we create these jobs, that every community
5 participates. That is not just communities in
6 terms of racially, but also across this entire
7 state.

8 I have been to a number of the
9 different regions upstate, around the state, and
10 I continue to believe that we have great
11 people -- we just need to make sure that the
12 opportunities are flowing and everyone can
13 participate.

14 And the other thing I know for a
15 fact is that we need broadband all over this
16 state. It is completely challenging to drive
17 around this state and do business and make sure
18 that as we're talking about COVID, our kids can
19 learn, get the opportunities that they need.

20 That is not possible when you can't
21 connect. You've got to be able to connect to the
22 internet highway. That is something that we have
23 to focus on, and we will focus on together.

24 And let me just say as it relates to
25 education: We need to make sure that we have a

1 quality education for every single child all
2 across this state. We need to make sure that
3 people have access to quality higher education
4 who live in this state. We also need to make
5 sure that we have opportunities for those who do
6 not go to college. We need to have
7 apprenticeship programs, we need to invest in
8 certificate programs, and we need to make sure
9 that no one is left behind in New York State.

10 We cannot have a model that only
11 assumes that everyone is going to go off to
12 college. There are some of us who are not. And
13 it is our responsibility to make sure there's
14 productivity in our workforce, and the only way
15 to do that is to make sure that everyone
16 participates.

17 And if we're going to talk about gun
18 violence, we're going to talk about community
19 issues, we can't do that when we leave so many
20 people out of the economic pipeline, and we have
21 to focus on that as we go forward.

22 Let me also say, as a new father --
23 I call three years ago new. And now I have a
24 second one, she's now two months -- childcare,
25 childcare, childcare. We talk about these

1 issues; they're all connected. How can you go to
2 work when you're worried about where your child
3 is going to be, if you can't afford adequate,
4 decent childcare? We need to make sure that
5 we're thinking about these things as a
6 comprehensive package, not as one-off activities
7 to address.

8 Let me just say, on the environment:
9 As many of us know, we passed in this chamber a
10 policy that will require us going to 100 percent
11 renewable energy. My question for us is as we do
12 that, who's going to be building the offshore
13 wind turbines? Who's going to make sure that the
14 transmission lines are set up? Who's going to
15 put the solar panels on the rooftops?

16 We need to make sure that we get to
17 100 percent renewable energy, we want to make
18 sure that we do that right, but we have to make
19 sure that everyone gets to participate. And I
20 believe there's an equity issue here that I'm
21 focusing on in my office to ensure that that
22 happens.

23 Also, \$27 billion from the
24 infrastructure bill that is going to be coming to
25 New York State -- at least -- to rebuild roads,

1 bridges, tunnels, the Second Avenue Subway, which
2 I'm very excited about. We want to make sure
3 that we've got jobs, skills training, workforce
4 development embedded in all of that for our
5 communities. And that is something that I am
6 very excited about.

7 Affordable housing. You cannot live
8 in New York and not know about the affordable
9 housing crisis that we have. We have an
10 affordable housing crisis, we have a homelessness
11 crisis. Today more than 50 percent of New York
12 City residents are rent-burdened. And tonight as
13 many as 90,000 New Yorkers will seek -- will fall
14 into the shelter system.

15 We cannot allow this to continue.
16 We must invest and we must work with our
17 municipal partners to ensure that we deal with
18 the crisis of homelessness and provide adequate
19 affordable housing for everyone.

20 Last, let me say as I've traveled
21 the state over the last four months -- I can't
22 believe it's been four months, I had to stop on
23 that -- I've seen firsthand that the solutions to
24 the problems that New York faces are right in
25 front of us. They're right in our grasp. The

1 urban food deserts in New York City can be fed by
2 New York farmers. New York residents who
3 vacation -- not right now as much, but when we
4 vacation, we can be hiking in the Adirondacks, we
5 can be skiing on Hunter Mountain. The green
6 energy revolution in New York can be powered by
7 our Atlantic winds and the raging waters of the
8 mighty Niagara Falls.

9 New York's economy can be rebuilt
10 better than ever by the hardworking New Yorkers
11 who make this state what it is. And it is our
12 job to give them the opportunity and the support
13 to get that done as we get through this pandemic
14 and whatever else comes our way.

15 Thank you very much.

16 Next --

17 SENATOR GIANARIS: Mr. President,
18 please proceed to the regular order of business.

19 THE PRESIDENT: Perfect.

20 Presentation of petitions.

21 Messages from the Assembly.

22 Messages from the Governor.

23 The Secretary will read.

24 THE SECRETARY: "Dear Majority

25 Leader Stewart-Cousins:

1 "I would appreciate the privilege of
2 the presence of the Members of the New York State
3 Senate to view a live broadcast on January 5,
4 2022, at 1:00 p.m., as I deliver the 2022 State
5 of the State.

6 "Very truly yours, Kathy Hochul."

7 THE PRESIDENT: To be filed in the
8 Journal.

9 Reports of standing committees.

10 Reports of select committees.

11 Communications and reports from
12 state officers.

13 Motions and resolutions.

14 Senator Gianaris.

15 SENATOR GIANARIS: At this time,
16 Mr. President, please recognize Senator Ortt for
17 his opening remarks.

18 THE PRESIDENT: Senator Ortt.

19 SENATOR ORTT: Mr. Lieutenant
20 Governor, it's good to see you -- in a very
21 familiar spot, but good to see you nonetheless.

22 I wish everyone a Happy New Year.
23 And it really is good to see everyone. First I
24 certainly -- the staff, it's good to see you're
25 back and everyone is doing healthy.

1 I want to recognize my colleague
2 Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Majority Leader
3 Andrea Stewart-Cousins; Senator Gianaris. Good
4 to see them both back here in this chamber, doing
5 well, and looking forward to a session hopefully
6 not totally like last session -- hopefully it
7 gets a little better and it opens up and we get
8 through this surge that we're seeing
9 post-holiday.

10 It's good to see my colleagues who
11 are here: Senator Borrello, Senator Serino,
12 Senator Helming and, of course, filling in for
13 Senator Lanza -- as the Lieutenant Governor
14 noted, he is not with us today, so it's a little
15 bit quieter here in the chamber. But Senator
16 O'Mara is here pulling duty, and I want to thank
17 him for his effort. And Shontell and Kristin.

18 But the bottom line is we are back,
19 it is a new year. And it's always -- no matter
20 what's going on, I think it's always a time when
21 we should be optimistic and hopeful about the
22 future. And there's certainly no shortage of
23 challenges.

24 And as the Lieutenant Governor was
25 talking, I thought about the number of challenges

1 he was laying out, and it struck me that a lot of
2 times in this chamber we don't often -- sometimes
3 we do, but not often -- disagree with the
4 challenge, with the issue, with the problem or
5 the obstacle facing the people in New York.

6 Crime, gun violence, economic
7 development, obviously public health,
8 agriculture, energy costs, the exodus of people,
9 our workforce -- all those things I think you
10 would find on the issue: Is that an issue facing
11 the people of New York? Whether you represent
12 Harlem or Niagara Falls or everywhere in between,
13 you would hear consensus that yes, those are
14 issues that we and our constituents are concerned
15 about.

16 Obviously where the disagreement
17 comes is very often on the solution to those
18 issues. And that's not new, and that's not going
19 to go away. And that's kind of part of also why
20 we're here, why we've been elected to represent
21 our constituents and to disagree without being
22 disagreeable where appropriate, and to try to
23 find some shared commonality to get things done,
24 where appropriate, for the people of New York.

25 So whether it's -- you know, it was

1 mentioned about gun violence. I often will tell
2 people that gun violence is perpetrated by
3 human beings, not by guns. And so we need to do
4 something about the root causes of what prompts
5 someone to commit gun violence. Many times
6 they're committed by career criminals who are
7 using illegal guns, which are already a crime,
8 obviously. Murder is also already a crime.

9 So we have to ask ourselves, what
10 are the other things that are playing into the
11 increasing crime, particularly violent crime,
12 plaguing not only our major cities but a lot of
13 other places in between? We have to ask
14 ourselves, What are the root causes of why
15 New York leads the nation in outmigration? How
16 do we change that metric? We all have a
17 responsibility to change that metric, because as
18 we lose people, those are our future workforce,
19 those are the future human capital that we need
20 to bring the state back to economic vitality and
21 greatness.

22 Obviously we've been facing a
23 pandemic the last several years, so economic
24 development and the future of New York's economy
25 weighs heavily, I know, on all of us, whether you

1 represent New York City or the North Country. It
2 may be more acute in different areas, but the
3 reality is we all have an obligation to put
4 forward ideas and policies and support
5 legislation that is going to bring back New York
6 economically, that's going to make it more
7 affordable for people to live here and for people
8 to stay here.

9 We have an obligation to make sure
10 that our education system still is a pathway to
11 success and still promotes achievement for people
12 who are achieving, and not to use our education
13 system as a road to any kind of social
14 experimentation.

15 I think it is important that
16 education, especially for first-generation
17 Americans, that is the ladder to a better future.
18 For people who are in poverty, that is the ladder
19 to a better future. And our conference supports
20 that, and it will be a major focus of our agenda
21 and my members' agenda as we go forward.

22 And I guess just last, the
23 Lieutenant Governor mentioned -- I think we
24 all -- this is -- we know what year it is, we
25 know what year it is in the political calendar.

1 But hopefully, I think -- I will do my utmost on
2 this floor, in this chamber, where there's
3 been -- and I've been privy and sat and listened
4 to a lot of very good debates over the years,
5 intellectual debates, debates that were -- I
6 think would have made our constituents proud. I
7 think we have to be able to disagree without
8 being disagreeable here.

9 I think we need to be able to
10 disagree, even vehemently, but we can still
11 recognize that both Senators, both conferences
12 are here to do what they think their constituents
13 want, need, and what they think is in the best
14 interests of the State of New York.

15 I know our conference stands ready
16 to do that. We stand ready to work with the
17 Majority where we can, and certainly to disagree
18 where we need to as well.

19 So, Lieutenant Governor, it is good
20 to see you. I thank you for your indulgence. I
21 thank the Majority Leader for her indulgence.
22 And I wish everyone a happy, healthy and
23 prosperous 2022.

24 THE PRESIDENT: Thank you,
25 Senator Ortt.

1 Senator Gianaris.

2 SENATOR GIANARIS: And now,
3 Mr. President, please recognize Majority Leader
4 Andrea Stewart-Cousins for her opening remarks.

5 THE PRESIDENT: Majority Leader
6 Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

7 SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Thank you
8 so much, Mr. President. How often I've said
9 that, but now it's a little bit different. But
10 we will get to that.

11 I just want to say, again: Happy,
12 Healthy New Year to everyone. It is really good
13 to see everybody and to be back in the chamber.
14 Although it wasn't that many months ago that we
15 were here, I think we thought that our reunion
16 would be a little different, that we'd be more
17 opened up.

18 But obviously COVID had other plans
19 for us, so -- so here we are. But we are looking
20 forward to being able to get back together in
21 full force.

22 But, you know, even though we are in
23 this phase, I will say that this is not a repeat
24 of March of 2020. We now, as you've indicated,
25 have a strong arsenal of tools to fight the

1 virus, to limit the human and economic toll that
2 the pandemic has taken on us. And in order to do
3 that, I will do my public service announcement:
4 We need people to get vaccinated, to get boosted,
5 wear masks as we push through this phase of the
6 crisis.

7 I want to thank Governor Hochul for
8 stepping up during uncertain times. Although
9 this will be our first session with Governor
10 Hochul at the helm, we've already accomplished a
11 lot together. And I am eager, frankly, for a
12 year of continued collaboration.

13 I want to thank my deputy,
14 Senator Gianaris, who's always stood by my side
15 in all of these endeavors.

16 And of course, you know, I want to
17 thank all of the members of certainly my
18 Majority, as well as all the members here in the
19 chamber, for the work that we do.

20 I do want to acknowledge my
21 counterpart, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie. And
22 again, he's somebody who stands on the side of
23 justice and has always been seeking to make
24 New York a better place.

25 And here back -- thank you, Senator

1 Ortt -- we do have -- you know, we've had an
2 opportunity to work together. And again, I think
3 that we have been -- you know, it's been easy,
4 collegial, and I look forward to continuing that
5 relationship as we move forward.

6 And certainly, again,
7 Senator O'Mara, it's good to see you. Thank you
8 for, you know, doing the important work that you
9 do and standing in for Senator Lanza at this
10 point. And I look forward to the continued
11 efforts to make sure this chamber moves smoothly.

12 And of course to Kristin and our own
13 Shontell and all the staff. We couldn't do it
14 without all of you, and we certainly acknowledge
15 the power that you give us to do our jobs.

16 And, you know, with that I want to
17 formally address my friend and colleague
18 Senator Benjamin. I want to say goodbye to
19 Senator Benjamin and welcome Lieutenant Governor
20 Brian Benjamin.

21 You know, you've always been one of
22 my main presiding officers. And quite honestly,
23 it is great to see you in this role as
24 Lieutenant Governor -- although I think you might
25 have seen what I was going to say today, because

1 so much of what you hit upon is in my speech.

2 But again, thank you for continuing
3 to serve the people of New York State, and thank
4 you for making the seat available in the
5 30th District for our great new Senator,
6 Cordell Cleare.

7 Usually we have an opportunity to
8 give people formal introductions, and we all clap
9 and we're happy to have you. But just so people
10 know that Senator Cleare is a long-time activist,
11 she's a former Senate staffer. She has a heart
12 for service to the people, and I know she will be
13 a tremendous asset. Thank you for joining our
14 ranks.

15 So the new year presents an
16 opportunity for a natural reset where we can
17 reflect on previous events and apply new insight
18 to the tasks ahead. We as a state have plenty to
19 reflect upon. This past year tested us in new
20 ways, revealed the depths of old wounds, and
21 challenged each and every one of us as elected
22 officials to step up on behalf of all
23 New Yorkers.

24 2022 will mark the second
25 anniversary of COVID-19. The hardships that

1 we've endured cannot be overstated. To date
2 we've lost 61,000 New Yorkers -- 61,000
3 New Yorkers. And at this point we continue to
4 offer our condolences to those who have lost
5 loved ones.

6 This once-in-a-lifetime crisis
7 amplified preexisting inequalities and brought
8 our economic and social systems to a grinding
9 halt. Despite these historic challenges,
10 however, the Senate Majority proved that we were
11 up to the task of meeting them with decisive
12 action.

13 We stabilized our healthcare system
14 and rolled out one of the largest and fastest
15 vaccine initiatives in the country. We bolstered
16 the economy from the ground up, with the help of
17 our federal partners, through the Emergency
18 Rental Assistance Program. We were also able,
19 here in this state, to provide a billion dollars
20 in small business grants, 2 billion to excluded
21 workers, and the most progressive budget in
22 history, which successfully jump-started the most
23 devastated sectors of our society.

24 And we didn't stop there. Because
25 COVID-19 did not just devastate our health system

1 and economy, it revealed deep inequalities that
2 had gone unaddressed for too long. Last year we
3 moved in New York closer to a reality where every
4 person has an equal shot regardless of their
5 zip code, their background and their
6 circumstances. We took major steps to level the
7 playing field for all New Yorkers by investing
8 record funds in education, requiring the wealthy
9 to pay their fair share in taxes, strengthening
10 our gun safety laws, and recommitting ourselves
11 to a greener future.

12 We may never return to our old sense
13 of normal, but that's only because we are
14 becoming more exceptional. Our conference has
15 laid a strong foundation from which to grow.
16 It's time for us to continue our collaborative
17 work and deliver even bolder policies that will
18 make New York a fairer haven for opportunity and
19 success.

20 This is our chance to step into a
21 promising new era. That begins with moving our
22 state towards social and economic policies that
23 acknowledge the changing nature of work and gives
24 New Yorkers the tools they need for the jobs of
25 the future.

1 In order to fully support the
2 workers, we need to ensure that parents -- very
3 much what you said -- aren't forced to choose
4 between a paycheck and raising their children.
5 Under this current system, our children
6 ultimately pay the price. It's time for us to
7 make universal, affordable childcare a reality in
8 this state, because this commonsense policy will
9 transform labor and gives kids a head start that
10 will change the course of their lives.

11 New York stood -- we must remember
12 in 2016 we stood in the forefront by enacting the
13 country's strongest and most comprehensive paid
14 family leave program. We must lead again in this
15 way.

16 I want New York to be a state that
17 invests in the next generation from the cradle to
18 college to whatever the training they need to
19 have. This can only happen, however, with
20 statewide, fully funded pre-K to accompany
21 universal childcare. I'm proud of the advances
22 we've made, but let's go that final mile and
23 ensure every district has the resource for
24 generations to come.

25 COVID showed us the vast untapped

1 potential of remote working and learning.
2 Unfortunately, roughly 1 million New Yorkers live
3 without broadband access. A huge sector of our
4 state is being excluded from the growing digital
5 economy because they lack the utility. Just as
6 the New Deal brought more Americans out of the
7 darkness, we will have to do the same again with
8 the internet.

9 As we strive for greater prosperity,
10 we must remember that small businesses and
11 workers alike are still suffering from the
12 economic devastation of the pandemic. Our
13 historic investments in small business grants and
14 unemployment benefits helped stop the bleeding
15 and kept shops open and families fed. But now we
16 need to help businesses and the workers that
17 power them not only survive but thrive.

18 We need to stem the rising costs of
19 unemployment insurance for small businesses while
20 ensuring that workers receive benefit increases
21 that have been delayed for years. We need to
22 look at the tax rates of both small businesses
23 and working- and middle-class taxpayers. And we
24 need to provide mental health support for
25 front-line personnel who bore the emotional brunt

1 of the COVID-19 cases -- and fair compensation to
2 essential workers, who are still being stretched
3 to their limits.

4 Ultimately, we cannot reliably
5 invest in our future without taking drastic steps
6 to reverse climate change. We're running out of
7 time to avoid the most catastrophic impacts of
8 rising CO2, which would alter life as we know it.
9 These once-in-a-lifetime climate events are
10 occurring every year with increasing ferocity.
11 This does not have to be our new normal.
12 New York's been a trailblazer on environmental
13 policy ever since we took the majority in 2019,
14 and we are not slowing down.

15 And as always, our conference will
16 continue to fight for bedrock legislation that
17 will protect the rights and freedoms of every
18 New Yorker. We've seen other state legislatures
19 take unprecedented steps to roll back voting
20 rights and reproductive care. These
21 antidemocratic attacks on our constitutional
22 rights will not stand in New York.

23 As in the past, our conference will
24 be expanding access to absentee ballots,
25 increasing the number of polling sites,

1 particularly on college campuses, and always
2 working to curtail voter suppression wherever we
3 see it. We will continue to rise up as a
4 destination state for women's reproductive care
5 so that every individual can make the choice best
6 suited for their body. There is no alternative.

7 I know this is an ambitious agenda.
8 That's because we are ambitious people. Since
9 taking the majority in 2019, we've proven time
10 and again that no mandate is too big, no issue
11 too small. That's why New Yorkers have chosen us
12 to fight for them.

13 After the events of the past
14 two years, and in the wake of our own government
15 revelations, we've had a lot of healing to do.
16 And I thank Pastor Traynham -- and thank you,
17 Senator Breslin, for bringing him -- because I
18 think he really set the tone of what we can do as
19 people who are doing what the people of New York
20 need for us to do.

21 It has been an incredible,
22 incredible period. But although it's been
23 difficult, it's also an incredible period of
24 growth. New York has never shied away from a
25 challenge. We know as leaders we're meant to

1 challenge the status quo and continuously build
2 towards a bigger and brighter future. That's why
3 I'm so excited to open up what I know will be
4 another historic legislative session and work
5 with each and every one of you to reach the
6 growing light at the end of the tunnel. Together
7 we will emerge stronger than ever before.

8 We have so much to look forward to,
9 so much to do. We'll do it together on behalf of
10 New Yorkers. I look forward to getting the work
11 done. And so therefore I say: Let's get to
12 work.

13 Thank you so much, Mr. President.

14 THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Madam
15 Majority Leader.

16 Senator Gianaris.

17 SENATOR GIANARIS: Mr. President,
18 on behalf of the Majority Leader, there are some
19 hand-ups related to Majority Conference
20 membership changes. I ask that they be filed
21 with the Journal, please.

22 THE PRESIDENT: So ordered.

23 Senator Gianaris.

24 THE PRESIDENT: Is there any
25 further business at the desk?

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

3 SENATOR GIANARIS: In that case, in
4 order for us to move over to the Assembly chamber
5 to hear the Governor's speech, I move to adjourn
6 until Monday, January 10th, at 3:00 p.m.

7 THE PRESIDENT: On motion, the
8 Senate stands adjourned until Monday,
9 January 10th, at 3:00 p.m.

10 (Whereupon, at 12:56 p.m., the
11 Senate adjourned.)

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