NEW YORK STATE SENATE

THE STENOGRAPHIC RECORD

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12:36 p.m.

REGULAR SESSION

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR ANTONIO DELGADO, 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 to please rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

THE PRESIDENT: Bishop Mark O'Connell, of the Roman Catholic Diocese in Albany, New York, will deliver today's invocation.

BISHOP O'CONNELL: Almighty God, source of all wisdom and compassion, we gather here in the halls of the New York State Senate at the threshold of a new dawn, a fresh beginning filled with promise amid these uncertain and critical times for our world.

As conflicts rage in places like Ukraine, Israel, Gaza and Venezuela and unrest echoes across the nations, we pause to seek Your guidance, trusting that our actions here in New York can contribute to the greater good, fostering peace and justice both near and far.

We invoke Your presence upon this assembly, granting wisdom to the members of the

Senate, the Assembly, and to our Governor. Illuminate their minds and hearts as they deliberate and legislate, that they may enact policies which uplift and protect the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized among us.

Help them to see beyond division, to build bridges of understanding, and to prioritize the common welfare in all their endeavors.

In the face of global turmoil, wars that displace families, crises that deepen inequality, may our leaders draw strength from Your eternal light, working tirelessly to promote healing, equity and hope, that their decisions reflect the commitment to human dignity, ensuring that no one is left behind in our shared pursuit of a just society.

Gracious God, at this new dawn, as this new dawn breaks, unite us in purpose, inspire us with courage, and bless the work of this session. May it bear fruit that honors Your creation and serves all people with integrity and mercy.

Amen.

(Response of "Amen.")

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will

call the roll to ascertain a quorum.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Addabbo.

SENATOR ADDABBO: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Ashby.

SENATOR ASHBY: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Bailey.

SENATOR BAILEY: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Baskin.

SENATOR BASKIN: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Borrello.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Present.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Brisport.

SENATOR BRISPORT: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Bynoe.

SENATOR BYNOE: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Canzoneri-Fitzpatrick.

SENATOR CANZONERI-FITZPATRICK: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Chan.

SENATOR CHAN: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Cleare.

SENATOR CLEARE: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Comrie.

SENATOR COMRIE: Present.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Cooney.
SENATOR COONEY: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Fahy.
SENATOR FAHY: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Fernandez.
SENATOR FERNANDEZ: Present.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Gallivan.
SENATOR GALLIVAN: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Gianaris.
SENATOR GIANARIS: Present.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Gonzalez.
SENATOR GONZALEZ: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Gounardes.
SENATOR GOUNARDES: Present.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Griffo.
SENATOR GRIFFO: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Harckham.
SENATOR HARCKHAM: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Helming.
SENATOR HELMING: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Hinchey.
SENATOR HINCHEY: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Jackson.
SENATOR JACKSON: Here.
THE SECRETARY: Senator Kavanagh.

SENATOR KAVANAGH: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Krueger.

SENATOR KRUEGER: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Lanza.

SENATOR LANZA: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Liu.

SENATOR LIU: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Martinez.

SENATOR MARTINEZ: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Martins.

SENATOR MARTINS: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Mattera.

SENATOR MATTERA: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator May.

SENATOR MAY: Here.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Mayer.

SENATOR MAYER: Here.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris, a quorum is present and the Senate may proceed.

I want to first begin by wishing everybody here in the body a Happy New Year.

I certainly want to acknowledge our esteemed Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins. Thank you for your work and leadership here. To Deputy Majority Leader Senator Gianaris, thank you.

Minority Leader Rob Ortt and Deputy Minority Leader Lanza, and every member of this awesome body.

I also want to acknowledge Sergeant-at-Arms Ben Sturges. It is good to see you.

(Extended standing ovation.)

THE PRESIDENT: As president of the Senate, it is my distinct honor to welcome you all to the 2026 legislative session and to welcome you all to a new year of service to the great State of New York.

As I look around this room I am reminded that this chamber is a place of immense power -- but it is also a place of incredible responsibility. Because the work done here does not stay here. It reaches into the daily lives of New Yorkers across the state, into their homes, their jobs, their schools, their places of worship, their communities.

That responsibility calls on us to remain grounded, to resist distance, abstraction or habit. It requires us to stay rooted in the lived experiences of the communities we represent, and that begins with listening:

Listening not as a formality, but as a discipline.

Because when we listen honestly, we are reminded who we work for and what is being asked of us. We hear the pressures families are under. We hear the anxiety about staying in their communities. And we hear the expectation that government should be a partner, making life more affordable and more secure.

Each of you hears the voices of your constituents every single day, voices shaped by different geographies, different histories, and different needs. In this chamber we have a responsibility to listen not only to be informed but also to be guided, to allow those voices to sharpen our judgment and anchor our decisions in the realities people are living with daily.

At its best, leadership is not about value or visibility, it is about conscience. It is about listening closely and then having the courage to act boldly on what we hear. It is about governing with integrity, walking with humility, and remaining accountable to the people who place their trust in all of us. Especially when the challenges we face are deeply felt and

urgent. Especially when the decisions we are faced with are difficult.

New York has always been a state of possibility. The possibility must be tangible. It must show up in whether people can afford to live, raise families, and build a future here. This is not an abstract goal, it is the measure by which our work will be judged.

The work ahead will demand seriousness and resolve. It will require transparency, honesty, and a clear vision for where we as a people are trying to go. It will necessitate a shared respect for the people we serve. And it will call for us to remember that the power of this institution exists for one reason and one reason only: To improve the lives of all New Yorkers.

We all have the power to make this state stronger, fairer, and more affordable for the people we serve.

As Lieutenant Governor, I look forward to working with members of both parties throughout this session. I encourage each of us to remain open to one another and to the voices of the communities we represent as we carry out

the responsibilities entrusted to us all. My hope is for a productive, thoughtful and meaningful legislative session.

Thank you.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Thank you, Mr. President.

At this time let's proceed with the regular order of business.

THE PRESIDENT: Presentation of petitions.

Messages from the Assembly.

Messages from the Governor.

The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: "Dear Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins:

"I would appreciate the privilege of the presence of all of the Members of the New York State Senate at the Kitty Carlisle Hart Theatre on January 13, 2026, at 1:00 p.m. to deliver the 2026 State of the State Address.

"Very yours truly, Governor Kathy Hochul."

THE PRESIDENT: The message shall be filed in the Journal.

Reports of standing committees.

Reports of select committees.

Communications and reports from state officers.

Motions and resolutions.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Please recognize Minority Leader Ortt for opening remarks.

THE PRESIDENT: Minority Leader Ortt.

SENATOR ORTT: Thank you, Mr. President.

To my colleagues, both on my side of the aisle and the other side of the aisle, welcome back. Happy New Year to everyone. It is good to see all of you healthy and back here in the Capitol.

I hope everyone had a great holiday season with their families and got to spend time with the people who love us and the people who we love. And hopefully that recharges you. I know for me that kind of recharges me, and sometimes reframes why I'm here, why we all do what we do.

I'll say it's good to be back in Albany. I think I speak for everyone why we do

what we do. We have to come here to do it. But the real reason, the motivating factor, is for the people we represent and that we work for back in our districts.

And I'm sure most of you and I hope most of you got to spend some time in those districts the last six months, obviously as we get ready for a new session. It's always exciting. It's kind of like the first day back at school. It's a clean slate. Right?

It's very thematic when you think about the new year. We all have hopes and aspirations for what this year can be for ourselves, for our constituents, and for the people of this state, remembering that they also have aspirations.

That our constituents, the people we work for, also have hopes and aspirations for what they, their family, their business and this state can achieve for them, and the opportunity that that can lay out for them and their families and for people who call the Empire State home and who want to continue to call it home.

And so with that, our conference is ready to work. We are ready to do the hard work

on behalf of the people of New York. We're certainly ready to work with our colleagues across the aisle. We're certainly ready to stand in opposition when we think that is necessary as a matter of policy, as a matter of principle.

We know affordability is going to be a major topic, as it has been for the past couple of years. There is obviously at times a difference in how we define affordability and our solutions to that. And I don't think those differences are strictly political. I think they're sincere; I think they're principled differences. But they're important differences.

You know, our conference does believe and will continue to advocate that one of the ways to make things more affordable for New Yorkers is to put more of their money back in their pockets, to let them keep more of their hard-earned money in any way we can do that.

We certainly will continue to advocate for a cleaner environment while at the same time advocating for a menu of energy options to keep prices down, keep New Yorkers working as we transition to new technologies and a cleaner and healthier environment here in the State of

New York.

Our conference believes in public safety for everybody, regardless of your ethnicity, your color, your creed, your zip code, your income level -- for everybody -- instead of advocating for some type of general insecurity for all. That I think is a very big difference between our conferences.

And when we work to protect the marginalized, I think it's important that we remember the marginalized is not the thief or the assaulter or the drug dealer, it's the victim of those crimes. And those are the communities that our conference and, I believe, many of my colleagues across the aisle also care about and want to make a better life for.

We need to provide a better quality of life, in short. And this is -- we all know it's an election year when all of us will go up basically for that interview before our constituents to say: Did we do a good job on behalf of you? Did we represent you -- your values, your hopes, your dreams, your needs -- did we accomplish that? Did we move that forward in a tangible way?

Not just good speeches, not just well intentions. But, Mr. President, you sort of -- did we actually put some points on the board for people? Did we make their life a little easier? And if the answer is no, then we need to do a better job.

Our conference, again, stands ready to work here. The Republican Conference is ready to work with our colleagues across the aisle, with the Governor this session to improve the lives of our constituents and New Yorkers across the board.

Mr. President, thank you for your indulgence. Happy New Year, and God bless.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Now let's recognize Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins for opening remarks.

THE PRESIDENT: Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins.

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Good afternoon, Mr. President. Thank you for being here, and certainly for your words at the outset of our session.

To my colleagues, welcome back. Happy New Year. And of course to those who are streaming in here, to all New Yorkers: Happy New Year.

Once again, I am proud to represent the great state, as we all are, and very, very excited for the opening of the 2026 legislative session.

So, Mr. President, you recognized my good friend Ben, but I think we deserve to give Ben another round of applause because we missed you so much.

(Standing ovation.)

SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: You get two rounds of applause because, you know, we missed you last year, so we can't applaud your being here and your recovery enough. So thank you.

I also want to welcome back staff from both sides of the aisle. And again, as the Minority Leader said, I hope that we all had an opportunity to enjoy the holidays and to enjoy some meaningful time with those people who care about us.

And obviously we are, you know,

again hoping that you are energized, recharged, and ready to take on, you know, what we know is going to be an interesting year and a challenging year.

I certainly look forward to another year of partnership with the Governor, with my colleagues in the Assembly. And I also want to continue to work with the Minority Leader and my colleagues on the other side of the aisle.

I am especially happy to see our floor leaders back and ready to go. My deputy leader, Mike Gianaris, thank you so much for all you do, and your counterpart, Senator Andrew Lanza. So again, thank you for your collaboration when we do these things.

You know, as I look around the chamber, I know I'm looking at leaders who are rightfully confident in what you've delivered for your communities. But at the same time I'm keenly aware that too many families are still struggling to pay the bills and to make ends meet.

These are not times of complacency. These are times that will demand clarity, responsibility, and focus. We're beginning a new

year in a moment when the pressures facing New Yorkers feel heavier and more immediate in their daily lives. Families are opening utility bills they can barely afford, they are walking down grocery aisles where prices are rising higher than their paychecks. They're worried about the cost of housing, healthcare, childcare, the overall cost of living.

At the same time, many New Yorkers are watching with genuine and well-founded concern the erosion of hard-won rights and constitutional freedoms that are being challenged all across the country. That's the reality that our constituents are living with.

It's the responsibility, therefore, of the Senate, led by this Majority, to meet it head on.

Understandably, there's a lot that we do not know and a lot that we cannot predict. And that uncertainty can feel overwhelming. But there is one truth about our work: It is that we've been here before, and every time this chamber has risen to meet the moment.

In fact, we have already proven who we are in times of crisis. When the chaos and

division of Trump 1.0 tested the foundations of our institutions, it was this chamber that stepped forward to defend New Yorkers.

We'll continue to be a clear and unwavering voice for what New Yorkers deserve from their federal representatives. For example, laws like our SHIELD Act were not abstract ideas, they're fundamental protections that matter now more than ever. We showed the country that states could hold the line when Washington would not, and that government could still be a force of stability, fairness, compassion and good.

In moments of crisis when COVID brought the world to a halt, and even when a former governor resigned in scandal, this chamber provided continuity and steadiness. We confronted what was uncomfortable, kept government functioning, and passed critical budgets under impossible conditions. We did it without losing our values or losing sight of the people we serve.

Those moments were not easy, but they reminded us of something essential. We know how to lead in uncertain times. We know how to confront the unimaginable. We know how to govern

when the ground shifts beneath us, because we already have. We know how to work together, we know how to reach consensus.

We represent every corner of the state, from cities to suburbs, small towns, farmlands. We represent districts that are safely Democratic and Republican as well as districts that are competitive, moderate, hard-fought. Our strength comes not from pretending that one size fits all, but from understanding that New York works best when communities see themselves reflected in the various solutions we advance.

Ideology and principles matter. They guide us. They shape our priorities and our sense of justice. But governing also requires realism. The landscape ahead is complicated. The stakes are high. Navigating what comes next will require discipline, collaboration and resolve.

In moments like these, we have to be the adults in the room. We have to help set the tone and direction for the state. We must give a sense of security to our constituents who are living in unprecedented times of uncertainty.

That is what the Senate has done under this Majority's leadership. When Washington chose chaos, we delivered stability. When Washington offers rhetoric, we produce results. When Washington leans on division, we focus on improving the people's lives in tangible and practical ways.

That's the standard New Yorkers expect from us as we move into this new year. We know what our communities need. We understand the challenges they face. We see the role of the Senate, led by the Majority, that we must play -- not to respond to the moment only, but to shape what comes next.

This session our work continues to meet the affordability crisis head on. We'll tackle everything from the rise in utility costs, the price of groceries, promoting universal childcare. We'll continue strengthening a healthcare system that puts patients first.

And we'll stand firm in defense of voting rights and equal rights, with one of our central focuses being standing up for communities -- and certainly the Bishop mentioned this today, they're being targeted and

marginalized -- which includes protecting our immigrant brothers and sisters by advancing goals set forth in New York For All.

As we open the legislative session, let us do it with confidence, grounded in what we've already proven, clear-eyed about the work ahead, and united in our responsibility to deliver. Because New York and New Yorkers are counting on us, and this Senate will be able, as always, to meet the moment.

Thank you. Let's get to work.

(Standing ovation.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Majority Leader.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Mr. President, before I move the next resolution, I want to acknowledge that we are joined by Assemblymembers Pretlow and Ra, who are informing us that the Assembly is ready to conduct business.

And with that, I would like to take up our own resolution appointing a committee of two to inform the Governor that the Senate is organized and ready to proceed.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Resolution 1307, by Senator Stewart-Cousins, directing the Temporary President to appoint a committee of two to inform 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 please signify by saying aye.

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed, nay.

(No response.)

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is adopted.

Senators Bynoe and Chan are appointed to inform the Governor that the Senate is organized and ready to proceed with business.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: And now let's take up the resolution appointing a committee of two to inform the Assembly that the Senate is assembled and ready to proceed with business.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Resolution 1306, by Senator Stewart-Cousins, directing the Temporary President to appoint a committee of two to wait upon the Assembly and inform 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 please signify by saying aye.

(Response of "Aye.")

THE PRESIDENT: Opposed, nay.

(No response.)

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is adopted.

Senators Ryan and Weik are appointed to inform the Assembly that the Senate is assembled and ready to proceed with business.

Senator Gianaris.

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

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

SENATOR GIANARIS: I move to adjourn until Monday, January 12th, at 3:00 p.m., with intervening days being legislative days.

THE PRESIDENT: On motion, the Senate stands adjourned until Monday, January 12th, at 3:00 p.m., with the intervening days being legislative days.

(Whereupon, at 1:03 p.m., the Senate adjourned.)