NEW YORK STATE SENATE

THE STENOGRAPHIC RECORD

ALBANY, NEW YORK

March 16, 2026

3:00 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: In the absence of clergy, let us bow our heads in a moment of silent reflection or prayer.

(Whereupon, the assemblage respected a moment of silence.)

THE PRESIDENT: Reading of the Journal.

THE SECRETARY: In Senate, Friday, March 13, 2026, the Senate met pursuant to adjournment. The Journal of Thursday, March 12, 2026, was read and approved. On motion, the Senate adjourned.

THE PRESIDENT: Without objection, the Journal stands approved as read.

Presentation of petitions.

Messages from the Assembly.

The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Senator Skoufis

moves to discharge, from the Committee on Ethics, Assembly Bill Number 2330 and substitute it for the identical Senate Bill 5843, Third Reading Calendar 452.

THE PRESIDENT: So ordered.

Messages from the Governor.

Reports of standing committees.

Reports of select committees.

Communications and reports from state officers.

Motions and resolutions.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Good afternoon, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon.

SENATOR GIANARIS: I have several amendments here.

Amendments are offered to the following Third Reading Calendar bills:

By Senator Cleare, page 7, Calendar Number 229, Senate Print 8072A;

Senator Persaud, page 12, Calendar Number 357, Senate Print 516A;

And Senator May, page 18, Calendar Number 454, Senate Print 2708.

THE PRESIDENT: The amendments are received, and the bills will retain their place on the Third Reading Calendar.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Please call on Senator Harckham for an introduction.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Harckham.

SENATOR HARCKHAM: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

You know, from time to time on this floor we welcome dignitaries from far and wide -- from New York, from around the world. Today we have some friends visiting us from Connecticut.

With us today are representatives from the Korean United Methodist Church of New Haven, as well as the Korean American Association of Connecticut.

And while decorum prohibits me from mentioning names explicitly, there is also the person here who puts up with the incorrigible Senator from the 40th Senate District on a daily basis.

So if you please, Mr. President, please welcome our guests and offer them all the privileges and courtesies of the chamber.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Senator.

To our guests, I welcome you on behalf of the Senate. We extend to you the privileges and courtesies of the house.

Please rise and be recognized.

(Standing ovation.)

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Mr. President, Senator Harckham didn't want to mention his wife's name, but I can.

So welcome to Jin-Hee Stevens, who is part of the delegation that was just introduced.

We have a privileged resolution at the desk. Let's take that up right now, Resolution 1753, and recognize Senator Kavanagh after reading that resolution's title.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Resolution 1753, by Senator Kavanagh, honoring St. Patrick and all persons of Irish descent upon the occasion of the celebration of St. Patrick's Day on Tuesday, March 17, 2026, and memorializing Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim March 2026 as Irish-American

Heritage Month in the State of New York.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Kavanagh.

SENATOR KAVANAGH: Thank you, Mr. President.

And happy St. Patrick's Month to everybody.

We are -- as a proud Irish-American whose father emigrated to the United States from County Donegal and whose maternal grandparents also made that journey somewhat earlier, it's an honor to introduce this resolution proclaiming March 2026 as Irish Heritage Month in the State of New York and celebrating St. Patrick's Day, a day that acknowledges the resilience, heritage, and enduring spirit of the Irish people and our great contributions to the State of New York.

Today of course we honor St. Patrick, who is the patron saint not only of Ireland, but also of the Archdiocese of New York.

And we also celebrate the generations of Irish immigrants, many of whom turned hardship into hope and really have enriched New York and our entire nation.

In the mid-19th century, millions of Irish began flowing into the United States

through what's known as the "Golden Door," often, of Ellis Island, seeking refuge from famine, from political oppression, and from injustice. Among them was Annie Moore, of Cork, Ireland, who was the very first immigrant from anywhere in the world to arrive at Ellis Island in pursuit of a new life in America.

Many, many of them arrived with very little, and yet contributed so much to New York, building the Erie Canal -- many, many thousands of Irish were involved in that -- as well as lots of our infrastructure, in a continuing tradition of being very important in our trades, our workers who construct and maintain all kinds of infrastructure around the state.

The spirit of public service of the Irish runs very deep. A quarter of the Continental Army was Irish-born, including the Fighting 69th that served on the battlefields of the Civil War and through many of our conflicts up to this day, and is headquartered in the 69th Regiment Armory in Manhattan.

One of the very first Medal of Honor recipients post-9/11 was Navy Seal Lieutenant Michael P. Murphy of Smithtown.

And of course I had the honor yesterday of joining an Irish delegation at 9/11, at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, and many, many of my Irish brethren and sisters gave their lives on that day, answering the call of service as police officers and firefighters.

That proud tradition really has sort of been consistent throughout our history as a country. Again, I mentioned the Continental Army and also nine signers of the original Declaration of Independence, and 23 United States presidents and a few governors I'll get to in a moment.

This is also Irish History Month, so it is important to recognize also the many Irish-American women who have been visionaries and trailblazers, including Annie Sullivan, who opened up the world to Helen Keller as her teacher; Nellie Bly, who changed the face of journalism; and Colonel Eileen Collins, who was the first woman to command a space shuttle and is a New Yorker.

And their legacy reminds us that the Irish spirit of courage has never been confined to one arena, one area of life, but across many

sectors and activities in our society.

Their legacy also lives on through, again, public service right here in New York. Of course a leader like Al Smith, New York's first "Happy Warrior," who really defined much of the great changes in our country, starting with services and programs in New York that made sure that we lifted up the neediest, made sure we took care of everyone in society, and became the New Deal programs of the '40s and into the '50s and still are some of our basic safety-net programs to this day.

The labor movement, of course, has been led by many, many Irish-Americans and continues to be -- to do so today. And of course we're very proud, as Irish-Americans, to have a Governor who is of Irish descent and also very much embraces that experience as a formative experience of her own and something that really defines her work and her commitment to making sure we're caring for all New Yorkers.

St. Patrick's Day is more, of course, than a tribute to the past. It's a living celebration of values that unite Irish people all over the world and us also as

New Yorkers: Resiliency in the face of struggle, solidarity in times of division, and the belief that every person deserves dignity.

The Irish island, of course, has been divided at times. There has been discrimination and oppression based on religion and other divisions in our society. We are very proud now that we are hopefully moving past those in a permanent way.

But we know that also Irish-Americans and the Irish have learned from those experiences and, again, we try to apply them to our work here.

As president of the American-Irish Legislators Society, I'm happy to work with leaders in this chamber and across -- and, you know, across the other side of the building, including our vice president, Senator Patrick Gallivan, and our treasurer, Pat Fahy, as well as Mary Beth Walsh and Mike Fitzpatrick, our Assembly colleagues.

So as we honor St. Patrick, who stood against intolerance and discrimination suffered by the Irish people, we are mindful of the continuing need to stand for justice,

inclusion and mutual understanding here in New York, and Ireland, and around the world.

This includes, again, our steadfast commitment to the Good Friday Agreements and the peace and reconciliation it has brought to the north of Ireland since 1998. And we know we are very much as Americans proud of the fact that American leaders of Irish descent and others were very instrumental in bringing that peace process to fruition in 1998, and continue to support that process.

So again, tomorrow is the biggest St. Patrick's Day parade not just in New York State, but anywhere in the world. We're expecting, as we usually do, about 2 million spectators, about 150,000 marchers. And it's not just a day for the Irish, it's a day when countless New Yorkers and many people from Ireland and other parts of the world join us in the spirit of Ireland and in the spirit of celebration.

And so for anyone who might be considering joining us who's within earshot of this speech, I say "Céad Míle Fáilte," which means, of course, "100,000 welcomes." I'm sure

that's on the tip of all of your tongues.

And again, St. Patrick's Day has very much become not just a day but really a month of celebration across our communities. I know many of my colleagues have participated in parades and other events.

So again, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. And just to end, there's an old Irish blessing that says "We all live in each other's shelter," and I hope we can continue in that spirit.

Happy St. Patrick's Day, and I vote aye on the resolution.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Fahy.

SENATOR FAHY: Thank you, Mr. President.

I join my colleague in noting Irish Heritage Day. Every March we do hear the bagpipes echo down the streets and a lot of green appears around the Capitol and certainly in New York City tomorrow.

But today, here, is a day to remind ourselves it's more than parades or even pints, it really is about heritage, the shared

sacrifices, resilience, and then that enduring promise of America.

It's a month that I -- that puts me down memory lane. My story is a very personal one, and I certainly share the pride. And I have to say the older I get, the more I believe that my roots have become a compass for my life.

I was born in Chicago to Depression-era immigrant parents who left small farms. Didn't really want to leave those farms, but they arrived here after immigration reopened after World War II. They were the very last of a generation to come off the boat right here in the New York City harbor -- or right south of us, I should say.

Mine is a very universal story. My parents came for the same reasons we see again universally, and that is that they had a chance at a job that they didn't have in their own country, and the chance that their children would ultimately have an education. Both of my parents only had a primary school education. My father had a year of technical school. But again, education was out of reach financially for their families.

So like many Irish, they helped build this country. My father started in the Chicago stockyards, my mother as a domestic servant. And as we've seen so many communities build, brick by brick, many ultimately found their way into public service. And I, as their daughter, ultimately did, against my father's best wishes, I have to say. Or against his recommendation.

But it was this unshakable belief in fairness and that opportunity -- we're reminded, opportunity should never be because of where you were born, because of who your parents were, or because of an accent or color of those who arrived on these shores.

The parallels to today's immigration battles are absolutely uncanny. My parents, through a lot of hard work, were afforded one version of an American dream, as many generations were. But that has really turned into more of a fairy tale for way too many.

And we have seen Lady Liberty's torch dim in recent years, dim with a lack of opportunity and that unshakable belief in fairness that we experienced and grew up hearing

about.

We must not forget -- so it's a reminder to me not to forget the roots, not forget our shared roots, the repression that held Ireland back for centuries, and the suffering for centuries, because of an autocratic rule. And I think it has led me to become so outspoken as I reflect on those.

But it's also that spirit of community, perseverance, and standing up for the underdog that the Irish have done so much on.

So as we celebrate the culture, the traditions, and the values of generosity, courage, and more, it is a reminder of the shoulders we stand on, the shared sacrifices.

And one of the many beautiful sayings from Ireland is "May your troubles be less, your blessings be more, and may nothing but happiness come through your door."

And with that, Mr. President, I wish all smiling eyes shine down upon all of us here and throughout the state.

Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

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.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Mr. President, Senator Kavanagh would like to open that resolution for cosponsorship.

THE PRESIDENT: The resolution is open for cosponsorship. Should you choose not to be a cosponsor, please notify the desk.

Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Let's take up the calendar, please.

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 102, Senate Print 3852B, by Senator Hinchey, an act to amend the Environmental Conservation Law.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 3. This

act shall take effect on the 180th day after it shall have become a law.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 60.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 122, Senate Print 3736, by Senator Comrie, an act to amend the Public Authorities Law.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 3. This act shall take effect immediately.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 60.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 159, Senate Print 119, by Senator Cleare, an act to amend the Emergency Tenant Protection Act.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Lay it aside for

the day.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill will be laid aside for the day.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 336, Senate Print 566, by Senator Skoufis, an act to amend the Executive Law.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 6. This act shall take effect immediately.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 336, voting in the negative are Senators Ortt, Rhoads and Walczyk.

Ayes, 57. Nays, 3.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 366, Senate Print 630, by Senator Stavisky, an act to amend the Criminal Procedure Law.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This

act shall take effect immediately.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 60.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 431, Senate Print 3699, by Senator Sanders, an act to enact the Facial Recognition Technology Study Act.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 4. This act shall take effect immediately.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 431, voting in the negative are Senators Rhoads and Walczyk.

Ayes, 58. Nays, 2.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number

446, Senate Print 1052, by Senator May, an act to direct the Department of Economic Development to move the Central New York Welcome Center to the Equal Rights Heritage Center in the City of Auburn.

SENATOR LANZA: Lay it aside.

THE PRESIDENT: Lay it aside.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 452, Assembly Bill Number 2330, by Assemblymember McDonald, an act to amend the Legislative Law.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect on the 30th day after it shall have become a law.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 452, voting in the negative are Senators Chan and Rhoads.

Ayes, 58. Nays, 2.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 456, Senate Print 257, by Senator Martinez, an act in relation to authorizing a study on lithium-ion battery fires and prevention.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 3. This act shall take effect immediately.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Borrello to explain his vote.

SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you, Mr. President.

I certainly support this bill. I think it's important. But I find it rather ironic or dangerous that we are proceeding forward with this electric school bus mandate without actually having a study on something like are these things going to start on fire.

We're already watching kids freezing because they're turning off the heat in order to complete their routes in the rural areas that I represent.

And we really need to pump the

brakes on this, no pun intended. This is one of many things that we should be studying before we're going to put our children on a bus that could be potentially deadly.

I'm supporting this, but I really would like some more common sense when it comes to the overall electric battery mandates.

Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Borrello will be recorded in the affirmative.

Senator Weik.

SENATOR WEIK: Thank you, Mr. President. I rise to explain my vote today, although I also agree with today's bill.

Today's bill is a study on lithium-ion battery fires, which pose a huge safety and environmental concern.

I have a bill, of course, that prohibits the mandate that requires school districts to purchase, operate and maintain electric buses, since we don't even know how to stabilize prevent or extinguish these fires.

The fact that we're passing this bill today certainly shows that everyone who votes yes on today's bill is also concerned with

the safety of electric buses and the children that we're mandating to ride on them.

Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Weik will be recorded in the affirmative.

Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 60.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 473, Senate Print 5779, by Senator Fernandez, an act to amend the Education Law.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 4. This act shall take effect on the first of July.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Oberacker to explain your vote.

SENATOR OBERACKER: Thank you, Mr. President.

This is a great bill, plain and simple. And I'm grateful to Senator Fernandez for bringing this forward. And again, it kind of shows that when we sit down, discuss, talk, be

able to work things out, great things can be accomplished.

And the fact that this bill will take potentially much-needed opioid antagonists and put them in an area where, if there is a health issue, most people know where these AEDs are anyway. I think it's just well thought out, a great bill.

And again, Senator Fernandez, thank you for bringing it forward. Every once in a while, I say, in Albany we get it right. Today we got it right.

Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Oberacker will be recorded in the affirmative.

Senator Fernandez to explain her vote.

SENATOR FERNANDEZ: Thank you, Mr. President.

And through you, I really want to thank the comments by my colleague here, because this is a very common-sense approach. First aid kits, AEDs are the tools that we run to when there is someone in distress, when they are unconscious. And many times maybe they don't

need that, or maybe they do need Narcan.

But this does provide more tools in a secure location to help somebody in their most desperate time of need for whatever may be the cause.

So I thank everyone for voting for this bill and for making New Yorkers safer by having the tools all together.

Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 473, voting in the negative:

Senator Walczyk.

Ayes, 60. Nays, 1.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 474, Senate Print 410, by Senator Gounardes, an act to amend the Civil Practice Law and Rules.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 4. This act shall take effect immediately.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 474, voting in the negative are Senators Ashby, Borrello, Canzoneri-Fitzpatrick, Chan, Gallivan, Griffo, Helming, Lanza, Martins, Mattera, Murray, Oberacker, O'Mara, Ortt, Palumbo, Rhoads, Rolison, Stec, Tedisco, Walczyk, Weber and Weik.

Ayes, 39. Nays, 22.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 479, Senate Print 2627A, by Senator Kavanagh, an act to amend the Real Property Law.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 479, voting in the negative: Senator Walczyk.

Ayes, 60. Nays, 1.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 483, Senate Print 661, by Senator Gianaris, an act to amend the Insurance Law.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect on the first of January.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 61.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 517, Senate Print 5116A, by Senator Cleare, an act to amend the Education Law.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect on the 90th day after it shall have become a law.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: Ayes, 61.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

Senator Gianaris, that completes the reading of today's calendar.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Mr. President, not since Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas in 1858 have a series of debates taken on such great importance as those between Mark Walczyk and Rachel May.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR GIANARIS: Let's take up the controversial calendar to hear the next installment, please.

(Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: The Secretary will ring the bell.

The Secretary will read.

THE SECRETARY: Calendar Number 446, Senate Print 1052, by Senator May, an act to direct the Department of Economic Development to move the Central New York Welcome Center to the Equal Rights Heritage Center in the City of Auburn.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Walczyk, why do you rise?

SENATOR WALCZYK: From the party of Lincoln, Mr. President --

(Laughter.)

SENATOR WALCZYK: -- I rise in hopes that the sponsor will yield for some questions.

THE PRESIDENT: Does the sponsor yield?

SENATOR MAY: Mr. President, I am happy to debate this bill once again.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR WALCZYK: In 2018, the state spent $10 million to build the Equal Rights Heritage Center, which opened in 2018. Is that correct?

SENATOR MAY: Through you, Mr. President, I don't know the price tag on the building.

SENATOR WALCZYK: Through you, Mr. President, would the sponsor continue to yield?

THE PRESIDENT: Does the sponsor yield?

SENATOR MAY: I do.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR WALCZYK: So at the time that the state spent $10 million to build the Heritage Center in the City of Auburn, it was under agreement that the City of Auburn was going to run the operations, be responsible for running the operations of the Equal Rights Heritage Center, is that correct?

SENATOR MAY: Through you, Mr. President. There was an understanding that the Central New York Welcome Center would be placed in the Equal Rights Heritage Center and the normal funding for a welcome center would contribute to the operating expenses of the center.

SENATOR WALCZYK: And through you, Mr. President, would the sponsor continue to yield.

THE PRESIDENT: Does the sponsor yield?

SENATOR MAY: I will.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR WALCZYK: But the CNY Welcome Center was actually placed in

Destiny USA, not in Auburn, is that correct?

SENATOR MAY: Through you, Mr. President, that is correct.

As far as we can tell, there was some side deal made between Governor Cuomo and the mall developers to shift the plan and put the Welcome Center at Destiny instead.

SENATOR WALCZYK: And through you, Mr. President, would the sponsor continue to yield.

THE PRESIDENT: Does the sponsor yield?

SENATOR MAY: I do.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR WALCZYK: And in the Heritage Center's first year of operations they received $50,000 from the State of New York to help the City of Auburn with operating, is that correct?

SENATOR MAY: Through you, Mr. President, I don't -- don't know. I wasn't in office at that time. And I didn't represent Auburn at that time, either.

SENATOR WALCZYK: And through you, Mr. President, would the sponsor continue to

yield?

THE PRESIDENT: Does the sponsor yield?

SENATOR MAY: I do.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR WALCZYK: You may have been in office in 2025 when the city received $200,000 from the state. Is that figure correct, $200,000 for the operations to help the City of Auburn run the Heritage Center?

SENATOR MAY: Through you, Mr. President, that is correct. Because I have advocated each of the last few years to get some operating funding into the state budget to replace what was lost by losing the CNY Welcome Center designation.

SENATOR WALCZYK: And through you, Mr. President, would the sponsor continue to yield?

THE PRESIDENT: Does the sponsor yield?

SENATOR MAY: Yup.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR WALCZYK: So I noticed you once again provided $200,000 for the City of

Auburn for the operations of the Heritage Center in your one-house budget.

The city says that it costs about $234,000 annually to run, is that correct?

SENATOR MAY: Through you, Mr. President, that sounds right to me.

SENATOR WALCZYK: And through you, Mr. President, would the sponsor continue to yield?

THE PRESIDENT: Does the sponsor yield?

SENATOR MAY: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR WALCZYK: Destiny USA is actually -- so it's a mall in Syracuse. It is the top 20 most -- in the top 20 most-visited shopping centers in the nation, with over 20 million visitors per year.

The Equal Rights Center gets about 8,000 visits a year, is that correct?

SENATOR MAY: Through you, Mr. President, I don't know that number. But that sounds very low to me. There are always people there when I go.

SENATOR WALCZYK: And through you,

Mr. President, would the sponsor continue to yield.

THE PRESIDENT: Does the sponsor yield?

SENATOR MAY: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR WALCZYK: Yeah, in their annual 2024 report, I can read you the specific number. A total of 8,206 walk-ins. That was an increase of 3,000 visits over 2023, so headed in the right direction. But falling pretty short of 20 million, where the Visitor Center is currently.

My question is, is Onondaga County in support of moving the Visitor Center from their county into the County of Cayuga in the City of Auburn?

SENATOR MAY: Through you, Mr. President. This isn't a decision for Onondaga County, this is a decision for the State of New York.

And I would also say the Visitor Center actually is a gathering place. There are events that take place outside of it all the time. And so I don't know if they're

clocking every single person who comes in there.

But Destiny Mall also -- some of those numbers of visitors are very old, to be honest, and it is -- I would say there's been a significant drop-off, especially now that Canadian visitors aren't coming to Syracuse anymore.

SENATOR WALCZYK: Through you, Mr. President, would the sponsor continue to yield?

THE PRESIDENT: Does the sponsor yield?

SENATOR MAY: I will.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR WALCZYK: In fact, at least in their 2024 report, they do clock combined events and tours total, adding another 6400 of combined events and tours.

I assume that's things outside of the Heritage Center that rally there, to include the No Kings rally that was held on October 18th at the Heritage Center or on January 22nd, a Democrat running for county court judge having their announcement in the Heritage Center.

My question, are there any

Republican events or conservative events ever held at the Heritage Center?

SENATOR MAY: Through you, Mr. President, I don't have a list of events that are held there, but I do know there are a lot of community events that occur outside the center. And -- and I'm sure some of them are, at the very least, nonpartisan, if not Republican-organized. I just -- I don't know.

SENATOR WALCZYK: And through you, Mr. President, would the sponsor continue to yield?

THE PRESIDENT: Does the sponsor yield?

SENATOR MAY: I do.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR WALCZYK: The City of Auburn is often called the "Prison City," for very good reason. There were a number of events in Auburn this time last year as corrections officers were fighting for safety on their job. Were any of the corrections officers' rallies held at the Heritage Center?

SENATOR MAY: Through you, Mr. President, I don't know the answer.

SENATOR WALCZYK: And through you, Mr. President, would the sponsor continue to yield?

THE PRESIDENT: Does the sponsor yield?

SENATOR MAY: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: The sponsor yields.

SENATOR WALCZYK: Do you happen to know the party registration of the executive director, the chair of the board, the treasurer, and almost the entire board of directors?

SENATOR MAY: Mr. President, I do not see how that is relevant to this question. And the answer is no.

SENATOR WALCZYK: Thank you, Mr. President.

On the bill.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator Walczyk on the bill.

SENATOR WALCZYK: So this bill would move the Central New York Welcome Center from one of the largest malls most frequently visited in America. It is in the top 20 largest malls, has over 20 million people visit it each day {sic}.

I know it well because I grew up in the Central New York region. I also represent the North Country and have many Canadian friends who talk about doing their Christmas shopping there. That's why it's situated well to be a welcome center.

The area where you've got 20 million people in Central New York showing up to shop is a great way to welcome them to the State of New York, show them some of the products that we make in the State of New York, and show them some information that they may spread out to communities, even like communities of Auburn. It's a great place to advertise for Prison City.

It's at the confluence of Route 81 and 90, making it very easy for many visitors -- even with traffic changes, still very easy for many visitors across the State of New York.

But on top of the strategy of this, what bothers me the most about this bill is that the City of Syracuse and the County of Onondaga, where the CNY Welcome Center is situated today, haven't asked for this, haven't approved of this, and would agree that in Central New York, Syracuse is the beating heart. That makes sense

for CNY to have the Welcome Center there and well-placed in the area where people most frequently visit.

So it doesn't make strategic sense for us in this body to move CNY's Welcome Center out to the City of Auburn. And no offense to Prison City; I'm sure they love the visitors.

But when you look at everything from -- actually, if you should know -- and you should know -- parking was taken away from the City of Auburn. Many residents at the YMCA weren't happy having to park out on the street.

Actually, at the Syracuse Mall, at Destiny USA, parking is free. And people, 20 million of them, are already showing up to shop there. So moving this into the City of Auburn could even cause more consternation.

And the real reason that this is brought forward is to support the Democrat hangout in the City of Auburn. This is the place where all the events are, this is the place where all the organizations are, this is where people coalesce and have rallies for one side of an issue, not for the other.

And that's what makes it difficult

in this body, with the State of New York and taxpayer dollars that we're investing here, to say no. So I hope that you will join me in voting no on this bill.

Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Are there any other Senators wishing to be heard?

Seeing and hearing none, debate is closed.

The Secretary will ring the bell.

Oh, sorry. Senator Gianaris.

SENATOR GIANARIS: Mr. President, we've agreed to restore this to the noncontroversial calendar.

THE PRESIDENT: Read the last section.

THE SECRETARY: Section 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

THE PRESIDENT: Call the roll.

(The Secretary called the roll.)

THE PRESIDENT: Senator May to explain her vote.

SENATOR MAY: Thank you, Mr. President.

When the state builds a building, I

think it is reasonable to expect that that building -- that the state will have a plan for how that building will be operated over time.

The state built a very nice building right in the middle of Auburn, right across from City Hall, right next to the Seward House, which is a very important tourist destination, and right around the corner from downtown.

And then the state pulled the funding that was supposed to be what enabled the building to continue its operation.

And personally, I think this is irresponsible on the part of the state and an insult to the City of Auburn, and it has left the city in a position where either they had to come up with a significant amount of money to run this building or watch it fall down, essentially, right in the middle of town.

So I am proud to advocate for a sustainable system of funding the operation of this building.

But I also need to say, clearly: This isn't about partisanship. This isn't about some kind of lefty plot. This is about infrastructure and how we support the

institutions in our upstate cities.

And the reality is even if --I think it's pretty inflated to say 20 million people are visiting Destiny Mall now, in a year. The reality is that the Welcome Center at Destiny Mall is located in a distant corner that very few people ever see.

So the numbers who actually visit that Welcome Center -- I've been by several times to check, and there's almost never anyone there.

So I would bet if they were collecting information, that there are actually at least as many people visiting the Equal Rights Heritage Center in Auburn as there are visiting the Welcome Center at Destiny Mall.

So I think this is smart economics for us to put state money into operating this building. And I think Auburn is deserving of it.

And I vote aye.

THE PRESIDENT: Senator May will be recorded in the affirmative.

Announce the results.

THE SECRETARY: In relation to Calendar 446, voting in the negative are Senators Ashby, Borrello, Canzoneri-Fitzpatrick,

Lanza, Martins, Mattera, O'Mara, Ortt, Palumbo, Rhoads, Stec, Tedisco, Walczyk, Weber and Weik.

Ayes, 47. Nays, 15.

THE PRESIDENT: The bill is passed.

Senator Gianaris, that completes the reading of the controversial calendar.

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

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

SENATOR GIANARIS: I move to adjourn until tomorrow, Tuesday, March 17th, St. Patrick's Day, at 3:00 p.m.

THE PRESIDENT: On motion, the Senate stands adjourned until Tuesday, March 17th, at 3:00 p.m.

(Whereupon, at 3:39 p.m., the Senate adjourned.)