



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

Taste of Africa Event Hosted by Senator Sanders Jr. Sets the Tone for a Dynamic Caucus Weekend

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Albany, NY –

This past Friday, February 14th, Senator James Sanders Jr. launched the **54th Annual Caucus Weekend** with our highly anticipated **Taste of Africa event**, and it was nothing short of spectacular! From the vibrant flavors of African cuisine to the stunning cultural showcases, the evening was a true celebration of heritage, unity, and excellence. If you weren't there, we can only hope that you don't miss it next year!

Attendees were treated to an unforgettable culinary experience, featuring an incredible mix of flavors from across the African diaspora. **Allie B's Cozy Kitchen** delivered soul food favorites, **Irie Vybez** brought the bold and flavorful Caribbean cuisine, and **Keobi** showcased authentic West African dishes—ensuring that every guest had a taste of something special.

Beyond the amazing food, the night was filled with electrifying performances that captivated the audience. **Drums of AFreeka** brought powerful rhythms to set the tone for the evening, followed by a moving rendition of the Black National Anthem, beautifully sung by **Aanya Lumsden**. The event also featured a **spoken word performance by Marcus Baptiste**, whose words resonated deeply with the audience, and an energetic **rap performance by Omar Cunningham**, who brought modern lyricism into the cultural mix.

The cultural significance of the evening was further elevated by the presence of **Princess Chetachi Nwoga Ecton, Queen Mother Makhadzi Makhadzi, HRH Chinedo Uchenna Kieran,** and **Ambassador Robinah Kakonge of the Republic of Uganda,** whose royal presence added an extraordinary touch to the celebration.

This year's Taste of Africa also featured two breathtaking fashion shows, where attendees arrived in their most stunning African attire. A major highlight was **Laduma Maxhosa,** who presented exquisite pieces from his internationally acclaimed brand, Maxhosa. Laduma shared the deep-rooted significance of his designs, **inspired by the Xhosa people of South Africa,** giving guests a deeper appreciation of African heritage and craftsmanship.

We were honored to welcome several elected officials, including **Assembly Member Clyde Vanel, Assembly Member Khaleel Anderson,** and **Albany Mayor Candidate Corey Ellis,** who joined us in celebrating the beauty and diversity of African heritage.

Our district showed up in full force, with three full busloads of constituents making the trip to Albany to participate in the weekend's festivities. Their enthusiasm and engagement demonstrated the strong commitment of our community to celebrating culture, advocating for progress, and making their voices heard.

In addition to the celebrations, we took time to honor outstanding members of our community for their dedication and service. AraCelia Cook accepted the 54th Community Award on behalf of the 149th Street South Ozone Park Civic Association, recognizing the organization's tireless efforts in strengthening the community. Additionally, Lisa George, senior deputy chief of staff from the office of Senator James Sanders Jr., was honored with a Community Service Award from Community Justice Innovation for her impactful work in advocating for justice and community development.

Throughout the weekend, we hosted a series of engaging discussions and events, with a key focus on **Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBEs).** These critical conversations shed light on both the challenges and opportunities in the industry, emphasizing the importance of increasing representation and economic empowerment. The data presented was eye-opening, reinforcing that we must do more to claim our stake in the business landscape.

As we close out another successful Caucus Weekend, we extend our deepest gratitude to all who made the journey to Albany and contributed to this incredible experience. Your presence, support, and engagement made this event unforgettable. We look forward to seeing you all again next year!

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