



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Sen. Shelley Mayer Host Black History Month Celebration With Black Labor Leaders

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS March 7, 2025

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New York State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Senator Shelley Mayer hosted an **insightful and engaging virtual panel in honor of Black History Month** featuring esteemed Black labor leaders on Friday, February 28. The event focused on the journey, contributions, and challenges faced by Black workers throughout American history, as well as the continued fight for equity and inclusion in the labor force.

The event featured prominent Black leaders in labor, including George Gresham, President of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East; Nancy Hagans, President of the New York State Nurses Association and a National Nurses United President; Terrence Melvin, President of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionist and Secretary-Treasurer of the New York State AFL-CIO; and Wayne Spence, President of the New York State Public Employees Federation (PEF).

Friday's panel kept with the theme of Black History Month for 2025: "African Americans and Labor." 2025 also marks the 100th anniversary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids, founded in New York by A. Philip Randolph as the first Black union chartered by the American Federation of Labor.

The panelists shared personal stories of their journeys to leadership and the barriers they encountered. They spoke about their perspectives on collective action in the face of ongoing challenges and underscored the role of labor unions in advocating for fair wages, workplace protections, and equitable opportunities for all workers, particularly communities that have historically been marginalized.

Panelists also dispelled misconceptions about the concept of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, which have been instrumental in helping qualified workers of color gain access to opportunities which they might otherwise have been denied due to the color of their skin. The speakers reinforced the importance of the ongoing importance of protecting DEI initiatives in the modern workforce—especially in light of efforts by federal leaders in Washington to roll back progress in achieving success for Black workers.

Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins said: "Black History Month is an opportunity to honor the incredible achievements of Black workers, activists, and leaders who have shaped our labor movement and continue to fight for fairness and justice. Our panelists' stories highlight the perseverance and dedication of Black leaders in labor, and underscore the importance of

continuing our work to advance equity and inclusion in the workforce. I am grateful to our distinguished guests for their leadership and commitment, and to all who attended this important discussion.”

State Senator Shelley B. Mayer said: “I was proud to join Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins in co-hosting a celebration for Black History Month. It was inspiring to hear the stories of our leaders in labor and to have them share their insights on the current attacks on working people. They remind us that when we work together and lead with empathy we can improve the lives of all workers. Thank you to George Gresham, PhD, Nancy Hagan, RN, Wayne Spence, and Rev. Terrance Melvin for joining us, and thank you to Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins.”

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