



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

## Leader Stewart-Cousins: This Budget Made Progress, But It Certainly Isn't Progressive

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS April 10, 2017

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"Thank you Mr. President.

First off, I want to thank the staff on both sides of the aisle who have done a tremendous job over these past few, chaotic weeks.

I want to recognize my team, starting with my Chief of Staff, Suzy Ballantyne. I want to thank our Director of Democratic Conference Counsel and Finance, Shontell Smith and our

Finance Director, Felix Muniz.

I also want to thank my Communications Director, Mike Murphy.

I especially want to thank my Deputy, Senator Mike Gianaris and recognize my Finance Ranker, Senator Liz Krueger. Our thoughts and prayers are with her and her family.

I want to thank Senator Flanagan, and Senator Klein for their work during this tough budget process.

I want to thank Governor Cuomo, and I want to thank my partner in the other house, Speaker Heastie for all his hard work.

Additionally, I want to applaud all the members of my conference who have put in long hours fighting for their constituents and our shared Democratic values.

While this chamber has just fulfilled our Constitutional responsibility of passing a Budget, we shouldn't be breaking out the champagne. This Budget is over a week late, and here we are still unable to achieve all of the policies New Yorkers deserve. While there are some good things in this Budget, there are too many half-measures and too many things completely left out.

This budget may show some progress, but let's be clear, it is not progressive.

Progress is providing more school aid, but a progressive budget would have recognized our obligation to the CFE and fully-funded our public education system.

Progress is taking some steps to help 16- and 17-year olds who run afoul of the law, but progressive would be truly Raising The Age.

Let me give you an example last week I read a newspaper story about a Westchester 17-year old who broke into a cookie kiosk at a local mall and stole a cake. Under current law he would be sent to adult criminal court and under our progress today he would still be sent to criminal court. So clearly that is not progressive.

Progressive would have been implementing this plan immediately. Progressive would have been reducing the time it takes to seal records. Progressive would have been starting the majority of cases in family court.

A progressive budget would have included the Raise The Age version that my colleague, Velmanette Montgomery has been fighting for for so many years.

Additionally, a truly progressive budget would address other crucial criminal justice reforms, including ensuring a speedy trial and reforming the bail system.

Progress is addressing college affordability for both public and private schools, but progressive would be to pass the DREAM Act and help thousands of New Yorkers who only want a fair shot at earning an education and achieving the American Dream.

Progress would have been codifying our state's health exchange into law which, sadly, we didn't; but progressive would have been implementing a Single Payer insurance plan.

Progress is investing in our state water infrastructure but progressive would be to not strip funds away from RGGI which is used for our environmental protection efforts.

Progress is allocating much needed development aid to Upstate communities, especially Buffalo but progressive would have been directing money to community schools and helping to rebuild crumbling school infrastructure, including in my hometown of Yonkers.

Progress is ensuring more development of housing, progressive would have been creating and maintaining more truly affordable housing.

Progress is taking care of direct care workers but progressive would have also acted on long deferred COLA Increases for Human Services Workers in OPWDD, OMH, and OASAS.

Progress would actually recognize the ethics problems in Albany. And a progressive budget would pass strong ethics reforms and restore New Yorkers' trust in Government.

My colleagues, as we've seen over the past few months, New Yorkers are scared with what is happening in Washington and they are engaged with what is happening in Albany.

This budget offered state government the chance to stand up for New Yorkers' rights and send a clear message that we will adhere to progressive values during these challenging times.

While this Budget failed to address many critical issues, we have the opportunity to address these issues in the months ahead.

In January, Democrats had an opportunity to unite and provide a truly progressive budget blueprint. That didn't happen.

So this budget may represent some progress, but certainly isn't progressive. The majority of New Yorkers expect us to do better; and I hope in the coming months, we will."