



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins' 2020 Legislative Session Prepared Opening Remarks

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS January 8, 2020

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Thank you, Madame President, for being here and presiding over the kickoff to another eventful session.

Thank you to Governor Cuomo, we accomplished so much together and there are more victories on the horizon.

I also want to thank my partner in the other House, my wonder twin, Speaker Carl Heastie. I know without him, we wouldn't have had so many great accomplishments.

I also want to thank the Minority Leader, John Flanagan. We may not always agree, but I always enjoy working with you and your conference.

And of course, thank you to my wonderful conference for representing what is great about New York, the American dream and American values.

But right now, I want to take a special moment and thank Rabbi Horowitz from Monsey for joining us today. Just last week, I traveled to Monsey to be with you and your community. And today I want to reiterate what I said that day— In the face of this ugly, hateful, and horrific tragedy, the entire Senate stands with you and your community as you heal and

pray.

There is no place for hate in this State!

Let's all stand together and give Rabbi Horowitz some applause and love to bring back to Monsey. Thank you, Rabbi.

Well, here we are again at the beginning of another session. I think back to last year at this time as history was made. As our Lieutenant Governor pointed out 2020, is the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment! Look how far we have come. Now women are not only voting we are leading in all segments of society and we are going to continue that leadership.

Getting back to last year, I think of all the victories along the way and all the hugging, all the cheering. I think back to when we gaveled out in mid-June after months and months of non-stop action. We gaveled out ready to be refreshed, renewed, but mostly to go back to our districts to serve our constituents. Last session was busy, tiring and historic with a record number of hearings and a record number of new laws passed.

Let's take a look at just some of the amazing things we accomplished last year.

The permanent property tax cap

The lowest middle-class tax rates in generations

Finally, standing up for women's choice, and while the federal government looked to take away women's rights, we said no!

We held groundbreaking hearings on sexual harassment and passed legislation saying that this scourge has no place in New York.

Standing up for our immigrant brothers and sisters during a scary time

Standing up for the LGBTQ community and saying we are with you

Passing laws that recognize the real dangers of climate change

Passing the Child victims act and delivering justice to so many abuse survivors

Passing groundbreaking affordable housing and rent control laws

Passing common-sense gun laws, working toward reforming our justice system and improving the voting process.

These are big, historic changes. They are changes that have created a more affordable New York for working families, and a fairer, safer and more just New York for so many of our neighbors who were denied basic rights and equal treatment under the law for years.

And while many of us celebrated these accomplishments, change can be scary to some. Change can cause discomfort. It can lead people down a path where fearmongering, and sowing division, and spinning a false narrative, seem attractive. But we must reject this path.

When given the choice, we must always create opportunities for progress rather than build barriers that prevent it.

We can do so much more to create more opportunities for New Yorkers whose pathways to a better future are blocked by the same old barriers we've been dealing with for generations: barriers to being able to stay in your home, barriers to getting a quality education, barriers to accessing decent child care or treatment for an addiction. These are barriers that shouldn't exist in New York State in the year 2020.

So today, we renew our commitment to creating opportunities – to leveling the playing field for children living in poverty in rural villages and inner cities; for homeowners and tenants struggling to pay their property taxes or make rent, from downstate to upstate. For longtime New Yorkers and new arrivals excited to experience the promise of our great state firsthand.

This next session, we have to continue to be bold. We have to continue to embrace change.

This is not going to be easy. We are facing a larger than expected deficit and we have working and middle-class residents of our state who cannot shoulder any more of the tax burden than they already do. But even with these challenges, we must rise to the occasion and meet the needs of our state.

We are going to look for ways to fund our education system in a fair manner and make sure all students get the proper resources.

We are going to fully fund health care.

We are going to make college more affordable so our children can stay in the community and thrive.

We are going to make child care more affordable so parents can continue to work and provide for their families.

We are going to continue to grow our economy in all parts of the state and make sure we create more and more jobs.

We are going to ensure our small businesses thrive.

We are going to help bridge the technology gap and bring broadband to rural areas.

We are going to continue to reform our voting system.

We are going to say to the LGBTQ community...we are with you.

We are going to stand up for our brothers and sisters in the labor movement.

We are going to continue to look to stop the horrors of gun violence.

We are going to look to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure and transportation system.

We are going to continue to take on the opioid crisis that is facing this state and country.

We are going to continue to recognize the dangers of climate change and pass real reforms to clean up our environment.

And we are going to stand up to hate! We are going to say that there is no place for it in our great state!

I think we all understand that we have a lot of work to get done. But I know together we can deliver for the people of New York.

So Madame President, Thank you for this opportunity and let's get to work.