



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

In Session Opening Remarks, Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins Says Conference Will Fight For New Yorkers In Era Of Trump

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS January 4, 2017



“Thank you Mr. President and thank you to all my colleagues.

I would like to thank my Democratic colleagues for once again electing me as their Democratic Leader. It is an honor to serve you.

I would also like to congratulate Senator Flanagan for his re-election as Leader and Senator Klein for his re-election as leader of his conference.

I want to take a moment and welcome our newest Democratic members starting with Jamaal Bailey from Senate District 36 (Mount Vernon and parts of the Bronx). Jamaal is a young attorney who has worked closely with Speaker Heastie serving the people of New York and is a long time fighter for social justice and maybe more importantly he is a new father for the second time — so if he looks a little tired we know why.

And of course our second Senator from Long Island, John Brooks from Senate District 8. John is a longtime public servant who has done so much to help serve the people of Long Island from being a Fire Chief to a School Board Member.

Senator Flanagan and Senator Klein, the Democratic Conference stands ready to work with you when we agree and we will not be shy when we disagree.

A New Year and a new session should serve as a restart button and a time to refresh our commitment to this great state.

Last year was certainly an interesting year.

Many in this great progressive state of New York look to Washington and the new Trump administration with grave concern. The national Republican Party has made it clear that they are looking at rolling back so many hard-won victories for the working men and women of New York.

I look at a chamber of 32 Democrats and 31 Republicans, yet once again we are denied our rightful place leading the Senate. Democrats must be true to their values especially in the atmosphere we are going to be facing. Democrats should be united!

In the African American Community there is a tradition of Watch Night Services. This is a tradition that stems from when the community was waiting for the signing of the

Emancipation Proclamation. They gathered in churches full of hope, nervousness and trepidation. This past New Year's Eve, Reverend Barber of the NAACP, a great national leader, actually hosted a Watch Night event in Washington D.C. Reverend Barber called on the nation to resist hate and extremism and called on all of us to do this starting on a state level and keep people at the heart of our public policies. While we gather here in this Capitol for so many people we are the watchers. We are their eyes. We are their ears. And fortunately we get to do more than just watch, but get to do the work.

- We need to work to increase economic opportunity for all.
- We need to work for equal rights.
- We need to work protect a women's right to choose. We need to work to protect our elections and make it easier to register and to vote. It amazes me that New York still doesn't have early voting. We need to work to fix our criminal justice system and pass things like Raise the Age that we have been talking about for way to long with no action.
- We need to work to restore trust in our government and pass real ethics reforms, things like closing the LLC loophole and regulating the use of campaign funds should be easy fixes that can happen immediately.
- We must work to lower our tax burden, our mandates on local governments and help our small businesses thrive.
- We must work to make sure that all New York children have access to the quality education they deserve and that all of our children have access to affordable quality higher education.
- We need to work protect our environment and not give in to those who doubt climate change.

So, Senator Flanagan and Senator Klein, as I said before, Senate Democrats will support you when we agree and we will challenge you when we disagree. We will not allow partisan bickering to obstruct our efforts to serve our constituents and together we will give all New Yorkers the responsible and productive government they deserve.

And to my fellow New Yorkers, the Senate Democratic Conference will be not only be watching for injustices, but will be working to stop them while we continue to move this great state forward.

Thank You.”