



Remarks: March 17, 2008
Assembly Chamber | State Capitol | Albany

Remarks to a Joint-Session of the New York State Legislature

Thank you.

Thank you, all.

NPR took a DNA test for me as they did in the program African Lives and they found a number of hits from Ireland and Scotland, so I want to wish you all a Happy St. Patrick's Day.

I would like to thank the Chief Judge Judith Kaye for administering that oath, the chief judge who I believe will go down in history as one of the greatest chief judges this State has ever had.

I would like to thank Rabbi Shmuel Lefkowitz, one of my dear friends for coming and speaking here today, and also, Monsignor Wallace Harris, my pastor, for delivering that invocation as well.

I would like to thank my colleague in government who I now have forgiven for shooting me with a water gun a few years ago, the Attorney General for the State of New York, Andrew Cuomo.

And I would like to thank a moderately popular comptroller in this chamber, the one and only comptroller, Tom DiNapoli.

The last time I was in this chamber I was gaveling in for the State of the State and Speaker Silver had brought me in here to practice so I didn't destroy anything in our first year. But in our second year, I said don't bother, I know how to do this.

Apparently, I was about to bring the gavel down on a glass, like this one.

The speaker at the last second grabbed the gavel away from me and he told me in his own inimitable way, as only Shelly can, I will not allow you to turn the State of the State into a Jewish wedding.

They had a Jewish hit in there too, Shelly. Thank you so much for your hospitality and for having all of us in the chambers today.

I would also like to thank the members of the Assembly with the Speaker for having us, and members of the Senate who are coming to this swearing-in, and their leader, none other than my good friend, the Majority Leader of the New York State Senate, Joseph L. Bruno.

The other day we had lunch and he said "Listen, some evening, if you like it you should come out to the ranch and have dinner with me." I'll go. I'm going to take my taster with me.

I'd also like to thank the Senate Minority, the conference, from which I first served as a State Senator for 21 years, and their very great leader, the man who has moved the conference beyond any place anyone ever thought it could go, the one and only Senate Democratic Leader Malcolm A. Smith.

And I would like to finally thank the leader of the Assembly Republican Conference in the New York State Assembly. He asked me other day when he came out of office, do you still play basketball, David? I told him, I don't play basketball, Jimmy. Maybe, you'd like to come by for a lesson sometime. Jim Tedesco, Assembly Minority Leader.

After some very difficult surgery, I don't know if I am touched by the appearance of anyone else here today than to have back with us our former Governor, George Pataki. The Governor is looking very well, and he's getting a lot better.

Also with us today is former Governor Hugh L. Carey, everybody.

Please greet former Lieutenant Governor - you know I had to get the former Lieutenant Governors announced - Stan Lundine.

And a very good friend of mine and to all of you, our former Comptroller, Carl McCall.

We have with us today both of our United States Senators, and we would like to present them right now. The senior Senator from the State of New York, and of course, arose from Brooklyn, Charles Schumer.

And the junior Senator from New York who has a lot of places to go these days, and I'm so flattered that she would come join us today, none other than Senator Hillary Clinton.

We'd also like to welcome all of the members of our congressional delegation. We hope that they are here. And we were trying to get the Chair of the Ways and Means Committee, Charlie Rangel, to come. Is he with us today? All right.

Well, he is in our thoughts. He's recovering from a severe case of the flu, so far has not been able to be here.

We have with us from New York City, Mayor Michael Bloomberg; former Mayor of New York City David N. Dinkins; and former Mayor of New York City, Edward I. Koch.

And we'd like to thank all of the mayors and county executives and elected officials from around the state as well.

We have some visitors with us today. We are so, so happy to have with us Governor Jon Corzine of New Jersey, and Governor Deval Patrick of Massachusetts.

And someone who went through a circumstance somewhat similar to mine has given me advice and come to join me today, Governor Jodi Rell of Connecticut. Governor, how did you do it?

I would like to introduce the former Secretary of State of New York and my father, Basil A. Paterson. My mother, Portia Paterson. And my second mom who serves as Michelle's mother, Kaye Johnson.

Speaking of Michelle, I want to introduce my wife and lifelong friend, Michelle Paige Paterson. Michelle and I have a different kind of a marriage. And I learned how different it was going to be about 15 minutes after I got married. I'm sure those of you men who got married, you remember the part about saying "I do," you remember the part about taking pictures afterwards, and then getting in a limousine, but do you remember sitting next to the woman of your dreams and all of a sudden, a little girl comes and sits between the two of you.

And I said, "Ashley, can I sit next to your mom?" And she said "No, I sat here first." How do you convince a 4-year-old that you want to sit next to your wife? And I tried one more time. I said "Ashley, I just got married. Can I sit next to your mom?"

She said, "Get over it, David."

And as I tried to get over it, that little girl has grown up to be my best friend, Ashley Dennis.

And finally, I would like introduce a gentleman who got into the Beacon School which was his first choice this year. My son, Alexander Basil Paterson, who we call Alex.

Ladies and gentleman, fellow New Yorkers. In so many ways, we woke this morning to a not so ordinary day.

But in one way, we woke this morning to a New York dawn that is like every other one that came before it. For today, like we always do, in spite of the obstacles, regardless of the circumstances, we move forward.

Of course, I never expected to have the honor of serving as Governor of New York State. But our constitution demands it. This transition today is an historic message to the world that we live among the same values that we profess, and that we are a government of laws and not individuals. Today we can be proud of our democracy.

Now look folks, this has been a very difficult week. But there have been turbulent weeks in New York's past, and there will be anxious weeks in our near future. But we move forward.

Today is Monday. There is work to be done. There was an oath to be taken. There's trust that needs to be restored. There are issues that need to be addressed. And all of us, as we set to us, must be aware of one truth that rise above all else.

It's that New York families are more challenges today than they were yesterday. And if we are going to build a viable future for New York, we are going to have to help single mothers who have two jobs. We are going to have to give children better schools and families who don't have health care some redress.

I learned about government right here in this Legislature.

I studied the same issues and had the same experiences, hopes, and frustrations as so many other New Yorkers. I am chagrined at the high cost of education for my family. And the prohibitive price of health care.

I have talked to New Yorkers for decades about the crumbling upstate economy, the crush of property taxes and the lack of affordable housing. These are issues that we will continue to focus and address, but we can do more.

I have a vision for New York. It's a New York where achievement is developed only from hard work, where doors are always open and where anyone can achieve no matter where they live.

They call what we do public service for a reason: because it's not politics. It's not parties. It's not power that counts at the end of the day. Those interests can vanish in a moment. It is the service that endures. It is service that is important. It is the service that is our mark. It is our measure. It is our record of performance.

My colleagues, all of you in the Legislature, those who serve in the judiciary, State employees who work in our great agencies, isn't that what called us to work in government in the first place?

Then let us seize that poignant moment. Let us right here and now, let us grab the unusual opportunities that circumstance has handed us today, and put personal politics, party advantage and power struggles aside in favor of service, in the interests of the people.

With the nation's eyes upon him in 1964, Robert F. Kennedy once said, "No matter how talented an individual may be, no matter how much energy he might possess, regardless of how much integrity and honest he or she may have, if that person is alone, they can accomplish very little."

And so what we are going to do from now on is what we always should have done. We're going to work together.

With conviction in our brains and compassion in our hearts and love for New York on our sleeves, we will dedicate ourselves to principle but always maintain the ability to listen.

And now, we look forward in this great State, we look forward with our eyes very much on the greatness of New York and we move forward, ever forward, together.

To many of you, I am an unknown quantity. But that doesn't matter anymore. What matters is what we are able to accomplish today, tomorrow and all the days ahead. It's Monday and there's work to be done.

There's a budget that needs to be passed, and we will pass it. We need a plan to put New Yorkers back to work and we will provide it.

We have to battle the obstacle of doubt and uncertainty and we shall overcome it.

Now, all of you in this room, I ask you to pause and focus on the problems of our great nation. Our economy appears to be headed toward crisis. In just the last 12 hours, one of the major investment houses with a storied career was sold at 10 percent of the price that it would have been worth on Friday.

The Federal Reserve decreased interest rates by a quarter of a percentage in a desperate attempt to half a further meltdown. We are looking at the economy that is reeling, and I must say to all of you in government and all of you in business that you must meet with me in the next couple of weeks and adjust our budget accordingly.

This may serve as bad news. This may be actions that we are often unaccustomed to taking, but our sworn duty is to uphold the interest of the people who sent us here and to make this state whole again.

I believe that we can weather the storm.

I have worked most of my life for New Yorkers and fought for New Yorkers. I believe that if we stand together, that our collective talent will bring us to a better period.

We don't know the path yet. But that's because we haven't blazed the trail. And I think you all know that I know a little bit about finding one's way through the dark.

Let me tell you a little about myself.

I was born in the borough of Brooklyn. I was educated on Long Island. Harlem is my home. This is where I learned love for family and appreciation for community.

I have confronted the prejudice of race and challenged the issues of my own disability. I have served in government for over two decades. I stand willing and able to lead this state to a brighter future and a better tomorrow.

Let me reintroduce myself. I am David Paterson and I am the Governor of New York State.

Thank you.

I want to thank all of you. All of you New Yorkers and our visitors, for coming here today and by your presence, giving New York a strength that we need at this time of transition.

But we as New Yorkers can achieve. We are Asian, white, Hispanic and black. We are upper-middle class, and social service customers.

We are homeowners, landlords, tenants, cooperators and even the homeless.

We send our children to public and private schools. And yet, New Yorkers, in spite of the perceived problems inherent in our difference, we have an immense opportunity, if we start to look at who we are, what we are, and what we can be.

God bless you all for coming today, and God bless the great State of New York.

Thank you very much.

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