

# State of Rhode Island

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# JOURNAL

-OF THE-

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**JANUARY SESSION** of the General Assembly begun and held at the State House in the City of Providence on Tuesday, the Seventh Day of January in the year of Our Lord Two Thousand and Twenty-Five.

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Volume 152, No.1

Tuesday, January 7, 2025

First Day

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The House of Representatives meets at the State House in Providence on Tuesday, January 7, 2025, and is called to order at 4:08 o'clock P.M. by the Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Senior Representative from the City of Newport.

## ADJOURNMENT OF 2024 SESSION

On motion of Honorable Marvin L. Abney, seconded by Majority Leader Blazejewski, the House adjourns the 2024 session on a voice vote.

## APPROVAL OF RECORD

By unanimous consent, the House Journal of Thursday, June 13, 2024, is approved.

## INVOCATION

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney presents Reverend Kevin Beesley of St. John's Episcopal Church in Newport, who delivers the Invocation.

(For Invocation, see Appendix, this Journal.)

## PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney calls on Representative-elect Jenni Furtado to lead the membership in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

## NATIONAL ANTHEM

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney calls on Ian Nicolato, a North Kingstown High School freshman, to sing our National Anthem.

## COMMUNICATION

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney announces the receipt of the following communication:



January 7, 2025

To the Honorable House of Representatives:

I, Gregg M. Amore, Secretary of State, hereby certify the following list of members elected to the House of Representatives in the General Assembly, in accordance with the certificate of election filed in this office by the Board of Elections on the twenty-second day of November 2024, as provided by Section 22-3-13 of the General Laws of 1956;

Edith H. Ajello  
Christopher Richard Blazejewski  
Nathan W. Biah  
Rebecca M. Kislak  
Anthony J. DeSimone  
Raymond A. Hull  
David Morales  
John J. Lombardi  
Enrique George Sanchez  
Scott A. Slater  
Grace Diaz  
Jose F. Batista  
Ramon A. Perez  
Charlene Lima  
Christopher G. Paplauskas  
Brandon Potter  
Jacquelyn Maria Baginski  
Arthur Baskin Handy  
Joseph Michael McNamara  
David A. Bennett  
Marie A. Hopkins  
Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.  
K. Joseph Shekarchi  
Evan P. Shanley  
Thomas E. Noret

Earl A. Read, III  
Patricia A. Serpa  
George A. Nardone  
Sherry L. Roberts  
Justine A. Caldwell  
Julie Ann Casimiro  
Robert Emmett Craven  
Carol Hagan McEntee  
Teresa A. Tanzi  
Kathleen A. Fogarty  
Tina L. Spears  
Samuel Angelo Azzinaro  
Brian Patrick Kennedy  
Megan L. Cotter  
Michael W. Chippendale  
Robert J. Quattrocchi  
Richard Rawdon Fascia  
Deborah Ann Fellela  
Gregory J. Costantino  
Mia A. Ackerman  
Mary Ann Shallcross Smith  
David J. Place  
Brian C. Newberry  
Jon D. Brien  
Stephen Matthew Casey

Robert Douglas Phillips  
Alex Daniel Marszalkowski  
Paul M. Santucci  
William W. O'Brien  
Arthur J. Corvese  
Joshua J. D. Giraldo  
Brandon T. Voas  
Cherie L. Cruz  
Jennifer A. Stewart  
Karen Alzate  
Leonela Felix  
Mary Duffy Messier  
Katherine Sheena Kazarian  
Jenni Azanero Furtado  
Matthew S. Dawson  
Jennifer Smith Boylan  
Jason P. Knight  
June S. Speakman  
Susan Ann Donovan  
John G. Edwards  
Michelle Elise McGaw  
Terri-Denise Cortvriend  
Marvin L. Abney  
Alex S. Finkelman  
Lauren H. Carson

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Seal of the State of Rhode Island on this seventh day of January, A.D. 2025.

  
Gregg M. Amore  
Secretary of State

Received and placed on file.

**ROLL CALL**

The roll is called, and a quorum is declared present with 73 members present and 2 members absent as follows:

**PRESENT** – 73: The Honorable Speaker Shekarchi and Representatives Abney, Ackerman, Ajello, Alzate, Azzinaro, Batista, Bennett, Biah, Blazejewski, Boylan, Brien, Caldwell, Carson, Casey, Casimiro, Chippendale, Cortvriend, Corvese, Costantino, Cotter, Craven, Cruz, Dawson, DeSimone, Diaz, Donovan, Edwards, Fascia, Felix, Fellela, Finkelman, Fogarty, Furtado, Giraldo, Hopkins, Hull, Kazarian, Kennedy, Kislak, Knight, Lima, Lombardi, Marszalkowski, McEntee, McGaw, McNamara, Messier, Morales, Nardone, Newberry, Noret, O'Brien, Paplauskas, Perez, Phillips, Place, Potter, Quattrocchi, Read, Roberts, Sanchez, Santucci, Serpa, Shallcross Smith, Shanley, Slater, Solomon, Speakman, Spears, Stewart, Tanzi, and Voas.

**ABSENT** – 2: Representatives Baginski and Handy.

**OATH OF OFFICE**

The Representatives-elect rise, as Secretary of State Gregg Amore administers the Oath of Office to all members.

**ADDRESS**

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney addresses the members of the House.

**ELECTION OF SPEAKER**

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney calls for nominations.

Representative Stewart nominates Representative K. Joseph Shekarchi, District 23 in Warwick, to be Speaker of the House of Representatives for 2025-2026. Representative Stewart discusses the nomination.

The nomination is seconded by Representative Dawson. Representative Dawson offers his remarks.

The nomination is also seconded by Representatives Carson, Cotter, Spears, Donovan, Speakman, Furtado, Biah, Blazejewski, McGaw, DeSimone, Marszalkowski, Craven, Caldwell, Morales, McEntee, O'Brien, Finkelman, Noret, Shanley, Perez, Ajello, Shallcross Smith, Fogarty, Cortvriend, Knight, Serpa, Phillips, Costantino, Lima, Azzinaro, Kennedy, Hull, Lombardi, Felix, Tanzi, Ackerman, McNamara, Corvese, Kislak, Diaz, Slater, Bennett, Edwards, Read, Fellela, Brien, Messier, Potter, Cruz Boylan, Giraldo, Voas, Stewart, Alzate, Casey, Solomon, Casimiro, and Kazarian.

Representative Newberry nominates Representative Chippendale to be Speaker of the House of Representatives for 2025-2026. Representative Newberry discusses the nomination.

The nomination is seconded by Representative Paplauskas. Representative Paplauskas offers his remarks.

Representatives Roberts, Quattrocchi, Santucci, Place, Nardone, Paplauskas, Fascia, and Hopkins also second the nomination.

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney asks if there are any other nominations.

There are no further nominations, and Majority Leader Blazejewski moves that nominations be closed, seconded by Majority Whip Kazarian.

The motion to close nominations prevails, on a voice vote.

The election of Representative K. Joseph Shekarchi of District 23 in Warwick as Speaker of the House for 2025-2026 prevails on a roll call vote, 62 members voting for Representative Shekarchi and 10 members voting for Minority Leader Chippendale as follows:

**SHEKARCHI-62:** Representatives Abney, Ackerman, Ajello, Alzate, Azzinaro, Batista, Bennett, Biah, Blazejewski, Boylan, Brien, Caldwell, Carson, Casey, Casimiro, Cortvriend, Corvese, Costantino, Cotter, Craven, Cruz, Dawson, DeSimone, Diaz, Donovan, Edwards, Felix, Fellela, Finkelman, Fogarty, Furtado, Giraldo, Hull, Kazarian, Kennedy, Kislak, Knight, Lima, Lombardi, Marszalkowski, McEntee, McGaw, McNamara, Messier, Morales, Noret, O'Brien, Perez, Phillips, Potter, Read, Serpa, Shallcross Smith, Shanley, Shekarchi, Slater, Solomon, Speakman, Spears, Stewart, Tanzi, and Voas.

**CHIPPENDALE-10:** Representatives Chippendale, Fascia, Hopkins, Nardone, Newberry, Paplauskas, Place, Quattrocchi, Roberts, and Santucci.

**ABSENT-2:** Representatives Baginski and Handy.

**ABSTAIN-1:** Representative Sanchez

**The Chair declares the Honorable K. Joseph Shekarchi of District 23 in Warwick has been re-elected Speaker of the House for 2025-2026.**

### **OATH OF OFFICE**

The House observes as The Honorable Supreme Court Justice Maureen McKenna Goldberg administers the Oath of Office to the Honorable Speaker Shekarchi.

### **NOW PRESIDING**

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney yields the rostrum to the Honorable Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi.

### **ADDRESSES**

The Honorable Speaker Shekarchi addresses the members of the House.

(For Speaker Shekarchi's Address, see appendix of this Journal.)

**ELECTION OF THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE**

The Honorable Speaker declares the election of Clerk is in order and calls for nominations.

Representative Messier of Pawtucket, seconded by Representative Alzate and the entire House of Representatives, nominates Francis McCabe to be Clerk of the House for 2025-2026.

There being no further nominations, Representative Messier, seconded by Representative Alzate, moves that nominations be closed.

The motion to close nominations prevails, on a voice vote.

Representative Messier moves that Representative Alzate be directed to cast one ballot for Francis McCabe to be Clerk of the House for 2025-2026, seconded by Representative Felix.

The motion prevails by unanimous consent on a voice vote.

Representative Alzate casts one ballot for Francis McCabe for the office of the Clerk of the House for 2025-2026.

Francis P. McCabe is elected Clerk of the House for 2025-2026.

**ELECTION OF RECORDING CLERK OF THE HOUSE**

The Honorable Speaker declares the election of a Recording Clerk is in order and calls for nominations.

Majority Whip Kazarian, seconded by Representative Boylan, nominates Diane DePina of East Providence to be Recording Clerk of the House for 2025-2026.

There being no further nominations, Majority Whip Kazarian, seconded by Representative Boylan, moves that nominations be closed.

The motion to close nominations prevails on a voice vote.

Majority Whip Kazarian moves that Representative Boylan be directed to cast one ballot for Diane DePina to be Recording Clerk for 2025-2026, seconded by Representative Dawson. The motion prevails by unanimous consent on a voice vote.

Representative Dawson casts one ballot for Diane DePina for the office of Recording Clerk of the House for 2025-2026, seconded by Representative Kazarian.

Diane DePina is elected Recording Clerk of the House for 2025-2026.

**OATH OF OFFICE**

The Honorable Speaker Shekarchi administers the Oath of Office to the Clerk of the House, Frank McCabe and the Recording Clerk of the House, Diane DePina for the 2025-2026 Session.

**COMMUNICATION****Communication from Jacquelyn Baginski:**

January 7, 2025

Dear Clerk McCabe:

Had I been present today, I would have voted for Representative K. Joseph Shekarchi for Speaker.  
Sincerely,  
Representative Jacquelyn Baginski

**Communication from Representative Arthur B. Handy:**

January 7, 2025

Dear Clerk McCabe:

Had I been present today, I would have voted for Representative K. Joseph Shekarchi for Speaker.  
  
Sincerely,  
Representative Arthur Handy

**Received and placed on file.**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Minority Leader Chippendale congratulates Speaker Shekarchi and looks forward to working together.

Majority Leader Blazejewski offered remarks today congratulating Speaker Shekarchi on his re-election and expressed his enthusiasm for continuing to work collaboratively with all members of the chamber.

Leader Blazejewski also proudly introduced newly elected Representative Furtado and her husband, Marc, and Representative Read, his wife, Amy, and their children. He extended a warm welcome to both families and emphasized the importance of unity and service during the legislative session.

Majority Leader Blazejewski announces that the next House session will be Thursday, January 9, 2025, at 4 p.m. Prior to the start of the session, there will be a brief House Democratic Caucus at 3:30 p.m.

Members may begin introducing legislation on Thursday. Additionally, a resolution adopting the Rules for the Legislative Years 2025 and 2026 is anticipated to be introduced. Members wishing to submit legislation related to the Rules will have until the close of business on Thursday, January 9th, to submit drafts to the Legislative Council. The desk will remain open to accept legislation submissions, with the final deadline for introduction set for Monday, January 13th, at noon. These resolutions may be delivered to the Speaker's Office, care of Nicole McCarty, and are expected to be heard in the Rules Committee on Wednesday, January 15th.

The seating charts for the 2025 and 2026 sessions will also be distributed on Thursday, January 9th.

Tuesday, January 14, 2025, the House will convene at 5 p.m. due to Governor McKee's State of the State Address at 7 p.m. in the House Chamber.

On Tuesday, January 14, 2025, the annual Ethics Training will also take place in the House Lounge at 4 p.m.

Wednesday, January 15, 2025, the House will meet at 4 p.m. for session. Thursday, January 16, 2025, there will be no scheduled session.

Majority Leader Blazewski wishes Speaker Pro Tempore Kennedy a Happy Birthday!

### **GUESTS**

Minority Leader Chippendale welcomes his wife Sherri, daughter Paige, son Seighin, and his son's girlfriend Laura Allard to the House. He also recognizes Representative Hopkins and welcomes her and her family to the House.

Representative Lima welcomes City of Cranston Mayor Ken Hopkins, along with present and former city council members, to the House. She also wishes her husband, former Representative Frank Fiorenzano, a happy birthday. Speaker Shekarchi joins in wishing Frank a happy birthday.

Minority Whip Place welcomes Representative Paplauskas of District 15 and his family and Representative Fascia of District 42 and his family to the House.

Representative Cotter thanks all her family, friends, and colleagues who worked hard to support her campaign. She welcomes her husband, Christopher, along with Patti and Jack Huston, to the House.

Minority Leader Chippendale introduces newly elected Representative Santucci of District 53 and family to the House.

Representative O'Brien welcomes his fiancée, Jacqueline Celeste, to the House.

Representative Abney welcomes his wife, Cheryl, son Lee, John Brooks, Reverend Kevin Beesley, and his wife to the House.

Representative Diaz welcomes Alex Moore, Samuel Minor, Everin Perez, Jose Astacio, Fatima Minyety, Eduardo Zapata, Ivellene Matos, Jose Paulino and Isabel Minyety to the House.

Representative Brien welcomes his wife Nicole and his daughters Juliana and Gabriella to the House.

Representative Sanchez congratulates Speaker Shekarchi on his re-election and shares some remarks.

Representative Fellela congratulates her three sons for raising money for the Special Olympics and welcomes her family to the House.

Representative Paplauskas welcomes his wife Judy, children Aidan and Sophia, parents Gary and Denise, and sister Meghan. He also acknowledges the city of Cranston officials who were here today.

Representatives Corvese and Lima welcome newly elected Representative Fascia and his family to the House.

Representative Alzate welcomes the newly elected Representative Furtado to the House.

Representative Tanzi congratulates Speaker Shekarchi on being re-elected and welcomes newly elected Representative Hopkins and her family to the House.

Representative Hopkins welcomes her husband, Steven, daughters, Madeline and Sophia, and son, Alexander, to the House.

Representative Fogarty congratulates Speaker Shekarchi and welcomes her daughter Lauren, who works in the Secretary of State's office, to the House.

Representative Furtado welcomes her husband, Marc, her parents, Gladis and Marcelino Azanero, and her brother, Jeffrey, to the House.

Representative Santucci welcomes his wife Elizabeth, son Nicholas, and his brother Carl to the House.

Representative Read thanks Representative Noret for all of his help in becoming a State Representative; he also welcomes his wife Amy, daughter Susan, son Charlie, and members from his district to the House.

Representative Fascia welcomes his wife, Elizabeth, grandson Salem M. Fascia, daughter Emily F. Wong, his sister Christine E. O'Connor, husband Dr. John C. O'Connor, his sister-in-law Sandra Swenson, and friend, Sandra Taylor, to the House.

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Speaker Shekarchi expresses gratitude to everyone who helped make this Inauguration Day successful and acknowledges Stacy Custer for her hard work and leadership.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

At 6:08 o'clock P.M., on motion of Majority Leader Blazejewski seconded by Minority Leader Chippendale, the House adjourns on a voice vote.

**Diane M. DePina**  
**Recording Clerk**



APPENDIX

## INVOCATION

REVEREND KEVIN BEESLEY

Opening Prayer for the Rhode Island Senate  
January 2025

Gracious and Eternal God,

We come before You today with grateful hearts, humbled by the opportunity to serve the people of Rhode Island in this chamber. As we gather to begin this session, we pause to seek Your guidance in all that we do.

Grant our leaders wisdom, O Lord, to discern the path of justice and truth. Help them to govern with clarity of purpose, recognizing that their burden is heavy and at times, the challenges may be great, You are a God of HOPE.

Inspire us to build bridges where there are divisions, to listen with open hearts, and to lead with compassion. May the principles of fairness and equity guide every debate, every vote, and every action we take.

Bless each official here, their families, and their constituents. Grant them health, resilience, and the courage to face challenges with determination and grace. May the work in this chamber reflect our shared commitment to a better, more inclusive future for all.

We ask for Your wisdom, Your peace, and Your blessing upon our elected leaders and upon this great state of Rhode Island.

In Your holy name, we pray. Amen.

**APPENDIX****SPEAKER SHEKARCHI'S ADDRESS**

Members of the House, Honored Guests, Family and Friends:

Welcome.

First, I'd like to extend my deepest appreciation to Chairman Marvin Abney for doing an outstanding job as the presiding officer, as well as for the tremendous work he has done as the Chair of our Finance Committee for nearly a decade.

Thank you to Representatives Jennifer Stewart and Matt Dawson for placing my name into nomination. I am very humbled, and I sincerely appreciate your very kind words.

To all those who supported me today, I sincerely thank you. Leading this body is one of the greatest honors of my life, and I will strive to live up to the trust you have placed in me.

I'd especially like to thank Majority Leader Chris Blazewski for being my partner in government, my trusted advisor, and my very good friend.

The House has had so many incredible accomplishments over the past four years. These could not have been done without the hard work and careful guidance of Leader Blazewski.

To Minority Leader Mike Chippendale - I offer you my congratulations and best wishes as you embark upon your second term as Minority Leader.

While Mike and I may not agree on every issue, we have always shown mutual respect for each other ... and we both share a deep respect for this House. Mike, I sincerely appreciate your collaboration, and I look forward to working with you and your caucus.

I'd like to thank Supreme Court Justice Maureen McKenna Goldberg for again swearing me in.

And, thank you to our good friend and former House colleague, Secretary of State Gregg Amore, for administering the oath of office to all of us.

It also means a great deal to me to have my niece, Samantha Shekarchi, standing by my side today.

Samantha is a recent graduate of Suffolk University Law School, and she is now completing a Master of Laws degree program at the University of Miami. She has a very bright future ahead of her, and I am very proud of her.

I thank Governor McKee, Lieutenant Governor Matos, Attorney General Neronha, Treasurer Diossa and municipal leaders who are with us today.

Thank you all.

I stand here today honored and excited to embark upon my fifth year as Speaker of the House of Representatives.

I cannot help but remember taking this oath for the first time. It was January, 2021, and we were not here in this beautiful chamber. We were across the street at the Veterans' Auditorium because we were in the height of the COVID pandemic. This body learned a lot as we legislated through those difficult years. As I look around today, it is worth noting that the face of the House hasn't changed very much since I first took the helm- many of the same members still fill the seats today.

In fact, in the November general election, the voters returned every incumbent member who chose to run. I believe that is a great testament to our responsive, collaborative approach to lawmaking.

As House members, we are here to serve the communities that we represent. The challenges in Woonsocket can differ from the challenges in Westerly. Our individual approaches and priorities vary greatly as well.

Ultimately, I believe we all share a common goal: to help our neighbors through tough times and make difficult choices that create a better future for ALL Rhode Islanders.

The people in this room have experience with hard times and making tough decisions. We will be relying on these skills as we face new challenges ahead and build on what we have accomplished together.

In the face of great need, we are anticipating a sizable budget deficit - estimated at more than \$300 million dollars in the year ahead.

We have been extremely strategic with our resources in recent budgets. We have passed five balanced budgets with NO broad-based tax increases - in fact, we provided tax relief that impacts virtually every Rhode Islander: families with children, seniors, military retirees and small businesses, and we eliminated the car tax permanently.

Along with the projected budget shortfall, there is immense pressure on some of our most critical systems: housing, healthcare, and our workforce are experiencing dire shortages. We have been laser-focused on these areas over the last four years and we have already made substantial investments and critical policy initiatives to improve them. We must press on!

As you know, housing has been a priority for me personally and this House. This is not an issue unique to Rhode Island, and it is not a partisan issue. At a recent National Governors Meeting, every single state listed housing as its top issue.

In fact, the housing shortage has been a problem generations in the making.

As our nation mourns the loss of former President Jimmy Carter, we honor his legacy. One of President Carter's cherished beliefs is that Housing is a human right. He worked to create more housing opportunities for people across the world during his presidency and for the rest of his life.

President Carter's passion for housing led he and his late wife Rosalynn to become closely involved with Habitat for Humanity and they brought global attention to the need for decent and affordable housing.

Rhode Island's housing crisis affects every community.

Ask anyone you know who is trying to find a house or apartment - the market is very challenging for renters and buyers. Both housing prices and rents exceed what is affordable for households earning the median income in our state.

In fact, the price of a home in Rhode Island has nearly doubled in the last five years. There is not a single municipality where a family with a household income under \$100,000 dollars can afford to buy a home.

We have passed multiple, comprehensive packages of affordable housing legislation - almost 50 new laws, as well as the state's first-ever permanent funding stream for housing development and the largest-ever state bond - \$120 million dollars - for housing. We also invested about one-third of our state's federal State Fiscal Recovery Funds - \$332 million dollars - in affordable housing initiatives.

I appreciate that our colleagues on all sides of the aisle - Democrats, Republicans, and our Independent - understand the urgency of our housing crisis.

A focal point of this session will be ensuring that these significant investments in housing are executed in a way that delivers maximum benefit in the least amount of time.

We will also be closely watching progress made by our state Housing Department, which has yet to become the DRIVER of consistent housing policy.

In particular, many of us are deeply concerned that resources directed to address homelessness have not been deployed as quickly or effectively as we had intended.

The Housing Department's new secretary recently appeared before our Housing Affordability Commission, and I am hopeful she will make the needed adjustments to achieve the department's mission.

Another area of focus and concern across the country is health care.

To help address our healthcare challenges here in Rhode Island, the state budget included funding to

support many health care programs and initiatives - including more than \$160 million for rate increases for home- and community-based behavioral health care and children's services. As the son of a doctor, I realize we need to build on this foundation to help address critical shortages in the healthcare system, particularly the looming shortfall of primary care physicians.

We will continue to work on creative ways to ensure that access to quality medical care is protected for every Rhode Islander.

We will work with our partners in healthcare -- hospitals, insurers and providers -- as we innovate together to chart the path ahead. Our Attorney General has been doing an excellent job in ensuring oversight of hospital conversions. I look forward to working with him on efforts to reform health care.

Our colleagues in the Senate have also made healthcare issues a priority. As we have seen in the past several legislative sessions, the boat moves much faster when we are all rowing in the same direction. We will continue to work collaboratively with our partners in government, and toward better solutions for our critical industries.

Shortages across the entire workforce is another issue not unique to Rhode Island. We have infused sizeable investments, funded with bond initiatives approved by voters in November, to create state-of-the-art facilities and programming at our state's higher education institutions.

We will continue to target innovation to promote Rhode Island and work with the business community, labor, and academic institutions to prepare and expand our workforce for the jobs of the future.

The groundwork we have laid in these areas and others will serve Rhode Island well. However, it is critical that we maintain these hard-fought gains. We expect our investments to be quickly and carefully allocated to maximize the impact on the most important foundations of our communities.

We will also continue to utilize our power of oversight into the management of some immediate crises such as the reconstruction of the Washington Bridge, which will require immense resources.

The effectiveness of the state's response to this crisis impacts so many Rhode Islanders. In turn, our constituents deserve timely and accurate information, and we will be asking tough questions as we embark on funding and rebuilding this vital thoroughfare.

I also anticipate that our Oversight Committee will scrutinize the large-scale cyberattack that targeted the RIBridges program and impacted some of our most vulnerable residents.

While we address pressing issues, we are also working to grow our economy and embrace innovation.

We have allocated significant investments - \$45 million dollars - to create a hub for the life sciences here in Rhode Island. The initiative has great momentum, and has the potential to dramatically improve our economy and workforce.

This effort hinges upon collaboration: the state partnering with institutions of education, as well as healthcare entities.

The GOOD news is that Rhode Island has which I think is unrivaled, anywhere - a unique ability to connect and collaborate. Our small size is one of our greatest assets.

We are nimble. We have the ability to move quickly.

Rhode Island's small size has also helped us retain some of our industry leaders. Last year, Citizens Bank had concerns about how Rhode Island's tax structure made our state less competitive compared to our neighbors.

We listened, acted quickly, passed legislation and kept Citizens within our borders.

In the last several years, the General Assembly has also worked hard to keep IGT and Bally's here for another 20 years. Here, companies have direct access to government leaders, and our partners in government enjoy an extremely collaborative working relationship.

Collaboration is key!

In the House, we will tackle today's issues in the same ways: with commitment, creativity, and compassion.

We welcome the input of the public, and encourage the participation of all Rhode Islanders as we begin this new session.

This is a very special day for our freshmen members. Thank you to the families of the new members for sharing them with us. I am very impressed with this class of six freshmen - your energy, passion, and commitment to the issues!

To my colleagues in this chamber, I believe in you. I am excited to continue the work we've started, and to accomplish even more great things.

The potential of the people in this room is UNLIMITED, and by continuing our work together, we will utilize our hard-earned collective skills to meet the new challenges we face now.

My door is open, my sleeves are rolled up and I am ready to get to work on behalf of the great people of this state.

Thank you.

God Bless you all.