The New York State Assembly issued the following news release:

Our work in this 234th Legislative Session begins in the shadow of Saturday's tragic and senseless shooting in Tucson, Arizona.

We join President Obama, the First Lady and the American People in remembering Federal Judge John Roll, nine-year-old Christina Taylor Green, and ALL who were robbed of their lives in this barbaric act of violence. Our sympathies are with their families today.

Let us also say a silent prayer for Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and for all of the wounded that they will recover fully and swiftly.

May we now observe a moment of silence.

At this time, when Americans are once again being forced to acknowledge the fragility of human life, let us also remember that tomorrow marks the one-year anniversary of the massive earthquake that decimated the Nation of Haiti; a natural disaster that claimed the lives of two hundred and thirty thousand men, women and children.

At this time, when our economic woes dominate the media, let us remember just how blessed we are to be citizens of the great State of New York.

In the spirit of thanksgiving, I urge all New Yorkers to continue their support of the Haitian relief effort and to keep the Haitian people in their thoughts and in their prayers.

Fortunately, for most of us, the beginning of a new year is a time of renewal; a time when we make resolutions to be better people, a time of optimism, when spirits are at their highest.

Speaking for the House, I extend our collective best wishes to Governor Cuomo, Lieutenant Governor Duffy, and to the new administration.

I reiterate our commitment to work with the Governor and with our colleagues in the Senate to make this inaugural year a productive and successful one for all New Yorkers.

To my colleagues in the Democratic Conference, I thank you for your public vote of confidence last week. I remain profoundly appreciative of this privilege which you have given me to serve as Speaker of the Assembly.
It is an honor to be elected to this Body by the People. There are no words to truly express what it means to me to be elected Speaker by a majority of my peers.

As grateful as I am for the faith you have placed in me and in my ability to lead The People's House, it is your friendship and your support, your dedication and your leadership for which I am most grateful.

Thank you, my friends, thank you.

To my friends and colleagues on the other side of the aisle, although I did not receive your votes, we are colleagues and I hope, friends.

You know how much I respect your commitment to service and that I will honor your commitment throughout the legislative session.

Yes, we will argue and respectfully disagree, but I - and your colleagues across the aisle - recognize and value dissent, because it is fundamental to our Democracy. We pledge to conduct this Chamber with dignity and civility.

I am committed to working with Minority Leader Brian Kolb and with each and every member of this Body, to improve our operations and to improve our government.

Now, together, let us give a warm and generous Assembly welcome to our Intern Class of 2011.

Also deserving of a warm and generous welcome are our distinguished and outstanding faculty instructors:

* Doctor Helen DesFossess of the University at Albany's Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy;
* And, Doctor Dennis Smith of New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.

Interns, because we take our program seriously, we have chosen carefully from the pool of applications we received and therefore, we congratulate you on making the cut.

I understand that your intern class is the most diverse in the history of our program. I expect that we will learn as much from you as you will learn from us.

We hope that your experience in the New York State Assembly is both enjoyable and enlightening. With the inauguration of our new governor, I can assure that this legislative session will, at the very least, be a memorable one for you. Welcome and thank you for joining us this afternoon.

In a few minutes, each of our new members will be introduced to the House, but let us also give a warm and generous welcome to the members of the Assembly Class of 2011, and to their families and friends here in attendance.

We commend your commitment to public service and we congratulate each and every one of you on your election. I remember clearly and very fondly, everything I experienced the first day I took my seat as a Member of the New York State Assembly:

The knowledge that I had made my family proud, the realization that I had so much to learn;

And, of course, the humbling sense that I was a member of an historic institution that had graduated giants of American history and yet was giving me the opportunity to make a difference not just in my own Assembly district, but in the lives of New Yorkers hundreds of miles away and in generations yet to come.

Traditionally, I tell new members that you will always remember that first day as the best day of your Assembly career, but I am confident that you will experience many memorable and rewarding days as a member of the People's House of
the Legislature.

There is, however, one advantage that I - and my longer-serving colleagues - had over you. Session was not televised back when we arrived in this chamber, so I never had to worry that my parents receiving calls from neighbors reporting that they had seen me doing a crossword puzzle during a floor debate.

Speaking for the veterans of this House, we hope most of all, that all of our new members will discover that there is often a vast difference between the reality of government and the perception of government.

The reality is that the Assembly is one House of a bicameral Legislature; a separate but equal branch of government.

We are lawmakers and the process through which we do our work - the committee process - is as critical to our Democracy as the legislation we ultimately pass.

Over the years, I and my colleagues have devoted ourselves to asserting the independence of this Body and to maintaining it as a member-driven institution.

Together, we are the People's House of the Legislature. We represent every county and corner of the Empire State.

Together, we most accurately reflect the will, the wants and the worries of New Yorkers upstate and down, farmer and financier, the newly arrived immigrant and the families whose ancestors arrived on Ellis Island generations ago.

As citizen legislators, each week, when our session days come to an end, we return home. There, we work within our communities to address real-life, day-to-day occurrences and to confront the real-life challenges that our constituents - who have no time for political jockeying - deal with every day. The challenges we deal with run the gamut of human experience.

In my own Assembly District, I have spent nearly a decade addressing the myriad challenges created by the September 11th attacks and the rebirth of Lower Manhattan.

Hopefully, our nation and our state will never again have to respond to a crisis of this magnitude. That said, each challenge that we take on is essential in its own right.

We are also, in many ways, a family. We laugh together. We grieve together. We support each other. We annoy each other. We forgive each other and we move forward together year by year to do the People's business in the People's house better than we have done it before.

We who serve in the Assembly are inheritors of a noble tradition. We adhere to it and we endeavor to build upon it in the time that we are given.

At the end of his legislative service, former New York Governor, Assembly Speaker, and the assemblyman who represented the Lower Manhattan district that I represent today, Al Smith, observed that the Legislature is a great university of learning for those who are willing to give it their entire attention and close study.

In no other place, he said, can you make firmer or warmer friends.

His closing sentiments regarding the Legislature were as follows, and I quote:

"It acquainted me with people all over the state and gave me a breadth of vision that I could obtain in no other way. Above everything I still like to think of the opportunity it gave me to do something to help large numbers of people."

We hope that our new members will find their experience in keeping with the words of this great New York leader.
As for the coming year, you heard my remarks on State of the State Day. I am not going to ask you to listen to them again.

As I traditionally do, I will close by acknowledging how fortunate we are to have wise and experienced leaders guiding us through our work in this legislative session beginning with my friend, my counselor, my advisor, our Ways and Means Committee Chairman, Denny Farrell.

Denny, year after year, we present you with an enormous challenge and year after year, you deliver with a thoughtfulness, a grace and a style that is admired and respected by our colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

To our new members, let me suggest that you make the time to get to know Denny Farrell. His legacy of service includes many of the most important fights for justice, human dignity and equal rights.

Denny's wit, wisdom and perhaps most of all, his yearning for knowledge and his love for the debate and the legislative process are worth emulating, and will serve you well here in Albany.

I cannot tell you how fortunate we are to have Denny leading our Ways and Means Committee or how blessed I am to have his support, his friendship and his Solomonic wisdom.

Denny, you are a true friend and an inspiration to all who aspire to lead and for your leadership, Denny, we thank you and wish you great success in the coming year.

Our work could not proceed smoothly and efficiently were it not for our exceptional Majority Leader, Ron Canestrari.

Ron, you are simply the best. You have proven to be an exemplary Member of the Assembly and Majority Leader.

To our new members, let me say that you will find Ron to be easy-going, always approachable, collegial, and willing to help with any question or problem. Just don't bother promising him that you will be in your seats on time every day. We've been promising him that for years. He no longer believes us.

Ron, a great humanitarian once suggested that it is more important to be a person of value than a person of success.

My friend, you are both. We thank you in advance for your leadership during this session.

Joining the Majority Leader in advancing the work on the floor, is our distinguished Speaker Pro Tem, Assemblyman Peter Rivera.

Peter, you are the voice of the People's House. Your warmth and eloquence invites our visitors to become a part of the legislative process, and makes our friends and families feel at home.

I thank you for your friendship and for your service. We look forward to your leadership in this new session.

To my friend and our Minority Leader, Brian Kolb, first let me congratulate you on your continuing leadership of the Minority.

I think you know how much I respect you as a leader and as a colleague. I know you agree that we can be competitors in November and partners in January.

I look forward to working with you to address the significant challenges facing our great state.

Thank you, Brian.

The Governor has called upon Democrats and Republicans to set aside their differences and to work together to rebuild the economy and revitalize our government.
We will achieve these goals. We will achieve them together.

Thank you.

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TNS 23nq 110111-3180051 61NaushinaQamar

LOAD-DATE: January 11, 2011

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newswire

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