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2026 Legislative Session: Sen. Weiner Opening Day Speech

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Mon, Jan 12, 2026 at 11:04 AM

Opening Day Speech
Sen. Janice Weiner

Thank you, Madam President.

Members of the media, the lobby, friends and family, and all Iowans listening today: thank you all for being here.

To my Senate colleagues: welcome back. Our Senate family has been through the ringer this past year.

As a Senate family, we mourn the losses of our colleagues and friends, Claire Celsi and Rocky De Witt.

As Iowans, we grieve for SGT William Nathaniel Howard and SGT Edgar Brian Torres Tovar. We hold the Howard and Torres Tovar families, as well as the three other Iowans injured in the attack in Syria, close to our hearts.

As Americans, we continue to face political violence that has shaken us to our core.

We do not live in a bubble here under the Golden Dome.

In just the past few days, a woman was shot to death in Minnesota and a synagogue was torched in Mississippi - the same one that was firebombed by the KKK nearly 60 years ago.

We Iowans - we take care of our neighbors, we are tolerant, and we stand up for their rights, which are our rights, too.

Because we all know that "love thy neighbor" comes with no exceptions.

So let us resolve to carry out the People's business with civility and empathy.

Let us do so, keeping in mind our state motto - our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain.

First, a few acknowledgements.

To Senator Whitver, thank you for your service as Majority Leader. I hope that retirement brings the gift of well-earned quality time with your family.

To Senator Klimesh, congratulations on your election as Majority Leader. I look forward to building a renewed commitment to the bipartisan cooperation Iowans expect. We both come from local government, and know that we are elected to work together for all our citizens.

To Senator Drey and Senator-elect Hardman: Welcome.

We look forward to your fresh perspectives, as well as the beginning of a restored sense of balance your presence brings to the People's Senate.

Shortly, Senator-elect Hardman will be sworn in - and make history. And when she is, I hope we will all listen closely to the words of the oath we each took to support and defend the Iowa Constitution and the US constitution - as public servants who answer to Iowans.

As we open this session, it is time for us to re-establish our state as a champion for working families;

To deliver on the promise of a better Iowa, where all Iowans can truly thrive.

Having talked to Iowans from the Mississippi to the Missouri, I can report that something has gone wrong over the past nine years.

It has gone wrong for our economy – we have some of the lowest income and GDP growth in the country.

It has gone wrong for our ability to attract and retain talent – we have a serious brain drain and are now the seventh most “outbound” state in the nation. We need our young people and talent to stay here.

It has gone wrong for our healthcare – we have the worst ratio of women to OB/GYNs in the entire country, and hundreds of thousands of lowans are now being priced out of health insurance.

It has gone wrong for our cancer rates – we have the country’s second highest rate and the only growing rate.

It has gone wrong for our state finances – Iowa is running a \$1.26 billion dollar deficit this fiscal year.

It is time for change.

It is time to listen to the working lowans who power this state – who are telling us – in cities big or small, in rural communities and everywhere in between – that their core issue is affordability.

We can and must work to find solutions for rising housing costs,

We can and must work to find solutions to childcare that remains either inaccessible or the equivalent of a second mortgage,

We can and must work to find solutions to run away healthcare costs, higher grocery prices, and unaffordable home and car insurance premiums.

And we can and must work to find solutions for our farmers – way too many of whom – due to high input costs and disappearing markets – are barely making ends meet.

We all represent working families walking a tightrope as they manage a budget stretched so thin it keeps them up at night.

We all know students, young people who are our future, who have seen their educational opportunities shrink.

In each of our districts is a worker whose plant is closing,

Or a farmer who is losing money on every bushel,

Or an employee facing the next round of layoffs,

Or a teacher contemplating leaving the state.

We lowans are good neighbors – an Iowa value that we saw on full display with record donations to our food banks –

But private efforts can only go so far – they cannot scale to fill the gaps created by cuts to federal and state services. No Iowa child deserves to go hungry.

It is our job as legislators to help create the conditions to grow our economy, to compete successfully with our Midwestern neighbors for the best and brightest.

But we can do so only if our state is an affordable, welcoming place where families can grow and thrive, no matter where in our great state they choose to live.

It is up to us to set future generations up for success by investing in our children, creating affordable, accessible childcare options statewide, and once again putting excellence in public education front and center.

That means investing in the system responsible for educating over 90% of Iowa’s children so they can all succeed. If we aim to grow our economy and our workforce, we can’t afford to NOT invest in them.

What we CAN’T afford is to continue subsidizing private schools for the wealthiest lowans while diminishing resources for everyone else.

And that’s a choice WE need to make if we want our urban AND our rural areas to thrive – with opportunity for all.

It’s time we reject the influence of special interests, of out-of-state interference, and re-establish an Iowa that works for working lowans – not just the wealthy and well-connected.

It’s time to fight back against predatory private equity firms and hedge funds that gobble up our housing supply and raise

prices on working lowans or lower the standard of care in our nursing facilities.

It's time to ensure that our neighbors, regular folks trying to heat and cool their homes, don't bear the added cost of our system's highest energy users.

We must find solutions for the hundreds of thousands of lowans whose monthly healthcare premiums have skyrocketed, for those at risk of losing Medicaid, for the scores of farmers who have seen their markets shrink or collapse, and for the working families who see the same paycheck buy fewer groceries each week.

They are depending on us. And we work for them.

lowans won't forget what we do in this chamber this year, and they won't forgive us if we fail to invest in their future.

We are not just Des Moines or Iowa City or Spillville or Red Oak. We are a shared community of ALL lowans. It is more important to raise the floor for all than to raise the ceiling for a few.

Let's remember our oath, remember who we work for – and deliver on the promise we made to serve the People.

Let's work together, and strive for an affordable, welcoming Iowa for all.

Let's get to work. Thank you, Madam President.