



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Malcolm Smith

## Senate Unveils Historic Rules Reform Report

MALCOLM A. SMITH April 20, 2009

| COMMITTEE: **RULES**

### *Takes first significant steps toward reversing 40 years of dysfunction*

(Albany, NY)- Over the last 40 years, the previous Majority created a mess in Albany that robbed New Yorkers of their government. Under their reign, the Senate was left with a legislative process that stifled debate, eliminated accountability and denied participation. The chaos was so far reaching that the Brennan Center for Justice accurately labeled our Legislature the most dysfunctional in the nation.

"For decades, the door to the Senate has been closed to the people it represents. A mess was made of our government and today we take another step forward in our mission to clean up that mess," said Senate Majority Leader Malcolm A. Smith.

Last January, the new Senate Majority embarked on a mission to clean up the mess the previous Majority left behind. On its first day in the Majority, Senate Democrats created the Temporary Committee on Rules and Administration Reform to change the way business is done in Albany. The committee was tasked with investigating our broken system and offering recommendations as to how we can clean up this mess. After a series of hearings across the state and taking input from good government groups, experts and citizens alike, that report has just now been released, detailing the initial proposals the Senate will take to

end the era of dysfunction which has plagued Albany for over 40 years.

"By demanding accountability, encouraging participation and opening up the legislative process, we can finally begin to change the way business is done in Albany and return our state government to its rightful owners- the people of New York," said Senate Majority Leader Malcolm A. Smith.

The provisions included in this report will provoke debate, increase accountability, and encourage participation. All things that are necessary for maintaining a vibrant democracy. Its recommendations represent significant steps toward fostering member participation, accountability, transparency and a more equitable distribution of resources. Through its recommendations to strengthen the committee process, empower all 62 senators, expand public input and encourage a more open and inclusive legislative process, the report's findings will open the door to fundamentally change the operation of the Senate.

"The recommendations in the report will provide the Senate with a more open, accountable and productive way of doing business. This is the beginning of real change in the legislative process and it will result in a much better product," said Senator David J. Valesky, Co-Chair of the Temporary Committee on Rules and Administration Reform. "Reform is an ongoing process. There is much more work to be done, and I look forward to continuing our efforts to transform what has been a dysfunctional body for decades into the well-functioning Senate that the people of New York State deserve."

Among its first recommendations, the committee advises that it should continue to serve the Senate by implementing the present recommendations, assessing changes over time and reporting on other possible reform areas. The report will also instruct the committee to tackle the areas of Member items and resource allocation with the same veracity it tackled rules reform.

This report is an historic step forward, and next week we will take another step by unveiling cutting edge web site technology that will ensure a level of transparency that New York State Government has never seen. Through the recommendations of this report and our utilization of new technology, we are finally shining sunlight on our legislative process to help clear away 40 years of dysfunction.

The recommendations of this report will:

#### **STRENGTHEN COMMITTEES FOR REAL DEBATE**

Senate will transform standing committees structure and process to encourage robust deliberation and member participation, including amendments and detailed public reports

#### **EMPOWER ALL 62 SENATORS**

**Senate will increase the role all Senators play in the legislative process at all stages**

#### **EXPAND PUBLIC INPUT AND TRANSPARENCY**

**Senate will open public access to deliberation in committees and the full chamber, the products of the lawmaking process and records in general, including a New York version of C-SPAN**

#### **MAKE THE SENATE MORE FAIR AND MORE DEMOCRATIC**

**Senate will determine methods to increase fairness in the distribution of resources and services between the Majority and Minority conferences**

"The Rules Reform Committee was established to make sure Albany moves forward with greater transparency to better serve all New Yorkers. These recommendations offered today were a joint effort between Democrats and Republicans and underscore the necessary changes we need to make," said Senator Jeffrey Klein (D-Bronx-Westchester).

"Reform is key to an open and transparent State government," said Senator Kevin Parker (D-Brooklyn). "It is imperative that the people of New York State have faith in the system and trust that we will hold ourselves and the Chamber to the highest of standards. Reforming

the rules of the Senate will ensure that we are held to those standards and the people of this State will benefit from a more open and accountable legislature."

"It is an honor to serve on this committee and work to remediate so many of the problems I had experienced as a member of the Minority," said Senator Serrano (D-Manhattan/Bronx). "My priority, both as an individual Senator and also Committee Chair, is to realize the potential of a more empowered legislative chamber, one in which we actively depend on the knowledge and initiative of all 62 members."

"Implementing comprehensive changes are vital in order for reform efforts to succeed," Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Westchester) said. "Restoring the credibility of the legislature is critical to ensure that we are serving the people of New York State in the absolute best manner possible. I am pleased to have had the opportunity to serve on this committee and work with my colleagues to propose positive reforms. There is more to do but this is a very big step in the right direction."

"For years, the State Senate has been perhaps the most dysfunctional legislature in the country. Today points the way to desperately needed improvement to empower committees and hold each of us accountable," said State Senator Daniel Squadron (D-Brooklyn/Manhattan). "This report is a good assessment of what's been wrong -- in past years and this one. On the long road from dysfunction, I am pleased that the work of our committee will continue: creating rules to implement today's recommendations, developing recommendations on issues we have not yet considered, and going beyond where we go today."