



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

State Senator Liz Krueger Praises Senate for Introducing Historic Rules Reforms

LIZ KRUEGER January 8, 2009

New York—State Senator Liz Krueger hailed the release of rules reform under the leadership of a new Democrat controlled State Senate as a milestone in New York's history. "These rules reforms represent a historic shift in the way the State Senate will function under Democratic leadership," said Senator Krueger. "For decades New Yorkers have been clamoring for an end to business as usual in Albany and I am proud that after years of my arguing for these changes, we are finally on the path to a fairer and more transparent government that truly serves the people's interests."

Senator Krueger has been one of the foremost advocates in the State Senate for government reform, making it a focus of her agenda ever since her first campaign in 2000. In 2002 Senator Krueger unveiled her plan for reform in a proposal titled "Waking Up the State Senate: 34 Proposals for Reinvigorating Democracy in Albany through Rules Reform". Since then, Senator Krueger has pushed the Senate Republicans to pass these proposals every year. She even went so far as to take the State legislature to court in 2005 in order to force reform on constitutional grounds.

For years good government groups like the Brennan Center for Justice, New York Public Interest Research Group, League of Women Voters, Citizen Action, Common Cause and

others have been calling for significant reform in the State legislature. Just this week the Brennan Center for Justice released an updated report on New York's legislature titled "Still Broken" which detailed the dysfunction in the legislature.

"Unfortunately for the citizens of New York, our State Senate has failed some of the most basic tests of democracy," stated Senator Krueger. "I believe that now I can fairly state this is all beginning to change with new Democratic leadership. For the first time since 1965 New Yorkers can be hopeful again because in our first week as the majority party, we are taking a major step toward the goals of democratizing the Senate!"

The new rules, scheduled to be debated and adopted by the Senate next week include a number of reforms of the old rules along with a clause that they expire at the end of 2009 and new rules be adopted again for 2010. By passing the rules in this manner the Senate Democrats will be able to immediately begin the process of assuring greater transparency and accountability while creating a meaningful process that will allow for public input and enable the Senate to deliberate on and craft new rules that will reflect even greater reform in 2010. Changes to the rules that were proposed for the year of 2009 included:

Creating a new Committee on Rules and Administration that consists of 4 majority members, and 2 minority members, with a chair to be appointed by the Majority Leader. This Committee will have the power to review rules and administrative procedures of the Senate, will hold public hearings and will report back their findings to the full Senate within the first few months of 2009. The goal of the Committee will be to propose new rules and administrative processes that reflect greater transparency and technical improvements to allow more public input into the process, greater authority for individual members, expand information provided to the public and any number of other reform measures.

Ending the use of "canvass of agreement" where individual votes of members are not recorded. This will change the current system of when amendments to bills are brought to the floor there are no recorded votes, and that rules for debate and procedure will be the same as for legislation. Currently there are restrictive limits on the debate of amendments and votes are only held through a canvass of agreement which does not require a recorded "yes" or "no" vote from every Senator.

Motions to discharge will also require recorded votes, and allow for debate times and procedures parallel to those used for all other bills. A motion to discharge comes when a bill has not been allowed to be voted on in committee and the sponsor attempts to bring it straight to the floor for a vote by the full Senate in order for it to be placed on the calendar in the absence of a committee vote to do so. Procedures will also be changed to allow motions to discharge 20 days after a request has for consideration in committee has been made. Until this change, bills had to be in committee for 60 days before a motion for release from committee was allowed, which substantially limited the number of motions that could be considered during any session.

The Senate will have open bill sponsorship, which allows for any Senator to co-sponsor any bill of their choice. Prior to this change, a Senator had to ask the prime sponsor of a bill if they could sign on as a co-sponsor. With open bill sponsorship they will not need the prime sponsor's permission. Under the old system the majority party would rarely let a minority member sign-on to any bill that they planned on passing.

There will be a system of dual reference for bills that impose criminal or civil penalties as is already done in the Assembly. This means that any bill which creates criminal or civil penalties must be passed through the Codes Committee as well as whichever other committee the bill would have normally been passed through.

"All of these changes will liberalize debate and enable the Senate to be more open and transparent, and their adoption will go a long way toward the reforms that I and so many editorial boards and citizens have been calling for" said Senator Krueger. "This is the first step in the process and we would expect that over the next few months we will build on these reforms."

The Brennan Center's reports have been pointed to by many as the standard for how to reform Albany. Solutions like requiring recorded votes on amendments and motions to discharge go right to the heart of one of the Brennan Center's biggest issues which is that, "the lack of public discussion or debate in committee or on the floor is a debilitating weakness of New York's Legislative process." In an editorial endorsing the Brennan Center's findings and recommendations the New York Times also described the reforms as the Senate Democrats first real test as a new majority.

Senator Krueger explained, "I know many people were counting on the Democrats to deliver on years of promises of reform and I am proud that as our first act in the majority we have delivered and have put in place a framework that will allow us to build on these changes and create a more transparent and open legislative process that will improve the ability of the Senate to address the serious issues facing New York."