



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

Albany Update

LIZ KRUEGER June 16, 2009

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Dear Friend,

The last two weeks in Albany have taught me that no matter how dysfunctional I thought this place was, it really was possible for it to get worse. I assure you that I share your frustration over the current power struggle and the failure of the Democratic majority to act on important issues that matter to the daily lives of New Yorkers. While things are still in flux, I wanted to give you my perspective on what happened and what it all means.

I strongly believe that the attempted coup had nothing to do with reform and was simply a blatant power grab by the Republican party and a couple of disaffected Democrats. The Republicans' claim that the coup was done for the good of the people and in order to enact government reform is completely ridiculous. Remember, this is the same Republican party that controlled the Senate for more than 43 years and made it one of the least democratic and deliberative legislative bodies in the nation. Now in their latest power grab, they are attempting to make Pedro Espada the President of the Senate and next in line to be Governor of the state of New York. This is an outrageous act which on the face of it belies any claims they make about trying to reform the system.

That said, I think all of us in the Democratic conference have to look critically at what role we played in what went wrong. I believe that the biggest failure of my conference was that it was not aggressive enough in advancing a reform agenda. From the day I ran for office I have advocated for reform of the Senate's rules in order to empower individual members regardless of who was in the majority.

While the Democratic leadership did introduce new rules that improved transparency, made it easier to move bills to the floor, and offered a broader proposal for significant reforms of the committee process, other issues such as equitable distribution of resources were not addressed. The common sense and "small d" democratic changes I have been fighting for were rejected. I believe that many of my colleagues adopted a "to the victor goes the spoils" model, and while I repeatedly argued against this, in the end, the conference was not willing to go as far down the reform road as they should have.

I think Bill Hammond nailed the situation in his column in Tuesday's (June 16th) NY Daily News (a section follows):

"They claim to be reforming Albany's dysfunctional ways. Yet they picked slippery Bronx Sen. Pedro Espada - who shouldn't be trusted as dogcatcher - to be president of the Senate.

That puts Espada a heartbeat away from running the entire state if, God forbid, something should happen to Gov. Paterson.

The desperate GOP strategy seems to boil down to this: Cling to power at all costs - even if it means abandoning all sense of responsibility and good government.

Of course, this is Albany, so the Democrats, have much to be ashamed of, too. They broke their campaign promises to operate the Senate in a more open and democratic fashion. Instead, they used their narrow majority to vindictively punish Republican senators....

But now, in contrast to the utter recklessness of the Republicans, the Dems at least have belatedly accepted the obvious. They seem resigned to the fact that neither the stupid party nor the evil party (I'll let you figure out which is which) can possibly form a credible, stable majority in this circus like atmosphere. They managed to flip Monserrate back to their side, but have, to their credit, said good riddance to Espada."

One potential silver lining from this situation is that the Senate may be forced to change its model of operations, given that we now face an equally divided body. The Senate Democrats have already proposed a bipartisan operating agreement to the Republicans, used in numerous other states and the U.S. Senate when they found themselves in similar circumstances, to circumvent the gridlock created by a 50-50 split in the Senate.

Our proposal includes:

- A rotating Presiding Officer of the Senate, alternating daily, one each to be designated by the Democratic Conference and the Republican Conference, respectively.
- Establishing a six-member Senate Conference Committee, comprised of three members designated by the Democratic Conference and three members designated by the Republican Conference, to determine which bills and resolutions will reach the floor, and
- Rotating Floor Leaders, alternating daily, one each to be designated by the Democratic Conference and the Republican Conference, respectively.

Unfortunately, so far, this proposal was soundly rejected by the Republicans who would rather let government grind to a halt than give up their last chance of having power.

What the impact of all of this is on broader legislative issues remains to be seen. Regardless of the short-term outcome it will no doubt be harder to move progressive legislation in a number of areas. This is a great disappointment to me, as I had high hopes for progress on

important issues like affordable housing, public education, environmental policy, and same-sex marriage. However, there is always the possibility that as legislators we will learn some valuable lessons.

I am hopeful that one of the lessons learned from this whole process will be the need to develop fairer and more equitable rules. Every senator, regardless of party, represents the same number of constituents and should have adequate resources. I am an optimist and believe that if I persevere we will ultimately be able to make real progress.

Please continue to hold us accountable, and know that I will do my best in Albany to be a force for positive change. It is not an easy fight, and these last couple of weeks have left me frustrated and angry, but more committed than ever to fighting for what I believe are the changes necessary to create a more responsible and responsive government for New York State.

Sincerely,

Liz Krueger

State Senator