



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

No More Drama

JAMES L. SEWARD June 25, 2009

After three weeks of inactivity, high theater and political dueling, the state senate needs to get back to the people's business. Many important bills affecting local governments, businesses and residents of New York state await action and a long-term solution to the impasse must be reached.

Last fall voters asked for change, and I was ready to deliver. Important reforms were part of what I had hoped to advance during this year's senate session. I also arrived in Albany with an agenda focused on property tax relief, job creation and government spending cuts. With our state facing an uncertain financial future my plan was to find ways to balance our books and start down the path to a brighter financial future.

Unfortunately many of the newly elected senators and the political bosses on the other side of the aisle quickly forgot their campaign promises and had other ideas. The priority became larger offices, parking spaces and high priced staff. Political perks seemed to be the only thing the new leadership cared about.

While they were taking care of themselves the new senate leadership and the governor were also taking care of the people of New York. First they approved a budget that increases spending by a whopping seven times the rate of inflation and includes \$8.5 billion in new taxes and fees. The spending plan was developed behind closed doors in the most secretive

budget process in the state's history. It saddles families with \$2,400 in new taxes each year, punishes businesses with health insurance hikes, and hijacks the STAR rebate checks from homeowners. In a time when families are cutting back, the state went on an all out spending spree. The budget shows a break from reality and despite objections from my Republican colleagues and me, the plan was approved and signed by the governor.

There have been other failures by the new leadership regime as well. The bailout for the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), the poorly constructed bottle bill and supposed drug law reforms that seal the records of convicted drug dealers to schools and nursing homes are among the most glaring.

All of these elements led to what occurred on the floor of the senate on June 8th. The historic change in leadership directed by a bipartisan reform coalition was not done for political gain; it came out of necessity to put an end to the string of destructive decisions being made by the downstate political bosses.

New operating rules were adopted immediately. Unlike the token changes advanced by the prior powerbrokers, our rules leveled the playing field in the senate, opened up the process, provided equal resources to all senators and empowered every New Yorker. But senators on the other side of the aisle turned their backs on the new rules, even going so far as to not show up for work in the senate chamber for more than two weeks. During this time I continued to report to work day in and day out, hoping that at least one brave soul from the other side would join the newly founded reform coalition and take up the people's business. Not one had the courage to join us.

We are now working on a new leadership agreement that will put the people of this state first. I am confident that going forward the new reforms we're developing will make a real difference in how business is done in Albany, and in turn, give way to policies that will bring results to each and every New Yorker. The process to get to this point has been unpleasant,

and at times absurd. I am confident though, that all of the anguish will produce a genuine payoff: a stronger, more vibrant New York and a better, transparent and bipartisan state legislature.