



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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A NON-PARTISAN SOLUTION TO GETTING THE SENATE BACK TO WORK

JOHN J. BONACIC July 9, 2009

For years I have fought against the leadership driven nature of the State Senate and Assembly. I fought against it when the Republicans were in charge, fought against it when the Democrats were in charge, and am fighting now harder than ever to reform Albany and end the politics as usual that have paralyzed the State Senate.

I have proposed a non-partisan agreement which will get the Senate back to work so issues we care about: property tax reform, safer streets, improved roads, lower cost healthcare can be honestly debated and voted on.

My solution to get the Senate back to work is aimed allowing the real issues to be debated in an open and public manner. Here is what I believe the Senate should do now that the Senate is tied:

1. Both political conferences should each have a leader who will jointly run the Senate.
2. There should be a Motion for Consideration or a Petition for Consideration which will empower rank-and-file lawmakers and allow them to bring a bill on the floor to a vote

without the consent of the Leaders.

3. The Active List (the list of bills actually scheduled for a vote) will be jointly created by a working committee composed of an equal membership from both conferences of the Senate.
4. Messages of necessity (a letter from the Governor allowing for an immediate vote on a bill without allowing for time for the public to review the bill) will not be utilized unless it is an actual emergency situation. Currently Governor Paterson (and past Governors) routinely issue Messages of necessity even when there is no emergency, thereby circumventing the public's review of legislation.
5. The professional staff of the Senate Finance Committee serve all 62 members following the best practices of other states with a Non-Partisan Senate Central Finance Office. This office will, like 40 other states, have co-managers who will administer the Office for the benefit of all 62 members of the Senate.
6. Legislative Sessions, committee meetings, hearings and other legislative business will begin airing on a C-Span- like channel called NYSPAN pursuant to a plan adopted by the Senate.

FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY FOR CONSTITUENTS

Making the Senate run better has got to be about one thing: better service for all New Yorkers. When the Senate is finally administered in a fair, equitable and non-partisan manner, every New Yorker will finally have the opportunity to have their Senator introduce a bill, have it fairly considered on the merits, communicate on the issues important to their local community without censorship of the Senate leadership, and make sure important community initiatives are funded in a fair way.

Every New Yorker will have their Senator be able to receive equal access to the resources of the Senate for printing, mailing, and other services provided by the Senate's central administrative departments. The positions necessary for the central, administrative functions of the Senate will not be charged against either the Conference or Coalition.

Committees will operate in a democratic manner. Committee co-chairs will be created to jointly administer the Committee functions, and there will be equal committee membership since the Senate is now tied 31 to 31. The Co-Chairs will jointly agree on a Committee agenda.

EMPOWERING INDIVIDUAL SENATORS MEANS

EMPOWERING NEW YORKERS

The Senate should adopt the Congressional model to establish a realistic and workable base allocation for each member, to adequately staff their individual offices. That means every New Yorker - whether they are represented by a Democrat or Republican will be able to get their problem or idea for a law considered at the same speed as every other New Yorker. Simply put, all New Yorkers are equal and their representatives should be able to serve them equally.

The proposal benefits all New Yorkers because it will get the Senate back to work and more importantly, allow the issues everyday New Yorkers care about to be considered in a fair way. It will dilute the power of the Senate leaders and thereby empower rank and file Senators - and more importantly, voters by having each representative have more of a say in what is happening in the State Legislature.

The Active List will no longer be created by one leader, but rather a working committee composed of equal membership from both sides of the currently divided Senate.

Each constituent group which has been promised State aid will know that it is actually coming and that politics is not freezing that needed aid as is happening now to hospitals, fire departments, and those that serve the disabled simply because that community's representative is a Republican.

There should be term limits for leadership positions and Committee Chairs. That would reduce the influence of special interests. This plan should be implemented through at least the end of 2010 since a new Senate will not take office until January 1, 2011.

These historic changes and reforms will completely change the Senate from a leader-driven body to member-driven - something I have long pushed for. The leadership of both the Senate and Assembly has far too much power and they have used that power to reduce the ability of New Yorkers to have their voices heard.

Both sides of the political aisle have argued for reform. With rare exception though, those arguments have only been made when the person arguing for it is in the minority party.

Now, real reform can come to Albany, and with that, more importantly, all New Yorkers can have their priorities heard and advocated for.