



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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NYS Senator Eric Adams in the Daily News

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The State Senate Democrats Deserve

The breakaway faction owes voters better

BY ERIC ADAMS

Sadly, New Yorkers have grown used to the dysfunction in Albany. But whereas in recent years it was merely individual bills that were sidelined by its power struggles, now it's entire groups being marginalized as well.

Laughably, this was done in the name of "bipartisanship" last week when six Democratic state senators broke away from their party's caucus to form a new leadership coalition with Republicans.

After years of struggle to elect a state government that fairly represents the diversity in our state, underrepresented groups finally rose to the Senate leadership in 2009. For me personally and for diverse districts like mine, it was a moment filled with opportunity and

hope.

That didn't last long. Another power struggle that year hijacked an agenda that would have finally paid proper attention to those constituencies.

But voters would not be refused. They returned Democrats to the majority this November, with a very large chunk of the vote coming from diverse communities. This time, however, it seems that our power won't just be limited - it will be institutionally removed by a backroom deal.

The breakaway faction, led by Sen. Jeff Klein, is forming a coalition government with the Republican leadership - leaving the real Democrats, who represent most of the people of the state, on the outside looking in.

Voters should be outraged. And they should be very worried about the vague details of this new power-sharing arrangement.

The ruling coalition has said in a press release that its plan will give the conference leaders of the new Independent Democrats and the Republicans "joint and equal authority" over the Senate agenda, the budget, appointments and "leadership and committee assignments for their respective conferences."

Really? Republicans outnumber Independent Democrats 5-to-1 in this coalition, so how exactly will this "joint and equal authority" be enforced?

Here are three ways to ensure true bipartisanship and a Senate that guarantees the attention diverse communities are due:

First, the new Senate should have an equal number of committee chairmanships for Republicans and Democrats - and those chairs must be allowed to run their committees as

they see fit.

Committees control much of the Senate agenda and are essential to executing the Senate's responsibilities to balance the budget, work towards campaign finance reform, investigate wrongdoing and write the laws we need.

Second, the Senate's own budget for staff and offices must be distributed evenly. Typically, the majority party's senators are in control and award themselves the lion's share of these critical resources. In a jointly run Senate, neither side should be at a disadvantage when it comes to these basic tools of support for each party's agenda.

Third, the Senate must adjust its rules to allow for fair play. The Democrats may have been out-manuevered in the Capitol, but in the real world, they still represent more New Yorkers than Republicans do.

This means that Democratic senators ought to have just as much right to introduce legislation and have it voted on as their colleagues in the new leadership.

So far, the coalition has promised to move on a few specific items - but without some formal procedural change, even that isn't guaranteed.

Ultimately, I care much more that people are empowered in government than that one political party or another is in official control. So as long as the majority of voters currently disenfranchised by this new leadership are guaranteed a fair shot at their agenda, I don't really care who calls themselves "leader."

If the six Democratic senators and the Republican conference use their newfound powers to make these changes in the name of fairness, they'll prove that this Senate takeover could be in the best interests of New Yorkers, and not themselves.