



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Malcolm Smith

The Senate Majority Vote Down Rules Reforms

MALCOLM A. SMITH January 15, 2007

Senate Majority tonight rejected important reforms that would have made the Senate more open and accountable to the public, more effective in its deliberations and less expensive to the taxpayers of New York.

The Senate Minority Conference had proposed changes to the rules of the Majority-controlled State Senate which have been manipulated over the years to create a cloak of secrecy around the Senate and to centralize power in the hands of the Majority Leader, leaving rank and file members with few, if any, responsibilities.

"Every good government group and every major newspaper that has editorialized on the matter agree that the rules of the State Senate make it one of the most undemocratic, dysfunctional and ineffective governmental bodies in the entire nation," Smith said.

The Senate Minority proposals would have drastically changed the way the Senate conducts its business, requiring full and complete disclosure of member items in budget bills, including the name of the sponsoring Senator, funding recipient and amount of funding. Additionally, member item funding for private, for-profit entities would be banned.

The Senate Minority also proposed reforming a rule that currently allows Senators to escape accountability for some of their votes. Six years ago Senate Majority changed the rules so that votes on motions to discharge a bill from committee are not recorded, allowing Senators to kill off important legislation without having to be held responsible for their votes.

The Senate Minority would also change the rules governing distribution of resources to rank and file Senators. Currently, the Majority Leader distributes staff and other resources as he sees fit, allowing him to reward Senators for their blind allegiance and punish them if they were to speak out against the Leader. Under the Senate Minority proposal, all Senators would receive equal staffing and other resources to serve their constituents.

Smith said the Majority had clearly gone against the will of the people of New York State, and would be held responsible for their vote. "The voters demonstrated very clearly in November that they want us to reform our legislative process," Smith said.

"Addressing the dysfunction that exists within the Majority-controlled Senate by reforming our own rules would have been a very positive first step toward changing the way business is conducted in Albany," Smith said. "Members of the Senate Majority Conference will have to explain to their constituents and all New Yorkers why they chose to vote down these important reforms."