



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Real Reform Comes To Albany

CATHARINE YOUNG June 10, 2009

News Column from

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It's a new day in the New York State Senate.

Historic and sweeping rules reforms were voted into place this past week by a bi-partisan coalition that is delivering on greater transparency and true accountability in state government.

Our changes will empower individual legislators, give attention to every corner of the state, strengthen the committee process, allow greater debate and shine sunlight on what's happening in Albany.

All of these laudable and desperately-needed goals for state government had been promised to the 19 million people of New York State in January of this year by Senator Malcolm Smith when he took over control of the Senate.

Tragically, the polar opposite became the reality.

Three men in a room, all from New York City -- Governor David Paterson, then Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith, and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver -- hatched the state budget in secret. When budget bills hit the Senate floor, Senate Republicans, including me, strenuously debated them. What immediately became pitifully apparent was that the Democrats, then in the Majority, didn't have a clue about the budget's contents, yet they unanimously voted it through.

The result? Not only a terrible process, but a horrific product.

Out-of-control spending hit a record \$13 billion increase -- during a recession.

Huge tax hikes to the tune of \$8.5 billion were piled on when New York already was the heaviest taxed state in the country. Homeowners, choking from property taxes, lost their STAR rebate checks. Families and senior citizens, struggling to pay their monthly bills, will be forced to pay higher telephone, electricity and natural gas because of an onerous tax placed on utilities. Taxes on health insurance premiums drove up costs for policy holders and put health insurance further out of reach for many.

Empire Zones, our best economic development tool, were stripped; and small business were slammed. Business owners were chased out of the state. Job losses continue to mount. People are leaving in droves.

We urgently needed to change the state's direction.

The first step was to reform the dysfunctional dynamics that have ruled in Albany for far too long. We need both parties to work together to implement solutions.

Our bi-partisan Senate coalition has precedent. Five other states, including New Mexico, Texas, Alaska, Tennessee and Louisiana have proven and effective coalition governments.

I urge the State Assembly to follow our lead and make reform a reality in their House.

Through reform, we can revive our economy, grow more jobs, establish career opportunities for our young people so they don't have to leave, alleviate the tax burden, and control spending.

We have taken the first steps with these groundbreaking reforms. Now we can truly make a difference on behalf of the people of New York State.

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