



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Suzi Oppenheimer

Oppenheimer Calls for Bipartisan Control of the Senate and End to Logjam

SUZI OPPENHEIMER June 17, 2009

State Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck) today called for an end to the State Senate stalemate, advocating for instituting bipartisan control of the Senate in order to address important issues facing Westchester and New York State.

“The time for leadership challenges is in January, not at the end of the Legislative Session in June. It is highly irresponsible of the Republican leadership to bring state government, at this late date, to a standstill. This week has brought us to a 31-31 split in the Senate membership so only through bipartisan cooperation will we be able to get the work done.”

Senator Oppenheimer remains concerned that key legislation will be blocked by the end of session power grab by Senate Republicans. She stated, “We need to move on property tax relief, reducing state mandates, and measures of importance to local governments. Stalemate is unacceptable.”

To move forward, Senate Democrats proposed a truly fair power sharing deal with them that would take politics out of the process. Unfortunately, Republicans and Pedro Espada rejected this offer and walked away from the negotiating table.

Included in the Democrats' proposal:

- Democratic and Republican Presiding Officers of the Senate would alternate daily;
- Floor Leaders would alternate daily (from a different party than that days' Presiding Officer of the Senate;
- A 6-member Senate Conference Committee (3 Democrats, 3 Republicans) would work to determine what legislation reaches the floor.

Bipartisan operating agreements have been used with great success in other state legislatures when there has been a tie in membership. Since 1984, cooperative agreements have been used to run houses in the state legislatures of Oklahoma, New Jersey, Maine, Washington, Indiana, and Montana when they have had a tie in membership. In 2001 and 2002, such an agreement was used to operate the United States Senate.

As Chair of the Senate Education Committee, Senator Oppenheimer has been championing legislation to bring mandate relief to school districts, which was slated to be voted on in June.

Included in the local legislation that has been blocked are local tax extenders for Westchester County, New Rochelle, White Plains and Rye. Senator Oppenheimer commented, "These measures are very important in providing alternative revenue sources, other than the local property tax."

In conclusion Senator Oppenheimer stated, "Bipartisan control and a working relationship to get bills passed is the only approach that will succeed. We need everyone to put their political agendas aside and function as a legislative body to get the end of session work completed."