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High Stakes, But No Game

The current deadlock in the New York State Senate has been characterized as a circus, a joke, a crashed clown car: but it's a tragic, high stakes power game that's gambling with the future of the State of New York. The historic first session of the New York Senate under a Democratic majority in over 40 years was distinguished by a renewed dedication to the benefit of all the people of New York, this generation and their children. The session has not been about political ambition: it has been about repairing the damage done to the state by 70 years of Republican Senate leadership.

Until two weeks ago.

As a result of the venal attempt to turn back the clock (and the last election) engineered by the Republican party, financed by an ex-patriot billionaire, and balanced on the ambitions of a Bronx politician, the people's business has been completely derailed at the most critical moment possible. The important work of the Senate happens at the end of the session, after bills have been crafted, discussed, considered, changed; after municipalities have been given indications of what they can expect as they craft their budgets; after service agencies have been given allotted resources. Schools, child care, hospital money, job development programs...all the things that real people rely on. Major questions like vacancy decontrol, Mayoral control of schools, alternatives to detention that break the cycles of crime, Senator Oppenheimer's Healthy Teen Act, Senator Stewart-Cousins' Reproductive Health Act, and my School Based Health Clinics bill; all derailed and held hostage to the failed ambitions of a party that lost the majority after losing their way.

And the New York Republican Party has clearly lost its way. I think they genuinely may not even realize where they are and where their history has left this state, particularly their upstate districts. The population of upstate New York has been steadily shrinking for decades as the only industry Republicans could think of to replace farming...was prisons. And as small towns became dependant on this twisted vision, of course their young people moved away in ever greater numbers rather than settle for a life as prison guards. Did the Senate Republicans create an environment for new industries? For artists? For manufacturing? They built a prison system, and then passed bills to feed that system by criminalizing our children, and abandoning reform for incarceration. A deeply flawed and lost vision.

The vision of the new Senate that was just seeing light this session has them scared and making desperate choices that are embarrassing even to themselves. They know they are not acting in anyone's interest, let alone the best interest of New York State. The current deadlocked situation cannot be allowed to stand, and even Republicans are saying they won't stand for it. And that is why I am hopeful that this tragic game might turn out to be a win for the people of New York as we can put this behind us and return the momentum of this historic session, focused on the good of everyone, here and upstate.

Committees: Children & Families (Chair), Social Services (Co-Chair), Agriculture, Crime & Correction, Education, Finance, Health, Mental Health, Rules
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