



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: January 12, 2009

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**SENATE MAJORITY ANNOUNCES PASSAGE OF HISTORIC RULES
REFORM THAT WILL CREATE MORE INCLUSIVE AND
ACCOUNTABLE SENATE**

State Senate Majority Leader Malcolm A. Smith today announced passage of historic rules changes that will fundamentally change the way the Senate operates and conducts business. In their first order of business as the Majority the Senate passed a series of rules changes that will foster discussion and productivity, and increase accountability and transparency for the public.

Most significantly, following passage of these reforms, Senator Smith announced the formation of a Temporary Senate Committee on Rules and Administration Reform that will make a proposal to the full Senate no later than April 13, 2009, to fully usher in a new era in Albany. The bi-partisan committee will include nine members and will be co-Chaired by Democratic Senator David Valesky and Republican Senator John Bonacic.

“Today the Senate took its first significant steps in decades towards achieving a more open, accountable and inclusive legislative process,” said Senator Smith. “By working with all of our colleagues to change the way business is done in Albany, we can restore public confidence in the Senate and show the people of New York that the Chamber belongs to them, not us.”

Besides the establishment of the rules reform committee, other key changes include:

- Affirming that rules adopted today are only valid through the end of the 2009 calendar year. This is a good faith effort by the Majority to ensure that changes continue to be made through the session.
- Reversing 2001 Senate Rules changes that reversed openness and accountability by:
 - Restoring the ability of Senators to use “Motions to Discharge” to attempt to force a bill out of committee.
 - Permitting full debate on Motions to Discharge.
 - Restoring the practice of recording votes on discharge motions and non-sponsor amendments by eliminating the canvass of agreement.
- Allowing for open bill sponsorship for any member that chooses to support a piece of legislation. In the past, minority party members could be excluded from signing onto majority sponsored bills.
- Implementing the practice of dual reference of bills in cases where legislation is affected by more than one committee. This will improve the committee process and allow committee members greater control over legislation coming to the floor.

- Increasing the use of technology, in particular the internet and other new media to increase public awareness of and access to public policy debates, the decision-making process and legislative records of the Senate.

Senator David Valesky (D-Oneida), Democratic co-Chair said, "We ought to have the kind of Senate where Democrats and Republicans can work together to solve problems on behalf of their constituents, regardless of politics. In a major break with the past, our package of reforms will empower all legislators and improve deliberation by giving minority party members the ability to move legislation and improve accountability by actually recording votes. The bi-partisan committee we have created will usher in even more changes as we move forward."

Senator John Bonancic (R-Mount Hope), Republican co-Chair said, "I look forward to working with Senator Valesky to produce rule changes that will be more transparent and fair for all the individual senators regardless of party affiliation."

Senator Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan) said, "I know many people were counting on the Democrats to deliver on years of promises of reform and I am proud that as our first act in the majority we have delivered and have put in place a framework that will allow us to build on these changes and create a more transparent and open legislative process that will improve the ability of the Senate to address the serious issues facing New York."

Senator Eric T. Schneiderman (D-Manhattan/Bronx) said, "Voters called for change in the most recent elections, and today's rules reforms are a sign of things to come. The new Majority is committed to reshaping the way that business is done in Albany, and we will continue exploring every operation and procedure of the Senate to see where reforms and improvements can be made. New Yorkers deserve a better-functioning and more transparent government, and today's actions are an important step in that direction."

Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson (D-Bronx/Westchester) said, "I've been working with my colleagues for the last eight years to change the Senate for the better. The reforms passed today will make the Senate the type of legislative body it is meant to be—an open body, a deliberative body, and one that makes the people of New York proud. These have been a long time in coming, but are very important and signal our commitment to changing the way things are done."

Senator Daniel Squadron said (D-Brooklyn/Manhattan), "Today is the first step in fundamentally fixing state government so that it works for the people of New York. We've got a long way to go, but with new Democratic leadership we have finally started down the path to real reform."

"The concerns facing New York today are too important to allow a business-as-usual approach to impede the progressive agenda we intend to enact and the people deserve. The passage of these reforms is not the end of our effort, rather it is just the beginning of the reform era we hope to usher into Albany," concluded Senator Smith.

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