

1 BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE
2 TEMPORARY COMMITTEE ON RULES AND
3 ADMINISTRATION REFORM

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4 Committee Meeting

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6 Room 124
7 The Capitol
8 Albany, NY

8 April 21, 2009
9 11:42 a.m.

10 PRESIDING:

11 Senator David J. Valesky
12 Cochair

12 Senator John J. Bonacic
13 Cochair

14 PRESENT:

15 Senator Jeffrey D. Klein

16 Senator George H. Winner, Jr.

17 Senator Jose M. Serrano

18 Senator Joseph A. Griffo

19 Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins

20 Senator Daniel L. Squadron

21 Senator Kevin Parker

22 Senator Liz Krueger

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1 COCHAIR VALESKY: I'm going to call
2 the meeting to order, please. If everyone
3 can take their seats, and we'll begin.

4 First of all, let me just briefly
5 introduce the members of this committee, and
6 then we'll review briefly the proceedings
7 that have taken place over the last 90 days
8 or so. And then I'd like to ask Senator
9 Bonacic, who's my cochair on this committee,
10 to make some comments. And I'll walk
11 through the specific recommendations that
12 are included in the report.

13 Before doing that, I want to welcome --
14 we have some special guests who are here
15 today. The young people who are joining us
16 are from the League of Women Voters, and

17 their statewide program, I believe they call
18 it Student Inside Albany Day; is that
19 correct?

20 BARBARA BARTOLETTI: That's correct.

21 COCHAIR VALESKY: So we welcome I
22 believe 29 young people from across the
23 State of New York who are learning more
24 about how their government works. And I

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1 know many members of the Legislature will
2 have these fine young men and women as
3 shadows throughout the day. So we look
4 forward to spending time with them.

5 I'm joined on the majority side of the
6 aisle by Senator Klein, Senator Parker,
7 Senator Serrano, Senator Stewart-Cousins,
8 and Senator Squadron.

9 John?

10 COCHAIR BONACIC: Sure. I'm joined
11 by my colleagues Senator Joseph Griffo and

12 Senator George Winner.

13 COCHAIR VALESKY: And we've also been
14 joined by Senator Krueger, who certainly has
15 an interest in the issue but is not a member
16 of the Temporary Committee on Rules and
17 Administration Reform.

18 To review where we have come since
19 January 7th, as many of you know, the Senate
20 approved a new series of rules that are in
21 effect only through 2009, made some changes
22 that many have described as a good first
23 start, including open bill sponsorship,
24 including repeal of the canvass of agreement

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1 that had been in effect in the Senate for
2 the last seven or eight years or so, and
3 some other issues in terms of openness and
4 transparency in government.

5 As part of those rules reforms, this
6 temporary committee was established by the
7 Senate Majority Leader with cochairs, John

8 and me. And our charge was to look at the
9 rules of the Senate and to recommend
10 additional ways that we could reform the
11 Senate as a legislative body to provide for
12 greater accountability, transparency,
13 openness in the legislative process
14 specifically as it relates to the Senate.

15 And we took as a part of that mission
16 to conduct public hearings, four public
17 hearings -- in Syracuse, Albany, New York
18 City, and Rochester -- and meet as a
19 committee three times prior to this session,
20 which is the last scheduled session of this
21 committee.

22 We have throughout the course of the
23 entire process, public hearings and
24 committees, I believe had an unprecedented

1 public access to deliberations of the
2 committee -- through webcasting, as we're

3 doing here today, through the posting on the
4 Internet of testimony that we gathered at
5 public hearings, and of comments and
6 deliberations and discussions by this
7 committee.

8 I certainly no of no other committee
9 that has had the commitment to that openness
10 and transparency or as much open and good
11 and productive, I think, debate of the many
12 issues that have been placed before us.

13 Today we are -- actually, I should
14 mention that as a result of the budget
15 process, which took a bit longer than was
16 originally expected, the committee was
17 initially charged with reporting to the
18 Senate majority and minority leaders by
19 April 13th as to our findings. And again,
20 because of the budget adoption process,
21 Senator Bonacic and I agreed to ask for an
22 extension through this week.

23 So my intent at this meeting, I'll
24 certainly have Senator Bonacic make some

1 comments. I'd like to then walk through the
2 recommendations that the committee is
3 making, and at that point would ask the
4 committee to consider adopting this report
5 and put the report to a vote to hopefully
6 recommend to Senator Smith and Senator
7 Skelos, as the original rule resolution had
8 called for in establishing the committee in
9 the first place.

10 So I will in a moment certainly ask
11 John to make some opening comments, and then
12 I thought I would walk us through the five
13 general areas that we as a committee would
14 like to move forward on at this particular
15 point in time.

16 COCHAIR BONACIC: Thank you, David.

17 First of all, again, I want to thank
18 all of those people who participated and all
19 the good government groups that came and
20 gave their expertise and recommendations

21 during the four public hearings.

22 I want to thank my colleagues on this
23 committee that started out with a good-faith
24 effort to try to change the Albany culture

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1 and do some reform.

2 And what I said in the beginning is
3 that what we expected to achieve -- and I
4 spoke, I guess I was directing it to Senator
5 Squadron at the time, because he's new
6 here -- was that a young Senator gets
7 elected and that young Senator expects his
8 voice to be heard.

9 If he puts a bill in, that bill should
10 be able to have an airing at a committee on
11 its merits, up or down.

12 He should have the resources to do his
13 job for his constituents. That goes that he
14 should have enough money to run his office,
15 for staffing, to communicate with his
16 constituents as like a Senator who's been

17 here 30 years, no different. The
18 constituent needs are the same.

19 He should have the opportunity that if
20 his bill gets voted out of committee
21 favorably, with or without amendments, that
22 his bill should be heard on the floor.

23 And finally, that his constituents,
24 when it comes to member items, monies that

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1 he brings back to those groups,
2 not-for-profit groups that he feels are
3 worthy, just like the Senator who's been
4 here 30 years, he has equal resources to do
5 that.

6 That was the goal. And the goal was to
7 diminish the power of the leader and their
8 staff and empower members to do the people's
9 work and to better serve their constituency
10 and better serve democracy in a transparent
11 way. That was the goal when we started.

12 And when we formed this committee, I
13 congratulated Malcolm Smith for allowing
14 this process to even begin, to even talk
15 about this. He deserved credit for allowing
16 this to be aired publicly, to be recorded
17 for anyone to see.

18 And this is what happened. I have
19 equal authority, as cochairman, with Senator
20 Valesky. My counsel got this report at 7:30
21 last night. This was the first time we had,
22 this morning, our three members, to look at
23 this. Okay? We have other committee
24 meetings.

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1 So this was thrust upon us without the
2 opportunity of thorough review or
3 amendments. And I understand now that this
4 draft report has been given out to the
5 press.

6 And I will speak generically as to this
7 report. It scratches the surface in making

8 turtle steps on issues of transparency, on
9 issues of what we call a 99 process that
10 allows a bill to go out of committee and
11 hopefully to get to the floor. It is
12 incomplete. And whether that bill ever gets
13 voted on the floor, that's an item that's
14 still vague and open.

15 And of course it talks about a
16 supermajority of a petition process; I don't
17 exactly know what that means.

18 But we never got to the core of
19 changing the culture. By that I mean a
20 guarantee that that young Senator, when he
21 puts a bill forward, he can get a full
22 airing in committee. If it gets voted down,
23 he's finished. If it gets past the
24 committee, then he would be guaranteed a

1 vote on the floor. We have not solved that
2 with this report.

3 We have not solved equal resources for
4 Senators. We have not solved equal staffing
5 at committees to debate a bill on the
6 merits, like the Brennan Center and many of
7 these good groups have talked about. We
8 didn't accomplish that. Okay? And we
9 certainly didn't accomplish member items.

10 And other members will talk specifically to
11 those issues.

12 And I'm disappointed, to tell you the
13 truth. We've made turtle steps, and we can
14 go brag about it in the perception and the
15 pandering game. But to truly change the
16 culture of Albany, we're not there yet. And
17 this was the best opportunity.

18 So the first question I'm going to ask
19 the committee members, would you consider
20 adjourning or continuing this? And don't do
21 a final report yet, because we will not sign
22 onto this draft that is being handed out to
23 the press. We will give a minority report
24 of what we think has been accomplished and

1 hasn't been accomplished.

2 But I'd rather we be together. I'd

3 rather we not have this polarization.

4 Because I honestly believe the members

5 around this table, in their hearts, do not

6 want polarization or partisanship. I

7 believe that to be true, or I wouldn't be

8 speaking this way.

9 So the question I ask, if this report

10 were adopted today and approved by the 24th,

11 what reforms are time-sensitive that happen

12 in the next week or two weeks or three

13 weeks? Because the report doesn't

14 mention -- nothing about a time schedule.

15 So why wouldn't we continue to try to

16 work out some of these goals and to work on

17 better language? Why must we close it down

18 by April 24th? That's my question.

19 And if you say it's compelling, you

20 want closure, we say fine. But we will not

21 sign onto this report. And --

22 COCHAIR VALESKY: So let me -- thank
23 you, John, for your comments.

24 Let me walk through the significant

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1 recommendations that have been made by this
2 committee, because I think it's very
3 significant and very important.

4 SENATOR GRIFFO: Senator Valesky,
5 before you begin that, though, I think you
6 need to legitimately address how we're
7 supposed to evaluate a report when you
8 receive it at 9 o'clock in the morning. I'm
9 appalled at that.

10 After everything that you've discussed
11 and advocated, we've all talked about this,
12 we had an open debate, an encouraging,
13 positive debate here, and we don't have an
14 opportunity to review a report, particularly
15 with everything that's ongoing in the course
16 of the day here?

17 I mean, we gave the benefit of the
18 doubt to the staff and allowed them to have
19 the time to go back and rewrite this report,
20 because we knew there was a lot of time
21 constraints on them, so we wanted to give
22 them that opportunity.

23 I think we should have had at least the
24 opportunity as members to review -- and I

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1 don't know, if you got the report the same
2 time, I think you would feel the same way.
3 Wouldn't you want to read the thing, even if
4 we're going over it, so that we can get our
5 thoughts together and discuss these things
6 as we did before?

7 COCHAIR VALESKY: Senator, I'm going
8 to explain what's in the report. There's
9 nothing in the report, by the way, that
10 wasn't discussed, in some cases at length,
11 at the open meetings that we have had that

12 have led us to this position. So let me
13 walk through what we're recommending.

14 We're certainly -- John, to your point,
15 I think everyone agrees that the work of the
16 committee should continue. The work of the
17 committee can't continue, however, unless
18 the full Senate authorizes the temporary
19 committee to continue.

20 So our first recommendation is to
21 continue the temporary committee at least
22 through the end of 2010, to implement the
23 recommendations that are included in the
24 report, to research additional reform areas

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1 that may be of interest to the committee or
2 anyone testifying before the committee, and
3 to assess the operation and measure the
4 success of any new rules that are
5 implemented in the weeks and months ahead.

6 We would also, because of the interest
7 that has been articulated in regard to the

8 member item distribution system -- which has
9 traditionally not been a matter of Senate
10 rules, that has been a budgetary matter, but
11 clearly there has been an interest in
12 discussing that. So we believe and have
13 made it clear in this report that in
14 continuing the temporary committee, we
15 provide that committee with a specific
16 charge to look at the issue of discretionary
17 fund allocation.

18 The issue of standing committees, which
19 is probably the largest -- or one of the
20 largest areas of reform that we address
21 here. That is directly related to, by the
22 way, the feedback from testimony that we've
23 heard from good government groups,
24 interested individuals, and so forth over

1 the last several weeks.

2 We are recommending for the first time,

3 to my knowledge, that the Senate would
4 actually reduce the number of standing
5 committees that we have by as much as a
6 third, by creating subcommittees, by
7 reducing the number of committees that
8 Senators serve on. Right now each of us
9 serves on anywhere from seven to nine
10 committees, and that does not, in many of
11 our opinion, allow for the most efficient
12 operation of the Senate. So we would
13 propose a maximum of four standing
14 committees.

15 We would take the extraordinary step of
16 recommending term limits on committee chairs
17 and rankers. A proportionate representation
18 between majority and minority members on
19 committees. To allow for an abstaining due
20 to conflict of interest vote, which we
21 currently don't have an opportunity to do at
22 the committee level. And then some other
23 issues with regard to structure and process.

24 The issue of absentee voting. We would

1 require members to be physically present to
2 vote in committees and record standing
3 committee meeting attendance on a single
4 voting sheet.

5 The issue of committee reports, which
6 actually the Senate rules currently speak
7 to, although they have not been rules that
8 have been followed through on to really any
9 degree of depth in recent history. We
10 would, if the full Senate moves in our
11 direction to allow us to continue our work,
12 develop specific guidelines for detailed
13 committee reports for legislation.

14 Again, many of us believe and the
15 research in many cases shows that those
16 legislatures in states and the U.S. Congress
17 where significant and real work is done at
18 the committee level, we believe that those
19 are often described as the most functional
20 of legislatures in the U.S. So we are

21 anxious to move in that direction.

22 In regard to hearings, we are
23 encouraging chairs in the strongest possible
24 language to hold public hearings on

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1 legislation they believe is of important
2 interest. And we've already seen that take
3 place in this legislative session.

4 We're allowing, at the discretion of
5 the chair, anyone who is interested in
6 legislation that is before a committee to
7 speak to that committee and make a
8 presentation, with an equal amount of time
9 and number of speakers afforded to the
10 ranking member of that committee.

11 To allow a petition of a third of
12 members of a standing committee to hold a
13 hearing on a specific topic within the
14 jurisdiction of that committee.

15 The issue of amendments in bill
16 process, we believe that this committee is

17 interested in looking at developing a
18 process by which we can amend bills in
19 committee in which the sponsor of the bill
20 retains control. Again, something that
21 other legislatures do that we do not do
22 here.

23 We address the issue of consideration
24 of bills at the committee level, and

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1 ultimately on the floor of the Senate,
2 through a new petition before a standing
3 committee of original jurisdiction, no
4 earlier than 30 days following the
5 introduction of the bill, to schedule a vote
6 before that committee within 60 days.

7 We also are anxious to explore a
8 mechanism which would be unprecedented in
9 this Legislature to create a petition
10 whereby members could move a bill, even if
11 it had been defeated by the committee of

12 origin and in fact voted down. We're
13 anxious to explore and create a process
14 whereby a supermajority of Senators -- a
15 number that will have to be determined in
16 further work of the committee -- whereby the
17 full Senate would not necessarily have its
18 will dictated by one committee of the full
19 Senate. Again, something that's never
20 happened before in this state. Other
21 legislatures do, and the U.S. House does as
22 well.

23 In regard to oversight, requiring
24 standing committees to file an oversight

1 plan of the agencies over which its
2 committee has jurisdiction, to have
3 oversight hearings, both from a fiscal
4 perspective and from the perspective of
5 reviewing the implementation of rules and
6 regulations and laws that this Legislature
7 passes and that agencies are required to

8 carry out.

9 Transparency issues is the third broad
10 area that the committee would like to
11 recommend, including posting online all
12 records of committees, including votes,
13 minutes, agendas, reports and attendance of
14 the meeting; to assess the capacity of
15 webcasting all meetings and archiving the
16 video, and the necessary infrastructure and
17 technology to implement that.

18 In regard to floor and chamber
19 transparency, posting online all records of
20 the chamber, including fiscal notes, votes,
21 transcripts, calendars and expenditure
22 reports; creating a user-friendly bill
23 search engine with full access by the
24 public; and archiving of video floor

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1 proceedings and posting of such material on
2 a daily basis.

3 To work hand in hand with the Assembly
4 to research and hopefully implement a
5 meaningful state public affairs network, not
6 one that just broadcasts the proceedings in
7 the Senate and the Assembly chambers and
8 from time to time televising fiscal
9 committee hearings, as we do now, but a
10 state public affairs network that uses the
11 national C-SPAN as a model.

12 And clearly that's something that we
13 need to research with the Assembly to do a
14 cost analysis of that. I think this
15 committee feels that that's a direction we
16 want to move in.

17 The fourth area of recommendation has
18 to do with the chamber and administration.
19 We know that in regard to resources that are
20 made available to individual members of the
21 Senate -- and, John, you indicated Senator
22 Squadron as a new member of the Senate -- we
23 have now in place, although this is not in
24 the rules, but we have in place, as a result

1 of the majority leader's directive, a
2 \$350,000 minimum staff allowance for all 62
3 members of the Senate. We believe that's
4 about a 75 percent increase from what the
5 average junior Senator in the minority
6 received in previous sessions.

7 So clearly we've already moved in that
8 direction. We believe the Senate rules can
9 reflect that with an additional charge to
10 move forward.

11 We also -- and certainly members of the
12 minority side of the aisle have been vocal
13 in an interest in creating a baseline budget
14 for ranking members to hire committee staff.

15 I know that, John, you had a bill in the
16 Senate in previous years.

17 And we have on the majority side,
18 without a rule, in regard to committee
19 chairs, they have the ability and have done
20 so over the last two and a half months --

21 and maybe even in some cases are still doing
22 so -- hired committee staff directly. They
23 are not members of central staff; they work
24 for the committee chair. We're very anxious

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1 for the minority to be able to do the same
2 thing.

3 We believe there is broad agreement on
4 the issue of fair allocation of support
5 resources, and our report speaks directly to
6 the issue of assessing all services that can
7 be -- and many of them already are -- that
8 can be shared in a bipartisan fashion
9 between the majority and the minority in
10 this house.

11 We believe we ought to take that one
12 step further and have conversations with the
13 Assembly to assess the feasibility of
14 combining services where appropriate,
15 whether that be mail, supply, telephones,
16 computers, so on and so forth.

17 In the area of conference committees,
18 we found a great deal of interest in
19 addressing that. Obviously much of that is
20 dependent upon the other house. But we
21 believe we ought to be moving in a direction
22 where the sponsor of the bill, or the chair
23 of the committee in which the bill was
24 originally reported and approved, have the

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1 ability to call for a conference committee,
2 with the consent of the Senate majority
3 leader, and move that to a process with the
4 Assembly.

5 And finally, in regard to openness and
6 transparency and greater public input, the
7 notion of regional budget hearings would be
8 something that we are very anxious to
9 pursue. Right now, certainly as all of you
10 know, the Finance and Ways and Means
11 Committees are required to hold budget,

12 fiscal hearings only here in Albany.

13 So we believe that we ought to be
14 instituting regional budget hearings in what
15 we identify as eight regions of the state:
16 Western New York, Finger Lakes, Central,
17 North Country, Capital District, Hudson
18 Valley, New York City, and Long Island.

19 So we believe that this committee -- or
20 that this report, again, contains nothing
21 that wasn't discussed in three open
22 committees that were scheduled and held in
23 March, and that we are anxious to recommend
24 this.

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1 And again, the intent is to have the
2 committee take this report for a vote, to
3 recommend it to the two leaders of the
4 Senate so that we can immediately begin on
5 assessing -- because, so everyone is clear,
6 this is a report of recommendations. None
7 of the rule changes that are recommended in

8 this report can actually take effect unless
9 the full Senate, by virtue of a resolution
10 put before the Senate, actually approves
11 those.

12 So I think that there are a number of
13 items here that can be accomplished before
14 this legislative session adjourns. And
15 that's certainly my intent, as the cochair
16 of this committee, to identify those rules
17 that can be changed this session.

18 There are clearly other rules that we
19 are recommending that can't happen in this
20 session. It would be technically impossible
21 to collapse committees midsession. So
22 there's additional work that needs to be
23 done on a number of these reform proposals.

24 But this work can't continue unless the

1 Senate authorizes the work to continue. So
2 we believe we have that mandate in place.

3 And again, the first reform recommendation
4 is to continue the work of this committee.

5 Other members who would like to speak.

6 SENATOR WINNER: Well, thank you,
7 Senator.

8 Obviously, I want to reiterate my
9 unhappiness with having this report made
10 available to me this morning. And I just
11 think that that was sort of indicative of
12 the fact that while there are some proposals
13 here that we discussed and agreed upon and
14 do make some positive steps forward, there
15 are major, major omissions here in areas
16 that I believe are probably the most central
17 to that which we heard in the form of
18 testimony and that we have heard from the
19 prominent critics of the operation of the
20 New York State Senate in the past -- the
21 Brennan Center and others.

22 As Senator Bonacic pointed out, the
23 whole issue of equal resources or sharing of
24 resources on a more equitable basis has been

1 largely ignored. And while there is a major
2 effort put forth on the part of the majority
3 to indicate that the minimum staffing
4 allowance and a recognition that there needs
5 to be resources made available for ranking
6 members on committees is a great statement
7 in principle, I think when one analyzes the
8 actual allocation of resources that are
9 currently undertaken in this Senate, that
10 you will find that that is somewhat of a
11 disingenuous type of a representation as to
12 what the reality is as far as how resources
13 are in fact being shared.

14 I know that there is a great deal of
15 reluctant to deal with the whole issue of
16 allocation of member items, some of which is
17 based upon past history in this place.
18 However, there was the indication before
19 that notwithstanding past practices that
20 there was going to be a new era and a new

21 dawn of equality as far as resources in the
22 new majority.

23 And we now find that, you know,
24 astonishingly -- I mean, I don't know if

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1 it's accurate, Senator Valesky; maybe you
2 can indicate whether it's true or not --
3 that press reports indicate that you are
4 being allocated \$4.7 million in resources
5 for your constituents, all of which breathe
6 and eat just like mine, and that I am
7 allocated \$250,000. So if that's equality,
8 I think we need to have a new math here
9 adopted in the New York State Senate.

10 So while I think that, you know, it's
11 good to talk about equality of resources,
12 once again, the facts belie the actual
13 reality.

14 So additionally, some things that I was
15 particularly interested in as far as process
16 are not being, in my judgment, adequately

17 addressed here, notwithstanding the fact
18 that we've had the opportunity to do so.
19 And that's why again I reiterate my
20 disappointment about having to find time
21 between 9 o'clock and 11:30 today to be able
22 to review this report.

23 But as Senator Bonacic pointed out,
24 there is an omission as far as the guarantee

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1 of the ability to bring a bill to a vote on
2 the floor.

3 There is I don't believe any
4 discussions with regard to removing the
5 ability to vote without recommendation in
6 the committee process, at least
7 recommendations that were here.

8 I did note also that there is a change
9 in what we had discussed substantially as it
10 relates to the motion to discharge process
11 vis-a-vis the committee and this new

12 petition that you discussed, something of
13 which I don't believe was discussed in any
14 detail before and now is out here for our
15 approval.

16 Those, in my judgment, are major
17 discrepancies in what we had talked about
18 before and what is in the reality of this
19 report which you are asking us to vote on
20 this morning.

21 So those are items of my displeasure
22 with respect to the final process. And I
23 would only point out, you know, that while
24 in all due respect to my colleague John

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1 Bonacic, while he is designated as a
2 cochairman of this committee, I think that
3 that is somewhat of a Potemkin village as
4 far as whether or not it's a true
5 characterization as to the role in which he
6 and the other members of the minority
7 perform with respect to our duties here.

8 So in all due respect, Senator Valesky,
9 to you and to your other colleagues that I
10 believe have attempted to put this together,
11 I just think that we have fallen far short
12 of that which we could have done. And to
13 that extent, I would respectfully demur on
14 my acceptance and support.

15 SENATOR PARKER: Thank you, Senator
16 Valesky.

17 Let me just begin by congratulating our
18 majority leader, Senator Smith, for having
19 the vision and the courage really to put
20 together this temporary committee.
21 Literally never in the history of
22 legislative life in Albany has a committee
23 like this existed. This really has never
24 existed before. This is historical.

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1 And let me congratulate both the
2 cochairs, both Senator Bonacic and Senator

3 Valesky, for being involved in this and
4 intrepidly taking on this challenge --
5 again, you know, really casting a ship into
6 the ocean of the unknown. Because again,
7 this has never been done before.

8 This is historical in many different
9 ways, and not just because it's happened and
10 because it was done in a bipartisan fashion,
11 but because it actually defies the
12 convention of this place.

13 There is a very famous quote by
14 Frederick Douglass that says "Power concedes
15 to nothing but demand." And it was demand
16 in this particular case, but that demand
17 really came from the people of the State of
18 New York.

19 And what this Temporary Committee on
20 Rules and Administrative Reform attempted to
21 do was to respond to the demand of the
22 people of the State of New York that we be
23 better, that we operate ourselves in a way
24 that was in line with the stations that we

1 hold in life, because we have been given a
2 public trust in all out of our elections to
3 represent them here in this place.

4 And so for 43 years Democrats in Albany
5 in the Senate suffered under the tyranny of
6 the majority, with not being able to get a
7 piece of paper without the majority leader
8 saying so, let alone a bill to the floor or
9 the ability to cosponsor a bill that you
10 thought was important that might have been
11 held by one of your Republican colleagues.

12 We have, in a matter of 90 days, done
13 what the Republican majority could not do in
14 43 years, which is do things like allow
15 cosponsorships of bills by Democrats and
16 Republicans. It sounds like a simple thing,
17 but this has not happened prior to that.

18 We, without even this committee,
19 changed the allocation -- and you heard
20 Senator Valesky talk about that -- allowing

21 \$350,000 to be the benchmark on which every
22 single Senator was given an allocation for
23 their office, 75 percent more than a junior
24 member of the minority ever had. That's

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1 more money than I think I saw in all, you
2 know, five or six years that I had in the
3 minority.

4 And so I want to respectfully disagree
5 with my colleagues when they say that these
6 are turtle steps or small steps or haven't
7 gone as far as we could have gone. The
8 reality is we have done historical work
9 here, that we have in fact taken great
10 strides to the beginning of what we admit is
11 a process.

12 And that's what we should all
13 understand government and politics to be.
14 You know, utopia isn't a place, utopia is a
15 journey. It is a process of becoming. And
16 we're all, and particularly this body, is a

17 process of becoming.

18 So, I mean, we can talk about the past
19 so we can understand our mistakes so we can
20 go forward and talk about things like in
21 2001 when the Republican Senate majority
22 changed the rules without prior notice or
23 any notification. And we can talk about
24 numbers of times when that happened.

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1 And so in the context of this, we
2 understand that there were things done in
3 the past that we now need to change if we're
4 going to go forward in a different way. And
5 although these recommendations may not be
6 everything that everybody wants, they take
7 giant steps, in fact, towards getting us to
8 where we all want to be at in a very near
9 future.

10 The issue was raised about why vote on
11 a draft today. A couple of things. One, we

12 all received the report at the same time.

13 So I didn't receive the report any time

14 sooner than anyone else here did.

15 But for anyone to pretend that what

16 they see as the primary contents of this

17 draft report today is new to them in some

18 kind of way means they were not paying

19 attention either to the meetings that we've

20 had in very public settings or they weren't

21 paying attention to their own counsel.

22 Mr. Chapman in fact received an email

23 on March 23rd that outlined the agreements,

24 including, you know, committee

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1 presentations, number of terms of -- term

2 limits of committees, attendance at

3 committee meetings, removal of proxy

4 committee voting, development of amendment

5 process in committees, regional budget

6 hearings, oversight, petition of hearings,

7 committee transparency, chamber

8 transparency, NYSPAN.

9 All of the things that we are talking
10 about in this report on March 23rd was
11 something that your counsel received an
12 email about. And these were things that
13 were talked about at length at meetings that
14 I attended and many of you attended.

15 So I think that it's a gross distortion
16 to describe the process by which this
17 committee has operated as one that goes
18 against the very principles that we're
19 trying to uphold here. You know, it sounds
20 like as if when you received the report is
21 the first time we've ever heard of this
22 stuff.

23 The reality is we've been talking about
24 a number of these issues at length over the

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1 past 30 days. And even the way we laid them
2 out is not a different set of values or a

3 different set of recommendations than we've
4 been going forward with.

5 But there are many things that we are
6 doing this year that, again, frankly just
7 literally had not been done. It sounds like
8 it's revolutionary -- and it is -- for us to
9 literally take a meeting and take the
10 reports of the meeting and put those on a
11 website for any constituent, anybody
12 practically in the world to be able to see
13 what is happening in our committee meetings.
14 That kind of transparency and accountability
15 is unheard of here in Albany.

16 And so for us to take those first steps
17 is monumental. And I want to congratulate
18 all of us for being involved in that
19 process. I think that when we look at
20 strengthening committees that those things
21 are going to be very, very important for all
22 of us in terms of our legislative agendas
23 and having the ability to do that.

24 And I do get the concern that many

1 people have regarding discretionary funds.
2 But let's be extremely clear. The charge
3 and mission of the Temporary Committee on
4 Rules and Administrative Reform was never
5 about resource allocation. It's not even
6 really a rules issue. And Chairman Valesky
7 indicated that. Senator Smith indicated
8 that. That was never the charge of this
9 committee.

10 So it was inappropriate for us to deal
11 with it both within the context of these
12 committee meetings or in the context of the
13 draft report, because it's not a charge of
14 this body.

15 However, both chairmen have indicated
16 that there is in fact a significant need to
17 continue the work, and that's why the first
18 recommendation is to continue this committee
19 in more than a temporary way, but at least
20 in a temporary way throughout the end of the

21 year, if not in a permanent way, so we can
22 in fact mark our course and make sure that
23 the things that we do here are in fact going
24 forward in the way that we in fact designed

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1 them.

2 But for us to come here and pretend
3 that resource allocation was the primary
4 charge of this committee goes against
5 everything that we have continually said as
6 we've gone forward in this process of
7 looking at rules and administrative reform.

8 And so, you know, I guess that the
9 minority does have a right to put out a
10 minority report. That makes me question
11 whether there was a good-faith effort to in
12 fact agree upon anything that we're going to
13 do here anyway. But that's fine. I think
14 that, you know, we will continue the
15 process, and I look forward to seeing your
16 report and us continuing to move forward on

17 the things that we agree upon.
18 And at least make sure that the reforms
19 that we have put forward today in the draft
20 report get implemented and we start to
21 change the culture in a real significant way
22 and a way that we know will address the
23 needs and empower all of the members of the
24 New York State Senate.

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1 SENATOR GRIFFO: I think, Senator
2 Parker, you've made some points. And I
3 think just -- we've got people sitting here
4 today, students too. And in order to -- I
5 think maybe I'll put it in a summary. In
6 order to understand and appreciate a motion
7 picture, you've got to watch the whole film.
8 You don't just watch the trailers.

9 And I think in this particular instance
10 we had a unique opportunity. I don't think,
11 despite the fact that we have discussed

12 this -- and I think it was encouraging, the
13 manner in which we discussed and debated
14 some of these ideas. In fact, it was quite
15 encouraging on both sides of the aisle.
16 People felt that it was wholesome and were
17 encouraged by the activity and dialogue that
18 took place.

19 But I don't think it's unreasonable,
20 even though we have been discussing this --
21 and I don't know that you feel comfortable
22 getting dumped on with reports and bills
23 that say: Just do this right now. I think
24 we've heard that criticism in Washington,

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1 we've heard that criticism lodged against
2 Albany.

3 So despite the fact that these were
4 topics that we were discussing -- you could
5 talk about a good-faith effort here from the
6 very beginning. But I do think that in this
7 particular instance, we asked for additional

8 time to get this report done over the
9 holidays. What would it have taken for
10 everybody -- and we talked about this. If
11 you look back in the record, we talked about
12 the procedure then, how do we do this, if we
13 would have an opportunity to get this and
14 study it and discuss it before we even took
15 any formal votes. All of those procedural
16 issues were on the table.

17 And I don't think it's unreasonable
18 here today to say why can't we continue to
19 read these 23 pages and absorb them and
20 further discuss them and see if there should
21 be any amendments. Unless you have a
22 preconceived notion and that's been
23 determined. Unless there truly isn't equal
24 authority in the cochairs.

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1 According to page 2 of this report that
2 I've looked at cursorily this morning, it

3 indicates an equal share. Now, if Senator
4 Bonacic didn't have any decision-making role
5 in determining what the procedure should be,
6 then how could that be equal? And that's
7 what I'm saying. That's kind of -- we're
8 sending a bad message here.

9 And did you really -- you heard what
10 was said in these hearings, but did anybody
11 truly listen? Sure, maybe the existence of
12 a committee is to be valued. But to have
13 true value is to achieve real reform. And
14 this was a unique opportunity. And I think
15 just this very meeting here today sends the
16 wrong message.

17 It would have been so easy, if you were
18 truly genuine, in saying, Let's get this
19 done, let's take a couple of hours and go
20 look at this and come back tomorrow morning.
21 What's the problem? You've already asked
22 for a delay to the majority leader and the
23 minority leader in distributing the report.
24 So what's the issue?

1 How can you be that uncomfortable and
2 unwilling to do that if we're truly
3 concerned and believe that we want to make
4 things different here?

5 And no, we're not going to agree on
6 each and every aspect of this report.

7 That's fine. But we can at least further
8 discuss it and make those points now that we
9 have a final draft. And it is a draft.

10 I'll emphasize the word "draft." I don't
11 know why you vote on a draft anyway, because
12 that's something that you review before you
13 submit a rules committee report to the
14 leaders, apparently. And I may need some
15 education in that procedurally, again.

16 But I think that's my problem here. I
17 wanted to really move in a bold and dramatic
18 fashion. But if you want to take small
19 steps -- because that's what I heard people
20 say, that Albany's culture needs to change.

21 The people that are here said, Change
22 Albany. And this was an opportunity that
23 began with the leader's decision. And now
24 we need it to go further.

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1 In my opinion, you know, is it real
2 change, or do we make it look or appear like
3 change? I want real change. And small
4 steps may be the beginning, but a lot of
5 steps have to be taken. And I think this is
6 unfortunate today that we can't even agree
7 whether or not we could just have some time
8 to thoroughly review the 23 pages that was
9 prepared by the staff, come back and discuss
10 it and make a recommendation. I don't know
11 what's wrong or unreasonable in asking for
12 that if we were truly committed to making
13 things different here in Albany.

14 Is anybody going to answer that or just
15 let it go?

16 COCHAIR VALESKY: Oh, no. First of

17 all, it is real change. And I'm not going
18 to repeat everything that Senator Parker
19 already said. But, I mean, you know, it is
20 significant reform of the legislative
21 process unlike anything that this house has
22 seen in anyone's memory. I mean, I just
23 think that's a fact. Number two --

24 SENATOR GRIFFO: But speak to the

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1 process, though, Senator, today. What's so
2 unreasonable --

3 COCHAIR VALESKY: But there's nothing
4 in here --

5 SENATOR GRIFFO: We haven't --

6 COCHAIR VALESKY: -- that we haven't
7 already addressed in our previous meetings,
8 number one.

9 And number two, we are already -- yes,
10 Senator Bonacic and I, by virtue of a letter
11 to Senators Smith and Skelos, we are already

12 past the point that was set in the
13 resolution that established this committee.

14 This report was due over a week ago.

15 Now, fortunately, the two leaders agreed to
16 accept Senator Bonacic and my letter. But
17 by virtue of the actions of the full Senate,
18 this is already overdue.

19 So I think -- and to conclude that
20 point, these are a series of 15 or so reform
21 proposals that would reform the Senate
22 unlike anything that's been done before. If
23 you agree with them, you'll support them.
24 If you don't agree with them, I guess you'll

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1 vote no. I mean, that's a decision that we
2 all have to make.

3 The fact of the matter is we can't
4 continue the work of this committee unless
5 the Senate authorizes us to do so. We are
6 already beyond the deadline that was set in
7 resolution.

8 SENATOR GRIFFO: How did you achieve
9 that, to go beyond that deadline?

10 COCHAIR VALESKY: Senator Bonacic and
11 I wrote a letter that was accepted by both
12 Senator Smith and Senator Skelos.

13 SENATOR GRIFFO: You think it's
14 unreasonable to ask for another 24 hours in
15 order for people to actually have an
16 opportunity to thoroughly read a report that
17 was issued? Despite the fact that we
18 discussed concepts. This now is a draft
19 report --

20 SENATOR SERRANO: If I could
21 interject, Senator Griffo. We've had long
22 deliberation and testimony. And I think the
23 hearings and the meetings that we had
24 throughout the state were extremely

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1 significant.

2 These first steps that we see in this

3 report are no-brainers. And this is, I
4 think, important that we make this message,
5 that we are looking -- we acknowledge that
6 there's a lot more work that needs to be
7 done. And that's why the first
8 recommendation is to continue the work of
9 this committee. This is in no way an end to
10 what we have done.

11 But I think what's historic here -- and
12 I believe Senator Valesky alluded to this --
13 is that it was 43 years for these meetings
14 to happen. We had plenty of time. There
15 was no interest on behalf of the Republican
16 majority to have this sort of committee in
17 this sort of setting to discuss these
18 issues.

19 Right out of the gate with the new
20 Democratic majority, the first thing we did
21 was to put this committee together to begin
22 the process. We had nothing really to look
23 at in the past, because this was never done
24 before. So in many ways we're learning as

1 we go. And I for one believe that we have a
2 ways to go.

3 But I think you can't question the
4 genuineness of the process or the
5 recommendations put forth by Senator
6 Valesky. And I think you lack a certain
7 level of credibility when you consider that
8 there was opportunities in the years past to
9 begin this process and that was never done.

10 Indeed, many within the Republican majority
11 scoffed at the notion of reform when it was
12 brought up.

13 So I think it's important that we keep
14 that in context. And you're right, it's
15 important that we not dwell too much on the
16 past, because it's pointless. And I have a
17 wonderful relationship with you, Senator
18 Griffo, and I look forward to working with
19 you on this committee and our other
20 committees.

21 But I think that the recommendations
22 that are put forth here are very basic, that
23 we can all agree upon. As a starting point,
24 we continue the work of the committee and we

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1 continue to move forward from that point.

2 That's my belief.

3 SENATOR GRIFFO: And I appreciate
4 that, Senator Serrano. Because as a newer
5 member of the Legislature, like Senator
6 Stewart-Cousins, I learned things by
7 listening to her that I found appalling.

8 And I did join -- and Senator Valesky
9 knows that -- in my first two years in
10 advocating for change and joined Senator
11 Bonacic in trying to promote reform and
12 change through legislative resolutions. So
13 we understood -- many of us who are newer
14 understand that things need to be different.

15 I just said that this was a unique
16 opportunity. And we have till April 24th;

17 that's what the letter asked for. And I
18 think this is just an illustration of having
19 the opportunity so that we don't commit the
20 mistakes of the past.

21 And you would have provided everybody
22 with an opportunity to just thoroughly read
23 23 pages and come back and then offer any
24 ideas. If there was any issues that we may

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1 have seen, whether they're grammatical or
2 policy-wise, that we could have brought up.
3 I just don't think that's unrealistic.

4 And I know, Senator Valesky, in the
5 past you have felt that way. And I'm
6 troubled today, because the report doesn't
7 say you have to vote up or down. Because I
8 believe in reform, and I want to see things
9 changed.

10 And I just think that some of these
11 things that worry me -- if you look at --

12 like, for instance, you talk about how
13 resources are being allocated. And it not
14 may not be directly tied to this particular
15 situation and charged to the committee. But
16 if you look at the way resources are
17 allocated, you might be able to say the
18 manner has changed. But if you look at the
19 total resources and how they've been
20 redirected, it may be different and
21 questionable.

22 Those are the types of things we should
23 truly question, ask and look at, in my
24 opinion. Let's look at things for what they

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1 truly are. Let's avoid politics as usual.

2 This was a unique opportunity. And that's
3 why I'm disappointed.

4 COCHAIR VALESKY: Which, assuming
5 that the Senate continues the authority of
6 this committee to do its work, we can have
7 those continued discussions.

8 SENATOR WINNER: Senator, just in
9 response to that, which I think is seminal
10 to this discussion, is that here we have a
11 unique opportunity. And this unique
12 opportunity is such that we have, you know,
13 the attention of everybody here as to what
14 work we're doing.

15 And so I think that we're missing an
16 opportunity to go as far as the rhetoric
17 that was before the establishment of this
18 committee, whereby we could have done so
19 much more. And we missed the many, many
20 opportunities we had.

21 And, you know, in all due respect to
22 Senator Parker, you know -- and in respect
23 to my colleague Senator Griffo -- I believe
24 that the issue of resources is specifically

1 addressed in the resolution adopting this
2 committee. Because it talks about that it's

3 in need of a review of the administration in
4 the Senate. What could be more direct
5 toward resources?

6 It talks about ensuring the effective
7 and responsive Senate. What could be more
8 central to being effective than having
9 resources? And what could be more effective
10 to the goal of ensuring that each member of
11 the house has the opportunity to influence
12 the legislative process than to have the
13 resources available and necessary in order
14 to assure those types of opportunities to
15 influence the process?

16 And the hearings did produce repeated
17 calls by the witnesses from good government
18 groups and others to deal with the issue of
19 resources.

20 So to that extent, I just would
21 reiterate my disappointment that that has
22 not been addressed and that we are going by
23 a significant period of time whereby there
24 will be a continuation of, in my judgment,

1 the inequality and inequity of the
2 allocation of resources.

3 And, you know, this may be reflective
4 of the -- you know, we hear a lot about what
5 went on in the past, the last 43 years, and
6 we hear -- and I tell you I spent 26 years
7 in the minority in the Assembly, and I know
8 what went on over there and I know what
9 continues to go on over there.

10 And as such, you know, this should not
11 be about what went on in the past, as
12 Senator Serrano indicated. But it starts to
13 take on the aura that this is not only about
14 what went on in the past, but this is about
15 getting even. And I just think that that is
16 an unfortunate type of a message to send.

17 COCHAIR VALESKY: Let me just -- just
18 very briefly, and then I do want to
19 recognize Senator Squadron, who hasn't had a
20 chance to speak.

21 The second recommendation of this
22 report -- and I'll read it -- is to "Task
23 the Temporary Committee to study, and before
24 the next legislative year, recommend

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1 proposals to reform the system of member
2 item distribution, including a formal
3 request for proposal process and a more
4 equitable distribution of funds."

5 Let me ask Senator -- we have the
6 Transportation Committee that is scheduled
7 for a 12:30 meeting. I want to give an
8 opportunity for anyone who has not yet
9 spoken to speak, and then we'll ask for a
10 vote of the committee.

11 Senator Squadron.

12 SENATOR SQUADRON: Thank you very
13 much.

14 This is a day in Albany that I think
15 shows a lot of what there is up here.
16 There's a lot of cynicism in Albany, there

17 are a lot of wild rules and perverse
18 assumptions. And I'm new here; I've seen
19 them throughout.

20 And I do think that we should step back
21 a little bit and say what are the broader
22 goals of why we did this and where are we
23 trying to go.

24 We absolutely do want to empower

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1 rank-and-file members, create a deliberative
2 body where every member is accountable for
3 the votes that they take.

4 We want to have functional committees
5 that genuinely debate, revise legislation,
6 have transparency and accountability in
7 their actions.

8 And we need transparency more broadly
9 in our structures. That's transparency of
10 our documents, transparency of our bills,
11 transparency of our budgets -- our committee

12 budgets, our member budgets, and our body's
13 budget.

14 And we need more fairness. We need
15 fairness in the distribution of our
16 resources, both internally and externally.

17 Those four priorities drive me on this
18 committee and are driving me in my first
19 year in Albany. The fact is that this
20 report does not do everything that I would
21 want it to do or that any of us, I think,
22 would want it to do. But on every one of
23 those four measures, it moves the ball down
24 the field. And on every one of those four

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1 measures, it keeps the issue open so that we
2 can move the ball farther moving forward.

3 When I came here, my first vote was for
4 the Democratic majority after 70 years that
5 created the most dysfunctional legislature
6 in America. Seventy years of the tyranny of
7 the majority that created a system that was

8 absolutely shameful.

9 My first vote was to change the
10 majority leadership, and my second vote was
11 for new rules. And there's one feature of
12 those new rules -- there were some
13 improvements in them. There's one feature
14 that we can't forget today. They will
15 expire this year.

16 The work of this committee in this
17 report, the work of this committee moving
18 towards the November 1st deadline, the work
19 of this committee moving towards January 1,
20 2010, is on taking these recommendations,
21 taking those four priorities that I laid
22 out, and making them a reality in terms of
23 how we organize ourselves as a body.

24 And to sit here today after having been

1 part of a majority that created the most
2 dysfunctional legislature in the country and

3 claim that we're not, with this great
4 opportunity that was created in a new
5 majority, solving this today is cynical.

6 To suggest that you really believed
7 that this committee was going to change
8 everything, was going to move the ball from
9 the 1-yard line on one side to the 1-yard
10 line on the other side today is perverse.

11 What we are doing is we are moving the
12 ball down the field in significant ways and
13 leaving the door open to continue that
14 progress. That means a lot. That has
15 never, to my knowledge, happened here
16 before. A lot of folks here who have been
17 here longer than I, have seen a lot of the
18 craziness longer than I, can correct me if
19 I'm wrong.

20 So I do think that as we move forward
21 today, as we move forward to the 24th, as we
22 move forward to November 1st -- that this
23 committee hopefully continues -- the stakes
24 keep getting higher and the expectations

1 keep getting higher. That's absolutely
2 true. Those four priorities cannot be left
3 in the dust.

4 They are not being left in the dust
5 today. We are starting from an awful, awful
6 place, and we are marching towards a better
7 one. And I think in the world of Albany
8 we're marching pretty well today.

9 And so that's why I'm going to support
10 the report and look forward to continuing to
11 work on the committee to get to the place we
12 have to get to.

13 For the majority to claim that we get
14 there today would be wrong. And for the
15 minority to claim that we're not getting
16 towards there is equally wrong.

17 Thank you.

18 COCHAIR VALESKY: Senator?

19 SENATOR STEWART-COUSINS: Thank you.

20 I just wanted to, you know, very briefly

21 lend my voice to this.
22 And certainly as someone who came, as
23 many of my colleagues did in these last few
24 years, with the understanding that we were,

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1 in terms of our functionality as a
2 legislature, in a very bad place, I
3 understood that when I came here I would
4 have to be part of the solution. And I
5 understood that there had to be changes in
6 order to even begin to discuss how to be
7 part of the solution.

8 And this is really where we are today.
9 When we began this session, we talked about
10 the League of Women Voters bringing students
11 here to listen to us discuss reform. That
12 is historic in and of itself. I don't think
13 in all of the years of advocacy of this and
14 other groups would there have ever been an
15 opportunity for young people to come in and
16 actually listen to both sides of the aisle

17 talking about something that is this
18 important and this relevant to every person
19 in this state.

20 This is an extraordinary time, an
21 extraordinary day. And we can't pretend
22 that because it hasn't taken into
23 consideration every single thing that we
24 would have wanted to see done that it was

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1 not indeed a very, very important committee,
2 a very important report, a very important
3 structure, a very illuminating process and
4 one I hope we will be able to continue.

5 That's what we're asking in the very
6 first rule change, is that we be able to
7 continue to do the other things that need to
8 be done.

9 When Senator Griffo referred to how I
10 talked about some of the things that
11 happened and how appalled you were, that's a

12 reality that I continue to bring up not
13 because I want to revisit the past but
14 because it's very important for people to
15 understand from whence we've come, how we
16 got this place, and how far it is even in
17 these small steps that we have been able to
18 move this ball down the field.

19 Clearly, it is not enough. But I don't
20 hear anyone around the table saying that
21 there is any opposition to any of these
22 beginning steps. And I think when we talk
23 about going forward -- and hopefully we will
24 go forward, and hopefully we will go forward

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1 earnestly and collectively -- we will talk
2 about, you know, the process. Not only will
3 we talk about it, we'll recreate it.

4 Because that's what this is about.
5 It's an evolutionary process. It's a
6 process that without our deciding to work
7 shoulder to shoulder will not make the

8 strides we need to make.

9 So I hope that we can agree at least to
10 the things that we agree on, which seem to
11 be on this page. And certainly we would
12 welcome additional reports and all that.
13 But understanding that this is not the end,
14 but it's the beginning of very, very
15 necessary change here in Albany.

16 COCHAIR BONACIC: First of all, I
17 want to thank the majority members. We've
18 expressed disappointment. We've used the
19 term "lost opportunity."

20 But if we're going to do any reform --
21 and I for one, and I'm sure Senator Winner
22 and Senator Griffo want to continue this
23 committee -- we need you to be the
24 champions. Because you're only six, and you

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1 have to go and work with your conference
2 with a mindset "it's our turn now, we want

3 to get even," and to overcome that. And
4 that's a difficult challenge.

5 So we're not here to be disrespectful
6 when we disagree. But there's a couple of
7 things that I'd like to share with you,
8 where there was some talk about the reports
9 were given and we had adequate time.

10 For the first time this morning, there
11 was a reference of the Bonacic bill of 2007,
12 of which we had 10 Democratic members. To
13 refresh your recollection, this was
14 legislation that we put forward in the
15 majority, of which we had 10 democratic
16 sponsors, including Senator Valesky and
17 Senator Smith.

18 If the Bonacic bill was adopted in
19 2007 -- or even if it was adopted today, not
20 the language in this report -- this is what
21 would have happened. And I'm only saying
22 this for the record. The minority
23 conference would have received \$20 million
24 instead of the current \$13.5 million. If

1 the Bonacic bill was adopted in this report,
2 the minority would have gotten \$6.5 million
3 instead of the \$1.4 million that is
4 suggested.

5 Now, we've never had any discussions
6 about the implementation of the Bonacic
7 bill; it appeared for the first time this
8 morning. That was one area where we could
9 have done a little work and had discussion.

10 In terms of resources, the enlightening
11 education to me by the public hearings with
12 the good government groups -- and especially
13 the Brennan Center, the League of Women
14 Voters, NYPIRG, Common Cause -- they said
15 strengthen the committees. Remember?
16 Strengthen the committees. That's the area
17 where there's honest debate. Where there's
18 public hearings, you bring in outsiders,
19 experts. And that's where the quality
20 decisions are made on legislation.

21 To me, that was like a bulb going off.
22 I said wow, that's what we should do. And I
23 think we all felt that way. But when it
24 came to strengthening the committees, we

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1 backed off for some reason.

2 And I'm just going to quote my good
3 friend Senator Klein, who's been quiet
4 today. But he said in our committee
5 meetings: "I would like to make a
6 recommendation that allows the ranker on
7 these committees to be able to hire their
8 own committee or committee staff person,
9 have a counsel as well as a director."

10 That's nowhere in these
11 recommendations. And that was something we
12 all agreed with. Then there was
13 backpedaling.

14 But my point is if that's where we're
15 going to strengthen the committee and dilute
16 central staff, that's the area we've got to

17 address here. And we didn't do it this
18 time.

19 It was reported in the newspapers, for
20 purposes of example -- not to embarrass
21 anybody -- but Senator Thompson's staff is
22 on track to consume \$380,000 in the fiscal
23 year that starts Wednesday. It doesn't
24 include the additional \$330,000 for his

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1 committee. Senator Stachowski, \$245,000 to
2 staff his committee. We got zero.

3 We got \$350,000 that you talk about in
4 being generous to run our offices and to
5 handle it with our constituents. But with
6 committee staff, your actions on money for
7 your committees and what you're giving to
8 the minority, you've been disingenuous. You
9 have.

10 Now, if you say you recognize it, it's
11 an area of improvement, I accept it. I

12 accept it. But you know, I still believe
13 that our rules affect our policy. I believe
14 in that.

15 SENATOR PARKER: Senator Bonacic, in
16 2007 when you had that Bonacic bill, you
17 were in the majority; right?

18 COCHAIR BONACIC: We were.

19 SENATOR PARKER: What was the floor
20 vote on that bill?

21 COCHAIR BONACIC: It never came to
22 the floor.

23 SENATOR PARKER: Oh, so you were
24 never able to get it to the floor when you

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1 were in the majority?

2 COCHAIR BONACIC: I couldn't dilute
3 the power of Senator Bruno. He would not
4 let it out. This is what I'm getting at --

5 SENATOR PARKER: So this is
6 historical, then. Because you weren't able
7 to do it then, and now we've done more than

8 you were able to do --

9 COCHAIR BONACIC: I'm not going to

10 ask you to define "historical."

11 (Laughter.)

12 COCHAIR BONACIC: But this is not a

13 blame game. This is just talking about

14 fairness and equity. You don't punish us

15 when you do this in committee. You don't.

16 It's the constituents that suffer.

17 And the last point I want to make, the

18 last point, we did -- you did, predominantly

19 -- a \$132 billion budget. Right? On every

20 area that affects New Yorkers and our

21 constituents. But \$250 million is the most

22 contentious, that creates the ugliness, the

23 partisanship, the unfairness. Member items

24 and staffing, \$250 million of a \$132 billion

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1 budget where we want to work together and be

2 partners in the future, that's the area we

3 break down on.

4 And I'm asking for good men and women
5 to step up and get over this \$250 million.
6 Because once we get through the ugliness and
7 the friction where every Senator can have
8 the respect to serve their constituents --
9 not to punish their constituents, like the
10 minority was punished, which was bad public
11 policy. Bad public policy. And we want
12 more empowerment for each of us, and more
13 civility, and to share the burden of running
14 a state government, which is not easy.

15 So I thank you. I will be recommending
16 to my colleagues that we continue this
17 committee. Because every time we take a
18 step, a turtle step, it's better than where
19 we've been. And we want to make progress.
20 There's much more work to be done.

21 But on the other things, we'd rather
22 abstain, do a report, tell you where we
23 agree and tell you where we think you came
24 up short and we would like to see you do

1 better. That would be my recommendation to
2 my colleagues.

3 I don't want to vote no on this.
4 There's too much work that's been put in
5 here. We've done turtle steps, and I want
6 to keep them. And I want to continue to do
7 better.

8 I'm done talking. And thank the
9 members, thank everyone.

10 COCHAIR VALESKY: We're actually up
11 against some standing committee schedules
12 that need this room.

13 So I think that we do need -- I am
14 looking for an affirmative vote from this
15 committee that says to Senator Smith and
16 Senator Skelos that the recommendations that
17 are contained in this report are the basis
18 of a direction that this Senate should be
19 moving in.

20 So I'd like to ask that those members

21 who support advancing this report to Senator
22 Smith and Senator Skelos to indicate by
23 saying aye.

24 (Response of "Aye.")

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1 COCHAIR VALESKY: Those opposed,
2 indicate by saying no.

3 (No response.)

4 COCHAIR VALESKY: The report is
5 adopted and will be delivered to the
6 leaders.

7 SENATOR WINNER: And the record, the
8 record indicates that --

9 COCHAIR BONACIC: So it's clear, we
10 vote yes on continuing the committee. We
11 abstain on the other recommendations.

12 We will give a report that votes yes or
13 no on this series of recommendations in the
14 main report.

15 COCHAIR VALESKY: The record will so
16 reflect. We look forward to your report.

17 Thank you, everyone.

18 (Whereupon, at 12:50 p.m., the

19 Senate adjourned.)

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