

News From the
New York State
Senate Democratic Conference



PRESS RELEASE

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**Remarks by Temporary President of the Senate Malcolm A. Smith
After the Senate Leadership Vote**

I'm honored ...humbled ...and truly grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this new chapter in our state's history.

The fact that I'm standing here is a testament to a new day in Albany: a day in which we can come together to exercise the kind of leadership the people of New York deserve.

I look forward to working with all of our Republican colleagues on the issues facing New York.

We are one Senate, with a common goal of improving the quality of life for the people of this state and a common purpose of making government more efficient.

Much has been written, said and speculated about this moment – my so-called “defining moment” – and many have asked whether or not I will rise to the challenge of plotting a new course to get New York back on track. Those questions miss a critical point: this day is not just about me or even the conference – this is about the millions of people in this great state who want to see unwavering commitment and bold leadership on issues they face in their daily lives.

There are seminal events in our lives where our mettle is revealed, even to us. The lessons I've learned on the road traveled to get here have left me more determined than ever before to reform the way our government operates.

Politics is the ultimate form of public service, the pursuit of which, I believe, should be a calling, not a career.

The principles of my faith tell me: do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind; regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Surely, we will not agree on every piece of legislation and every decision we have to make, but we are expected to govern with integrity, responsibility and a servant's heart. These are the ideals that will guide my service every day.

There is just too much at stake for us to do less. Across this great state – from Brooklyn to Batavia, from Hauppauge to Hudson – middle class families are hurting: unemployment and

poverty are rising; mortgage foreclosures are ever-increasing; and health care coverage is disappearing. The people are looking to us, their government leaders, to ease their burdens.

But, instead of putting our resources into the hands of our working men and women, every budget cycle millions of dollars are squandered on pet projects of dubious value to advance an individual legislator's political agenda, at the expense of the common good.

The people of this state can no longer afford government for the political class, by the special interests.

Instead of allocating valuable resources for local programs and services, we waste hundreds of millions of dollars annually on public authorities that have overlapping and duplicative functions.

We have to be smarter, more accountable about how we use our resources. We have to find unprecedented new efficiencies in government administration.

I've said it before and you will hear more on this shortly: in our first 100 days in the Majority, we will push for consolidation of state agencies and a complete overhaul of the empire zones program. Slashing wasteful spending on bloated government is a measure that will save the state considerable capital.

We're grappling with the biggest budget crisis in decades -- \$2 billion for the current fiscal year and up to \$15 billion for the next year. In the midst of this crisis we are fortunate enough to have a governor who had the vision to sound the alarm early on about our dire fiscal crisis. Governor Paterson's budget proposal is a real wake up call for us to recognize that our state and nation's economic problems must transform the way we do business here. We are committed to working with the governor and our legislative colleagues to meet our fiscal challenges head-on.

But we also know the challenges we face and the reform we need can be achieved only through shared commitment and "shared sacrifice" to replace wasteful practices with prudent policies.

We must return this chamber to the standard that had defined our democracy since its birth -- and once again usher in government for the people.

Government for the people means an economic recovery plan for businesses large and small, and real jobs that put people to work.

We will generate a revenue stream for the state's overall economy by investing in new technologies and funding infrastructure and transportation projects like mass transit, high-speed rail, roads and school construction projects. These efforts will go a long way to reviving the economy from the ground up -- stimulating our local economies.

The tough fiscal times we face call for tough choices, but we know we cannot make those decisions alone. Now, more than ever before, we will forge a stronger state-federal partnership to revive New York's economy and provide tax relief for middle-class families. We will

continue to work with our congressional delegation and the Obama administration to create opportunities for new jobs all over the state.

Government for the people also means reforming the way business is done in Albany so that our legislative process is more open, more accountable and more effective.

We have said that one of our first orders of business is to reform the Rules of the Senate to give members meaningful deliberation of legislation and to foster bi-partisan agreement on matters of public interest. Today, we are making good on that promise.

This morning we created a new committee on rules and administration – a bi-partisan commission – to review the full Senate Rules and adopt a process for greater transparency that allows greater public input into our legislative process, as well as provides for greater authority for individual members. The commission will report back to us no later than the end of September.

Imagine a fully functioning legislature where Senate committees function like real committees, where members debate and even amend bills in the committee, where members of the Majority and Minority introduce bills onto the floor for a vote, and those votes are recorded. And, where budget conference committees and individual members are able to negotiate final bills with their Assembly counterparts.

To my colleagues on both sides of the political aisle I say to you: we need your creativity and innovative approach to legislation and to policy that moves New York ahead. You will have an audience with me, and we will stand together and show strong and determined leadership.

We are one legislative body representing all of New York, it's time we start governing that way.

We will set our sights high for the first 100 days. But every day, we will dedicate ourselves to dispelling the notion that Albany has the most dysfunctional legislature in the nation. We will put aside the issues that divide us as partisans and individual legislators to harness the full potential of this glorious chamber and meet the needs of the people we were elected to serve.

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