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## Sampson to Skelos: Bring back rules reform panel

Posted on January 26, 2011 at 4:15 pm by Casey Seiler, Capitol bureau chief in Dean Skelos, General, John Sampson, State Senate

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The debate over drafting rules for the Senate continued today, with Minority Leader John Sampson calling for the revival of bipartisan committees and Majority Leader Dean Skelos explaining that the rules his conference tried to

"If you look at some of the rules changes we had yesterday, it was all about committee structure, functioning," Skelos said. "There was no power grab in all of that."

"There's a lot more to come, but we have to start functioning. This is what yesterday was about," Skelos said. "If you look at the rule changes, they weren't anything that were dramatic that needed a lot of study. We have to function, we have to get our committees going...it was just part of the orderly process in terms of the Senate functioning."

He also explained his decision to remove the tie-breaking power of the lieutenant governor: "The temporary president and majority leader should be elected by senators, not by the lieutenant governor," "It clarifies it, and if that situation ever arose in the future, it's very clear and you would avoid lawsuits and government would be able to function."

And also addressed the decision to give committee assignments to members of Klavinucciesky, the renegade Democratic caucus: "They asked, the 26 in the minority did not ask," Skelos explained. "I don't think it was a payoff anymore than when they appointed Senator Morahan and Maziarz as committee chairs that that was a payoff."

Here's Sampson's letter.

Dear Senator Skelos,

In early 2009, Senate Democrats created the Temporary Committee on Rules and Administration Reform, co-chaired by Senators David J. Valesky, and John J. Bonacic. The committee held four public hearings, investigating ways to reform the Senate proceedings and administration. The committee's findings and accompanying minority report laid the foundation for the reforms finally adopted by a near-unanimous bipartisan vote on July 16, 2009.

While the rules changes proposed by Senate Republicans on January 25, 2011 were apparently few in number, in our judgment their impact is profound. I am therefore deeply troubled by the lack of notice from Senate Republicans, and the subsequent attempt to ram this permanent rules resolution through committee and to the floor.

The Majority may Rule, but in a deliberative democratic process, the Minority still has Rights. I am concerned about the precedent these attempted actions may create in our body, and I am concerned about the signal this attempt to rush things sends to the public.

The Senate's rules set the table for how we conduct business on behalf of New Yorkers, but providing these changes to the Minority staff just two hours before the legislative session silences the voices of the millions of New Yorkers the Members of the Minority Conference represent.

This act should not be taken lightly. These difficult economic times call for fairness on behalf of all residents in every region of our great state. Those citizens must have equal representation through the legislators they have elected, and any change would be a reversal from how your conference was treated over the past two years.

As Senate Republicans finalize central staff budgetary allotments, these recent actions raise the question whether New Yorkers represented by the Senate Minority may be further deprived by an overly partisan and disproportionate split of monetary allocations and other resources.

There is a better way. Given the concerns raised by the lack of procedural notice and reservations raised with respect to the substance of the proposed rules changes, I respectfully request you re-institute the Temporary Committee on Rules and Administration Reform. There should be a public, transparent, and bipartisan process led by Members from both Conferences, who will be charged with drafting permanent rules all 62 Members can support.

In 2009, the Temporary Committee had six Majority Members and three Minority Members. Accordingly, should you agree to honor recent practice and precedent by reinstating the Temporary Committee, I will appoint Senator José M. Serrano, Senator Daniel L. Squadron, and Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins to serve as the Minority Members of the Committee.

Provided adequate and public notice is given, these Members are ready to meet with representatives of your conference at any time and location of your choosing.

It is my hope we can build on the progress made in the 2009 Rules Reforms, and give New Yorkers greater confidence their voices will be heard in the Senate that is run in the serious and bipartisan manner these difficult times demand.

Sincerely,  
John L. Sampson  
Minority Leader

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