

1259 Dryden Road  
Ithaca, NY 14850  
November 24, 2004

Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton  
106 East Court Street  
Ithaca, NY 14850

Dear Assemblywoman Lifton,

I read your guest column on New York State legislative reform in the November 18, 2004 edition of the Ithaca Journal. You said, perhaps with reservations, that "I support nine out of their 10 proposals," where the proposals referenced come from Common Cause/NY, Citizens Union, the League of Women Voters, and the New York Public Interest Research Group. The details of those ten proposals are available at <http://www.nypirg.org/goodgov/reformny/10steps.pdf>.

I'd like to call your attention to Step 8 of that document, in particular on page 31 where it calls for:

"Legislative Process Reform. There should be a prohibition on proxy voting. Legislators should attend committee meetings to insure that their constituents' views are fully represented in decision-making."

This section appears to reference the Brennan Center report, which is available from [http://www.brennancenter.org/programs/downloads/albanyreform\\_finalreport.pdf](http://www.brennancenter.org/programs/downloads/albanyreform_finalreport.pdf). Pages 30 and 31 of that report discuss "fast roll call voting," often known as empty-seat voting because this process spares legislators who want to vote yes from having to be physically present in the chamber.

According to their survey of other professional legislatures, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey are the **only** states which consider this method acceptable. Pennsylvania uses it less than half the time, and New Jersey uses it "fewer than ten times per session." The legislators of other states - including California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin - appear to get along just fine without it. New York appears to use it regularly.

Do you support empty-seat voting in the New York Assembly? If so, do you feel comfortable leaving behind what has always been a key feature of representative democracy, the gathering of the representatives to vote? And if not, how do you plan to do away with this practice?

Sincerely,

Simon St.Laurent  
<http://livingindryden.org>