

1259 Dryden Road
Ithaca, NY 14850
(Town of Dryden)
November 24, 2004

Senator James L. Seward
District Office
41 South Main Street
Oneonta, NY 13820

Dear Senator Seward,

I see on your web site (http://senatorjimseward.com/press_archive_story.asp?id=9761) that you are proud to announce the release of the Preliminary Report of the Senate Task Force on Government Reform. I'd like to ask you about one aspect of that report in depth.

In a brief moment of light, the report acknowledges:

"In addition to late budgets, critics of New York state government have focused on other aspects of legislative and government operations. Notably, one recent study analyzed the role of Senate and Assembly committees in reshaping and deliberating legislative issues prior to their moving to the floor for enactment." (6-7)

This section appears to reference the Brennan Center report, which is available from http://www.brennancenter.org/programs/downloads/albanyreform_finalreport.pdf.

I'd like to bring your attention to pages 30 and 31 of that report, which 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 Senate? 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>