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STATE SENATOR
Tenth District



SENATE
STATE OF DELAWARE
LEGISLATIVE HALL
DOVER, DELAWARE 19901

COMMITTEES
Adult & Juvenile Corrections
Combat Drug Abuse
Finance
Judiciary
Labor & Industrial Relations
Permanent Rules
Revenue & Taxation

Recently, I offered legislation in the State Senate that will, if ratified, change forever the way we do business in Dover. For too long, Delawareans have suffered under the paranoia of a few Senators who are so intimidated by public scrutiny that they have adopted rules that restrict public access to the people's Senate. My resolution, Senate Resolution 13, would change those rules.

Back in the 1970's, Republicans took power in the Delaware House of Representatives for the first time in years. A high priority was to end the "desk drawer veto" -- the power of committee chairs to unilaterally hold the fate of any bill in their hand. Until then, a House committee chair, upon being assigned a new piece of legislation for committee scrutiny, could simply ignore it or "toss it into a drawer."

No committee hearing. No public debate. No vote. Never to be seen again.

Thankfully, the House did away with that process almost 30 years ago. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the State Senate where the practice continues to this day.

As a voter and a citizen, you ask: How does this affect me? Let's see if I can answer that.

I can guarantee you that there is or has been legislation that you would support that is or has been placed in a drawer in the last five years. The issues run the entire spectrum of political positions and ideology: from gay anti-discrimination to parental consent for abortion; from creating an Inspector General's Office to land use bills to banking bills to tax bills to crime bills to health care bills to open government bills. You name it and it's been in a drawer in the Senate.

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Not all of them are good bills. Some I would have voted against. But each represents a serious public issue and should have been discussed openly in full public view. It's time to end the practice of allowing committee chairs to have oversized power in your State Senate. We are elected to represent the people on the issues of the day and we need to hear what the people think. Let's debate, discuss and vote on these crucial bills. Let every bill have its day in committee within 10 days of its introduction. Then, let every bill have at least a public committee vote. It's time we did it right. We owe the people of Delaware no less. Let me give you an example.

Your Senator almost certainly does not read the annual State budget before he or she votes on it. You can take my word for it. It's not that we don't want to; we're simply not given the opportunity. The budget is released in its final form, about three inches thick, with over \$3,000,000,000 of spending; only hours before it is voted into law. In an effort to correct this, last year the House of Representatives passed a bill, House Bill 4, which would ensure that legislators, the public, and the media have ample access to the budget in time to become informed about it before a vote. We would each know in advance where those billions of tax dollars are going. However, upon reaching the Senate, House Bill 4 was assigned to the Executive Committee where it now sits in the Chairman's drawer.

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I ask that you join me and the nine Senate co-sponsors and advocate the adoption of Senate Resolution 13. Without heavy vocal support from the voting public, this resolution will most certainly suffer the fate of so many before -- ironically, with a desk drawer veto.

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