

State Senate GOP names four breakaway Democrats to panels

By **Tom Precious**

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ALBANY -- Senate Republicans Tuesday rewarded four breakaway Democrats with posts to legislative panels -- worth an extra \$12,500 in annual stipends.

The Republicans also gave their No. 3 leadership post -- vice president pro tempore, which is worth an extra \$34,000 a year on top of his base pay of \$79,500 -- to Sen. George Maziarz, a Newfane lawmaker.

"I am pleased to appoint Sen. Maziarz as vice president pro tempore of the New York State Senate, further illustrating our commitment to Western New York. Unlike the Senate Democrats, who only paid lip service to Western New York, the Senate Republicans are committed to helping businesses create jobs and revitalizing the local economy," said Senate Majority Leader Dean G. Skelos.

The Republicans gave a committee on children and families issues -- which for two weeks had been held by freshman Sen. Patrick Gallivan of Erie County -- to Sen. Diane Savino, a Staten Island Democrat. Gallivan, who recently was given two committee chairmanships, will continue to lead the social services committee.

The Republicans also rewarded a Syracuse Democrat, David Valesky, with the aging committee chairmanship and appointed freshman Democrat David Carlucci of Rockland County to a little-known panel that reviews state regulations.

The leader of the Democratic dissidents, Sen. Jeff Klein, a Bronx Democrat, was tapped to lead a new committee on alcoholism and substance abuse.

But Klein will have to wait since creation of his committee requires a change in the Senate rules -- and Republicans failed today to get their own set of new rules for running the chamber out of a GOP-led committee.

Democrats, who lost power in last November's elections, objected to the GOP-crafted rules for more than two hours during a committee meeting. They said a couple of the changes pose legal problems, including one to prohibit Lt. Gov. Robert Duffy, who is legally president of the Senate, from casting tie-breaking votes in Senate leadership elections.

The back-and-forth all ended anti-climatically when the Republicans pulled the measure from the agenda because they were one vote short; a GOP senator from Long Island, Kenneth LaValle, left Albany earlier in the day before his vote was needed to get the rules changes out of the Senate Rules Committee.

The Senate is narrowly led -- 32-30 -- by the Republicans.

"Oops," said one official with the Senate Democrats, who experienced their own vote-counting problems during their two-year reign of power.

Mark Hansen, a Senate GOP spokesman, said the four Democrats were given committee posts in "an effort to make the Senate more bipartisan," and that the dissident Democrats had "made clear they want to put governing ahead of politics."

But Austin Shafran, a Senate Democratic spokesman, said the move by the former members of the Democratic conference "was never about independence but power, perks and now the payoff."

A spokesman for the four Democrats said their new posts pay less than they would have gotten had they stayed with the Democratic conference.