**Comments in Opposition** to Resolution on the Conduct of Senate Meetings

(submitted by Maureen Dolan, Parliamentarian, 4/13/18)

The time and effort involved in crafting this resolution is appreciated. Efficient meetings sounds appealing.

I know **efficiency** is great for **engines** and appliances, but efficiency can be **at odds** with broader principles of governance such as **openness** and **transparency**. I have **several serious concerns** about this Resolution.

Under the Bylaws, the development of the Agenda for Senate meetings is the responsibility of the EC.

The **1st Resolved** statement **is supportable** because it is **consistent with past practice**. For many years, reports of Standing Committees were **regular Agenda items** – not considered as Old or New Business.

**2nd Resolved Statement**: some Senators may already be aware that our **esteemed Secretary** (Jennie) has **initiated improvements** in the process by which reports, presentations and summary documents are submitted in preparation for inclusion on the Senate Agenda. I believe it would be helpful to allow our Secretary to describe these improvements in her **Annual Report** to be submitted to the Senate. Most of the procedural items cited in the 2nd Resolved statement are being **actively addressed** by the Secretary.

**3rd Resolved Statement** stipulates that “in order to be included for discussion at a Senate meeting, reports, updates, or other presentations shall include one or more ***specific action items*** to be taken up by the Senate”. This requirement is **overly restrictive** and as such, not consistent with SUNY Senate **standards and practices** through which we derive our **system of governance**. Senate history shows that **Open discussion itself** can be **the** **meaningful activity** that occurs in response to report or update or presentation.

This Resolution’s narrow focus on action items **impinges** on the **Chair’s role** as presiding officer.The Chair has discretion in the Order of Business and in allowing discussion. Rather than impose limitations, the Senate needs to be **dynamic** and **resilient.** We cannot foresee urgent matters that may come before us, when discussion and deliberation can be highly relevant. **Case in point**: open discussion on Parking Lot Environmental Impact was longer than scheduled because of the Chair’s discretion, given the importance of matter under consideration.

**4th** and **5th Resolved Statements:** I have serious concerns about proposed **restrictions and limitations** on discussion and debate during Senate meetings. The Senate was established with **commitment to openness**. Speakers are **limited only by time** – not content. A **diversity** of perspectives has always been encouraged. Such is our commitment to openness – that Senators may yield the floor to non-Senators and visitors. This Resolution would **restrict** **open discussion** and **limit who can speak** –contrary to governance principles.

Unless the Chair is **clairvoyant** and able to predict a speaker’s comments or perspective, proposed restrictions on discussion would **limit which voices get to be heard**. That is contrary to **openness** and **transparency**. Limiting discussion may lead to shorter meetings, but would **sacrifice Senate values** and **impede** Senate’s **overall effectiveness** as a **deliberative body**.

I also note that **Oral presentation** of reports (to be restricted under 4th Resolved) can provide important **context and insight** which might not occur if written reports were simply **received and filed**.

**Improvements** are always possible. But this Resolution, as written, would implement procedural changes that are overly restrictive and inconsistent with our governance model. Therefore, I believe this Resolution should not be approved.