



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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For Your Information from Senator Rubén Díaz

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New York Needs Transparency in Political Spending

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Unprecedented amounts of secret money were spent on last year's federal elections. In fact, spending by shadowy outside groups has become increasingly pervasive everywhere, including in New York elections. Unless we change the system with reforms like meaningful disclosure rules and public campaign financing, this crisis will only grow worse. Fortunately, key figures in Albany are pushing for more transparency in our state's government.

New York State Senator Rubén Díaz recently sponsored a bill that would require elected officials to post the amounts and sources of campaign contributions on their websites, increasing the availability of this key information. Additionally, a bill sponsored by Speaker Sheldon Silver last month would significantly increase the disclosure requirements imposed on outside spenders.

Governor Andrew Cuomo has signaled his strong and committed leadership in the fight to bring secret political spending out of the shadows. In last month's State of the State address, the governor called for comprehensive campaign finance reform, including "the nation's most aggressive disclosure law, period."

New Yorkers need these champions of transparency to continue their efforts. Voters have a responsibility to make informed decisions on Election Day, and the state must ensure the public has access to all the relevant facts. Everybody knows the identity of the source is relevant in deciding how much to trust an election-year message. Viewers of an ad that argues hydrofracking is safe would take into account whether the ad was paid for by the industry that stands to make billions of dollars. And voters deserve to know how much pro-fracking interests are willing to spend in favor of certain candidates, when some collect 15 percent or more of their campaign funds from those sources. The same is true of other special interests active in New York politics, from gambling to the soft-drink industry.

Ultimately, though, while transparency is crucial, it's only one piece of the puzzle. A complete solution to the broken system in Albany is a full package of reforms centered on public financing of elections, so that candidates have an alternative path to victory that relies on their constituents and average voters, and not influence-seeking special interests.

The governor has called for a public financing system that would provide candidates matching funds for every small donation by a resident of the district they seek to represent. A similar system has increased donor participation and diversity in New York City. Combined with improved disclosure, lower contribution limits, and sensible enforcement of campaign finance laws, this type of reform would make Albany responsive to all the people of New York, rather than those who can afford to spend the most.