



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruben Diaz

What Real Campaign Reform Should Be

RUBEN DIAZ May 12, 2014

| ISSUE: **CAMPAIGN FINANCE**

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

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What Real Campaign Reform Should Be

You should know that soon I will be organizing a press conference together with many religious and Hispanic ministers to start a movement in which our minority community should be educated in regards to campaign finance reform. Leaders of both parties, Democrat and Republican, will be invited to join us.

You should also know that yes, we are in need of election reform – but not just any old window-dressing reform. We are in need of real, deep and serious campaign finance and election reform.

Therefore, let me give you in advance what I believe real campaign reform should include.

As I have said before in another What You Should Know:

First, let's start by giving four-year terms to our New York State Senators and Assembly Members.

Everybody else has four-year terms. The Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Attorney General, the New York City Mayor, and the New York City Council Members – they all serve four-year terms. This gives them all ample time to dedicate themselves to the business of the people – without having to be distracted too much about making time to raise money for their next election. Instead, as soon as New York State's Senators and Assembly Members get elected, they have to start raising money to get re-elected instead of honestly and faithfully dedicating most of their time to their duties as legislators. It is important to give Senators and Assembly Members four-year terms. I assure you that this will be good, and it will help to lessen corruption and desperation for some legislators to raise money for their next campaign.

Second, it would be ideal if New York State's election reform would also include a mandate to stagger elections.

You should know that in the United States Senate, Senators have six-year terms and every two years, one third of the Senate is elected. If the New York State Senate and Assembly would have elections staggered so that only half of the body would be up for re-election every two years, we would have continuity and seniority and experience. It would be more stabilizing for our government, and for our election cycles.

Third, legislators should be full time with no outside income.

We need legislators to provide full disclosure about all their business dealings, as well as every aspect of their operations. If election reform changes the status of Senators and Assembly Members from a part-time to a full-time job, it would help eliminate a lot of the temptation and the hanky-panky of lawyers in elected office who currently do business with firms and serve as 'of counsel' to companies that do business with cities, local municipalities, and the State. A legislator should be a full time legislator, with no other part-time jobs.

Fourth, you should also know that the proposed election package reform bill will give more power and control to groups, unions, organizations and PACS.

Right now, they can only contribute limited amounts of money to candidates. As things stand now, they are limited to how much money they can spend on a candidate. If Governor Andrew Cuomo's election reform bill passes as it is, they most certainly will have even more power and ability to raise money.

For example, if a political party decides to ask every one of their members to contribute at least \$25 dollars to a candidate of their choice to oust an opponent, and they all contribute, the government matching funds for each of those \$25 dollar donations grows to \$150. If you multiply that amount by the number of party members who donate, that's a lot of money – and a powerful tool for the party to either oust or help an incumbent or an insurgent. I am deeply concerned that political parties and Super PACS and organizations backed by wealthy individuals will make it much easier to say "Bye-bye!" to any incumbent who has the strong support of his or her constituents.

Finally, you should know that I personally never liked using public funds to support political candidates when our communities are in need of services. Why are they proposing to spend between two hundred to three hundred million dollars from public funds to give politicians money to run their campaigns? It seems to me that money should be spent building affordable housing or to help senior citizens or to improve child care services. The list is endless.

If there really is no money to help community organizations, senior citizen centers, little leagues, block associations and community watch groups, then we should not use public money to support political campaigns. After eliminating resources to community groups and not-for-profit organizations that serve the people, why should we instead be giving money to politicians to run their campaigns? New Yorkers would be much better served if their tax money is given to our senior citizens for computer labs, little leagues for uniforms and baseball equipment, and block associations to strengthen the role of our families and neighbors.

Ladies and gentlemen, as people attempt to pressure me and discuss ways to approach the much-needed election reform, you should know that I feel obligated to share with you what real campaign reform should be.

This is New York State Senator Reverend Rubén Díaz and this is what you should know.