



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael Gianaris

Senate Republicans Block Gianaris Ethics Bill Preventing Public Reimbursement to Campaign Committees for Legal Defense

MICHAEL GIANARIS April 30, 2015

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Stopping yet another ethics reform measure in its tracks, Senate Republicans on the Investigations and Government Operations Committee voted down Senator Michael Gianaris' bill that would prevent New York State from using public monies to reimburse campaign committees and legal defense funds. Senator Gianaris expressed frustration that his colleagues voted against reforming the current law that forced the state to reimburse the campaign committee of a former legislator for more than \$1.5 million and pay out upwards of \$560,000 more to his legal defense fund. Senator Gianaris introduced the bill (S.2262) in January in order to close this loophole and ensure taxpayers would no longer have to foot the bill when legislators are accused of crimes.

The Republican committee members who voted against the bill are Senators Martin Golden, Carl Marcellino, Terrence Murphy, Michael Nozzolio, and Thomas O'Mara.

"Today is another sad example of common sense reform losing the fight with twisted Albany logic," said Senator Gianaris. "Only in this backwards ethical culture do some think it is okay that public financing for campaign committees only exists for those accused of crimes. I will continue working to close this loophole and I can only hope my colleagues will come to their senses on this issue."

Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh, who carries the bill in the Assembly, said: "Everyone accused of a crime is entitled to a proper defense, but reimbursing campaign committees after the fact is just excessive and unnecessary. So today's vote is disappointing."

Senator Gianaris began his fight for this legislation when the Attorney General's office was forced by statute to approve reimbursing former Senator Joseph Bruno's long dormant campaign committee to the tune of \$1.51 million for legal fees accrued in defense of corruption and bribery charges. In addition, the state had to reimburse a legal defense fund created in 2009 for the same case for an additional \$564,547. Under current law, state employees are entitled to reimbursement for legal defense if the charges in question arose from their official duties and are subsequently dropped or the accused is acquitted. Senator Gianaris' bill would amend Section 19 of the Public Officers Law so that neither campaign committees nor legal defense funds would be eligible for reimbursement, thus preventing any future payouts similar to this case.

The proposal will also require that any legal defense funds raised be utilized in full before any public reimbursement takes place, in order to ensure that public funds are protected.

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