



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruben Diaz

Attorney General Eric Schneiderman Agrees With Me

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WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

By Senator Rev. Rubén Díaz

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You should know that back on May 13, 2013 I wrote a What You Should Know Column titled "My Two Cents on Election Reform" and at the time, aside from the Legislative Gazette, no one cared too much about what I had to say.

You should know that I am very glad that New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman has announced his "End New York Corruption Now Act" that includes some of the very same recommendations that I wrote about in that article including ending outside income for lawmakers and extending their terms from two to four years.

Below is the content of what I wrote.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

By Senator Rev. Rubén Díaz

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My Two Cents on Election Reform

You should know that starting with my son, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., and going all the way down the political landscape, I am feeling a lot of pressure to support Governor Andrew Cuomo's campaign finance and election reform legislation. There have been many, many conversations about election reform to try to get me on board ... the pressure has been tremendous!

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, I would like to contribute my two cents about how I believe we should start.

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, we must be sure that every elected official – especially the lawyers who serve in the Senate and the Assembly – report who their clients are and who gives them money.

We need legislators to provide a 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, Governor Andrew Cuomo should donate to charity the \$20 million dollars plus in campaign funds that was raised for him.

Those \$20 million dollars plus were raised for Governor Andrew Cuomo in cooperation with the Committee to Save New York, and by people doing business with New York State. As part of his call for transparency, Governor Cuomo should require the release of the names of all of the people who made donations to the Committee to Save New York. Like everyone else, Governor Andrew Cuomo should start from scratch. It's not nice for him to say, "Hey, I have \$20 million dollars and can continue raising money, but the rest of you can go and start from scratch to raise your money."

Fifth, you should also know that there are indications that the proposed election 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. I especially don't like it now when Governor Andrew Cuomo has cut the Senators' and the Assembly Members' member items and capital funds. These cuts prevent legislators from helping their communities. If the justification for Governor Andrew Cuomo is because he believes the State cannot afford member items and capital funds, or if he says they need to money to balance the State Budget, then how can he allow for public funds to be used to support political candidates?

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 my two cents with all of you.

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