



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Todd Kaminsky

## Senator Kaminsky & Assemblywoman Griffin Announce Bill to End “Zombie” Campaign Committees of Felon Politicians

TODD KAMINSKY January 8, 2019

| ISSUE: **CORRUPTION**



(Rockville Centre, New York) --- On the day former Majority Leader Dean Skelos is expected to surrender to prison on corruption charges, Senator Todd Kaminsky and Assemblymember Judy Griffin with Common Cause/NY announced legislation (S.93) to force politicians to dispose of campaign funds within two years of a felony conviction.

In the past 15 years, more than 20 New York elected officials have served time in prison. While in jail they have not been forced to give up what is often their most powerful asset: campaign cash.

“If a candidate betrays the public’s trust, he should not be allowed to dole out campaign cash to his cronies from a jail cell,” said State Senator Todd Kaminsky. “As a former federal prosecutor, I saw firsthand how corrupt government officials not only steal taxpayers’ hard-earned money—but their right to honest representation as well. It’s time we end these zombie accounts.”

Candidates who are convicted felons are not required by law to return their campaign contributions, allowing them to maintain political clout and pay legal expenses even when behind bars. Kaminsky’s law would change that.

Under the law, campaign money can be returned four ways:

1. Return, prorated, to each contributor the funds that have not been spent or obligated;
2. Donate funds to a charitable organization;
3. Donate funds to the state university of New York or the City University of New York;
4. Donate to the State's general fund.

“It is time we hold elected officials accountable for their actions. Politicians must face the consequences of their criminal convictions,” said Assemblymember Judy Griffin.

“Once an elected official has betrayed the public’s trust, he should be stripped of his power — campaign cash is no exception,” said Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause/NY.

“In Albany, money equals power, and if someone is behind bars on corruption charges, he

shouldn't be allowed to hold onto donations meant for campaigning. Simple as that."

"For too long political insiders have gamed the system and eroded public trust in government and politic," said Senator Jim Gaughran. "This common sense bill will ensure that convicted felons, who campaigned on an assumption of public trust, are not able to misuse campaign funds by funneling them to another candidate or political party. This bill, along with other much needed electoral reforms, will go a long way towards making the system work for the people, not politicians."

"Elected officials convicted of felony crimes such as former Senator Dean Skelos have tarnished the reputation of New York State and Nassau County government," said Senator Kevin Thomas. "Under the leadership of Senator Todd Kaminsky, we are attacking corruption head on. With this legislation, we take a firm and necessary step toward a more honest and transparent New York State government. I applaud Senator Kaminsky and enthusiastically co-sponsor this bill."

As of today, when former Majority Leader Dean Skelos self-surrendered to prison on corruption charges, he has more than \$40,000 in an active campaign committee named "Friends for the Election of Dean Skelos." Former Speaker Sheldon Silver, who was sentenced in July, has more than \$100,000 in a still active "Friends of Silver" account and more than \$400,000 in his "SpeakerPAC." Former Senator Carl Kruger, who was sentenced to jail in April 2012, still has more than \$400,000 in an active "Friends of Carl" account. Kruger, Silver and Skelos have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars of their campaign cash on legal services.

In 2016, the state legislature enacted a comprehensive wind-down provision for campaign accounts still maintained when a candidate or elected official dies. This legislation would expand the current law and close the loophole making it applicable to any campaign account or elected official who is found guilty of a felony.

## 2019-S93

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- Introduced
- - In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate
- - Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
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Relates to the disposition of campaign funds upon the conviction of a felony of a candidate, former candidate or holder of elective office

December 26, 2018

In Senate Committee **Elections**

Sponsored by **Todd Kaminsky**

Do you support this bill?

NAY