

Honest Fair Elections and Honest Campaign Ads in New York!

By Bob Banov and Roger Ohlsen
June 14, 2012

Since Andrew Cuomo became Governor of New York, good government groups, unions, religious and interfaith organizations and national organizations have been urging him to work with New York lawmakers to create a viable voluntary system of public financing for political campaigns. If New York's governor were actually to prioritize passage of a Fair Election law rather than just giving it lip service (as he did with independent redistricting), there is a real possibility that both the Assembly and State Senate would enact these bills.

With a Fair Elections matching system in place, New York State politicians could spend most of their time working on behalf of their constituents, instead of devoting upwards of 40 percent of it raising money from special interests for their next election.

Even a coalition of environmental advocacy groups is swinging their weight behind an effort that's making an end-of-session push for an overhaul of campaign finance laws this year and has written Cuomo a formal letter about it, because Fair Election Law would help wipe out the undue influence of pro-fracking industry groups from the oil and gas industry, which would certainly be good for our health and well-being.

The Governor spoke to the institution of a Fair Election system during his election campaign.

It's time we make sure that all New Yorkers have an equal voice in our political process...we must achieve fundamental campaign finance reform by implementing a system of public funding of elections"

- Governor Andrew Cuomo, State of the State Address, January 4, 2012

Given the successes of such clean money systems in other states in recent years (see below), it is clear that enacting such legislation would make New York a model for the rest of the country. Now if lawmakers in the state adopt a new proposal for campaign finance legislation before the end of this legislative session on June 21, it's possible it

could squeak through the Senate in the fall, and even if it does not squeak through this year, such measures will remain on the agenda until they do.

Do Fair Election Laws really work?

We know that even over the near course, Fair Election laws empower sincere public servants to win elections because when their ads run on television, the viewer is informed that the ad was paid for by taxpayers, through the candidate's campaign, signaling that the candidate is, ninety-nine percent, a free agent and not in anyone's pocket.

It is a fact that in as problematic a voting state as Arizona, Clean Money -- Clean Elections / Fair Elections laws have had some past success. In fact, they've been successful in seven states and three cities: Arizona; Connecticut; Maine; Hawaii; New Mexico; North Carolina; Wisconsin; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Santa Fe, New Mexico and Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

When candidates can communicate honestly, the way we get to elect our representatives starts to change.

How about Fair Campaign Advertising?

Fair election laws establish a voluntary system under which candidates collect many small contributions from voters in their communities. These contributions are matched by public funds, according to a simple formula set by the legislature that is designed to make sure such clean money candidates can run a competitive race. This means that from square one, the candidates need to communicate with their constituents, the people they are supposed to serve. If elected they will be beholden to the people, not a handful of wealthy donors "investing" in favorable tax treatment or regulations potential sweetheart contracts. This will make it much more likely that new laws and regulations will protect and benefit the interests of citizens rather than a few donor companies or individuals.

Current lax election laws and the unavoidable dependence of candidates on special interest campaign contributors to ensure a competitive campaign prevent many of our most talented citizens from running for office. Whereas, free from the money chase,

politicians can consider legislation on the merits of the legislation itself, without worrying about whether they are pleasing well heeled donors and lobbyists.

Supported by people at such opposite ends of the political spectrum as Bill Moyers and Senator John McCain, Fair Elections would return our government to one that is of, by, and for the people -- not bought and paid for by special interests.

Will your state follow suit?

Do you feel this is a question worth exploring? If so, keep on reading.

How do Fair Elections-type laws work?

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Is there more information about this out there?

Remember, the battle is on, so you will read all sorts of things about it online. But the battle is being engaged! And if all this interests you, and we certainly hope that it does, you can learn more about Fair Elections in New York in detail at the Clean Money – Clean Elections Public Campaign [website](#); the Fair Elections for New York [website](#) and the Citizen Action of New York [website](#).

UPDATE:

Writing in the City Room section of the NY Times, Nov. 17, 2012, Thomas Kaplan reports that a group of more than 30 technology industry leaders has endorsed an effort to overhaul the New York State campaign-finance laws, and is urging NY's Gov. Cuomo to push for a system of public financing for state elections.

Since the Times has published a number of articles stating that the governor's own campaigns coffers have been filled with money from lobbyists in the past and still appear to be so, it will be both interesting and telling to see the results of this new leg in the campaign finance road.