

News Coverage on Campaign Finance

Rich people for campaign finance reform

[Jimmy Vielkind](#) ^[1] ^[2] ^[2] ^[2]

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<http://blog.timesunion.com/capitol/archives/115296/rich-people-for-campaign-fina...> ^[3]

They are Republicans and Democrats. Professionals, professors, a rabbi and a priest. Old and young, executives and attorneys, ambassadors and five former members of Congress — including Scott Murphy, a Glens Falls Democrat who represented parts of the Capital Region in 2009 and 2010.

More generally, they are the political donor class, and now they are fighting to reform New York's porous system of campaign finance.

“Do you realize that people in New York State can give campaign contributions in New York State political races that are **12 times the legal limit** ^[4] for gifts to the president of the United States?” Said **Fritz Schwarz**, ^[5] chief counsel at NYU's Brennan Center for Justice. “That's a crazy system.”

The group is calling, generally, for lower contribution limits, the “amplification” of small donations using public funds, the closure of several oft-derided loopholes around party housekeeping accounts and LLCs and tighter enforcement at the state board of elections. When asked, Schwarz and other speakers at a Wednesday press conference did not offer specifics.

Indeed, the idea was simply to show support for Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who in his State of the State presentation last month **called for stricter campaign finance limits**, ^[6] but has yet to provide any specific proposal.

“We stand with the vast majority of New Yorkers who support Governor Cuomo's call for campaign finance reform, and we will use our voices, our time and our networks to help make that plan a reality,” said **Sean Eldridge**, ^[7] a gay rights advocate who now serves as president of Hudson River Ventures. His partner is Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes.

What does that mean? You're going to launch a well-heeled lobbying campaign, exercising the clout you have to enact a Cuomonian priority? It smacks of the Committee to Save New York, a coalition of business and real estate magnates (and a private sector labor group) that poured huge amounts of money into ads in 2011 supporting the freshman governor's fiscal priorities. It was [conceived with the blessing, and quiet nudging](#),^[8] of the governor himself.

Under current law, CSNY didn't have to reveal its members. It just created a 501(c)-4, registered as a lobbying entity, poured in the money and hired a shop of smart political consultants to do its work.

Sure enough, New York Leadership for Accountable Government (NYLEAD) filed with the Joint Commission on Public Ethics on Friday as a lobbying organization.

Of course, the irony of using that same playbook for a campaign finance reform effort would be so delicious I don't think Casey and I could be snarky enough on the blog to quite capture it. We'll have to start doing push-ups or something to get ready. In the mean time, the organizers insist the campaign finance reform effort isn't that.

"At this point, we have no news about specific contributions to a campaign or specific resource investments," said Eldridge. "I'm sure that the people who are part of New York LEAD, who care a lot about this issue, will be involved in the campaign in New York in *many* ways, and if you look at the list there will be some who have helped fund and support campaign finance initiatives in the past."

Schwarz said the group would disclose the contributions of any individual members to a lobbying campaign — which, he stressed, was NOT the idea.

"This is an idea campaign," he said. "This group has come together to stand behind — other people are going to be working on the politics of it, in the sense that you're talking about, maybe some individuals will. I don't believe New York LEAD is going to become a fundraising or a fund-spending group. It's an idea-generating group to demonstrate you can have more competition, a better system, one where there's less corruption and voters are involved instead of money being involved."

So far, the Brennan Center is footing the bills for a new website and [hire SKDKnickerbocker](#),^[9] whose most recent hit was the legalization of same-sex marriage, according to that firm's Morgan Hook.

Eldridge said the effort was "inspired by Governor Cuomo's vision for New York" but is "an independent effort." The governor did get a heads-up call, I was told after the press conference, but Eldridge says he wasn't aware of Cuomo pushing for it. Schwarz said the push had been planned prior to the State of the State presentation.

It's unclear what the next steps are in the idea campaign. Below is a list of its members, which (notably) include David Rockefeller, former attorney general candidate Sean Coffey, Charles O'Bryne (a top aide to Gov. David Paterson who resigned when it was revealed he didn't pay his

taxes, then tried to excuse it by saying he had a mental illness known as “late filers syndrome”), Ed Koch and Jerome Kohlberg of KKR.

Press Clip Relevance

The article is relevant because it discusses how political donors, through NY LEAD (New York Leadership for Accountable Government), have banded together to press for broad campaign finance reform.

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