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Opinion Editorial on Campaign Finance

Albany Can Kick the Money Habit

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While New York waits for Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#)^[4] to keep his promise to reform its election system, some powerful New Yorkers are stepping into the vacuum. A [coalition](#)^[5] that includes Barry Diller; Chris Hughes, a founding member of Facebook; the banker David Rockefeller Sr.; and the restaurateur Danny Meyer plans to push Albany into fixing the lax rules for financing political campaigns.

The group backs a sensible proposal for a public financing system that would replace the current system, in which New York politicians can collect up to \$60,800 per donor for a statewide race. That compares with about \$5,000 per contributor for most other states. There are no limits on contributions to political parties, a loophole widely used by wealthy people like Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Governor Cuomo has repeatedly said he wants to reduce the glut of money from special interests to all state politicians, himself included. In his State of the State address this year, he made a strong pitch for public financing and lower contribution limits. But Mr. Cuomo has yet to release a bill to reform the system, and unless he pushes extremely hard, it will not happen.

Mr. Cuomo's willingness to break his vow to end gerrymandering — for the sake of getting his budget through — was not reassuring. But this new group calling itself New York Leadership for Accountable Government might be able to shore up the governor's political will.

There is no mystery about what New York State needs: do it like New York City.

Starting in 1989, the city's public financing of campaigns has significantly encouraged more candidates, more small donors and more public interest in elections. A city candidate can get \$6 in public money for every \$1 raised, up to \$175 per donor. As a result, 37 percent of the contributions to participating city candidates are for \$250 or less. Only 5 percent of state donors give less than \$250. To participate in the city plan, a candidate must follow strict rules for reporting and collecting money, which the Campaign Finance Board monitors very closely.

The state law should scale back contribution limits per donor with even stricter limits for anyone doing business with the state. Soft-money donations to political parties that are now unlimited should be banned. No personal or noncampaign uses should be allowed for campaign money. There should be a nonpartisan group enforcing these changes, much like in the city.

Mr. Cuomo has said he wants campaign finance reform in New York this year. Now he has big-time support.

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