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News Coverage on EffectiveNY

State election funding plan hinges on November

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10/22/2012

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This morning, *The New York Times* reported that [affluent advocates of campaign finance reform planned](#) [4] to pour at least \$600,000 into two key competitive state Senate races. Besides raising the profile of the issue in the 2012 elections, one supporter told *The Insider* that the proposed funding mechanism for publicly financed campaigns could well be determined by which party holds the Senate majority in Albany.

Bill Samuels, whose New Roosevelt Initiative is listed as a “campaign supporter” of Fair Elections For New York, a coalition [pushing the issue](#) [5], said if Senate Democrats win the majority, proponents would likely continue a push for campaigns financed by taxpayer dollars out of the state’s general fund—similar to the model in New York City.

If Republicans hang onto their majority, Mr. Samuels said, an announcement would likely be follow the November election proposing an alternative funding mechanism for elections that would be more palatable to Republicans, who don’t like the idea of using taxpayer money to pay for candidates’ campaigns. Supporters say that is essential to reducing the impact of private donors’ money on government policy.

“The real issue is getting rid of the money,” said Mr. Samuels, the former finance chair for the

Senate Democrats' campaign efforts, referring to large campaign donations. "If [the public funding] is not from the general fund, it could be from some other source."

Mr. Samuels declined to elaborate on the specifics, but Susan Lerner, the executive director of Common Cause, whose organization is listed as a "partner" in the Fair Elections New York Coalition, said alternative funding mechanisms had been on the table during discussions of campaign finance reform this year. Ms. Lerner noted that in Connecticut, elections are funded primarily through the sale of abandoned property, and in Arizona, on a surcharge to criminal and civil penalties.

Asked whether the result of the elections would play a role in proponents' strategy on the issue, Ms. Lerner said she would be supportive of funding campaigns through these alternative methods regardless of which party controls either house of the state Legislature.

"I think it would be a good decision," Ms. Lerner said. The GOP holds a slim majority in the Senate.

Notably, the proponents of campaign finance reform discussed in the *Times* article were planning to help one Democratic and one Republican Senate candidate.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has been supportive of campaign finance reform, but did not make the issue a top priority during last year's legislative session. Mr. Samuels said time will tell if Mr. Cuomo pushes campaign finance reform as he did the legalization of gay marriage, or whether the "http://www.crainsnewyork.com/images/icons/Icon_External_Link.png ^[6]"); text-decoration: none; color: rgb(34, 90, 148); background-position: 100% 50%; background-repeat: no-repeat no-repeat; " target="_blank">cynical Andrew Cuomo we saw in redistricting" will emerge. On that issue, Mr. Cuomo pledged to veto a partisan, gerrymandered map of new district lines, but ultimately approved one in exchange for future reforms to the process.

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