



New York
COMMON CAUSE
Holding Power Accountable

THE ACTIVIST

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Common Cause/NY
 74 Trinity Place, Ste 901
 New York, NY 10006

nyoffice@commoncause.org
 www.commoncause.org/ny

212.691.6421

Your Role in Election Protection

By Susan Lerner, Executive Director

Here in New York, thankfully, thankfully, we aren’t facing newly passed legal restrictions that make it harder to vote in states like Florida, Pennsylvania and North Carolina. However, we do face the challenge of getting people to register and vote in the face of inefficient, partisan-driven election administration that results in poorly run elections in too many places around the state. Whether it is long lines, polling location changes or opening late, people just turn away and don’t vote.

You can help! We’re looking for volunteers to help with three exciting volunteer projects on election day in November.

Cut the Line in New York City – Did you know that you can cut the first line at New York City polling places if you know your Assembly and Election district number? Volunteer to use your smartphone to help reduce lines of voters waiting at polling places in New York City. We’re sending out teams of Common Causers, students from area colleges like CUNY and NYU, and volunteers from other groups who will look up the election district numbers for voters stuck on the long lines for the initial information table. You can help cut down on the length of time voters have to wait to cast their ballots during the high volume morning or evening hours.

Voter Assistance Hotline in New York City – Every presidential election, Common Cause/NY and NYPIRG team up to staff a volunteer hotline to help answer voters’ questions and gather reports of problems at polling places. We’re looking for volunteers to fill 3-hour shifts from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. on November 6th.

PollWatchUSA – Common Cause/NY is crowd-sourcing poll watching. We’ve developed a mobile website that you can use on your smartphone to report conditions at your polling place anywhere in New York State. We need help getting the word out on Election day and we need people to use the app:

www.pollwatchusa.org

Email NYOffice@commoncause.org or call 212-691-6421 to volunteer.

Important Election Dates

- **Oct 12** - Last day to register for presidential election
- **Nov 6** - Election Day

Playing the Influence Market: Hedge Funds' Investment in Political Campaigns

By Brian Paul, Research and Policy Coordinator

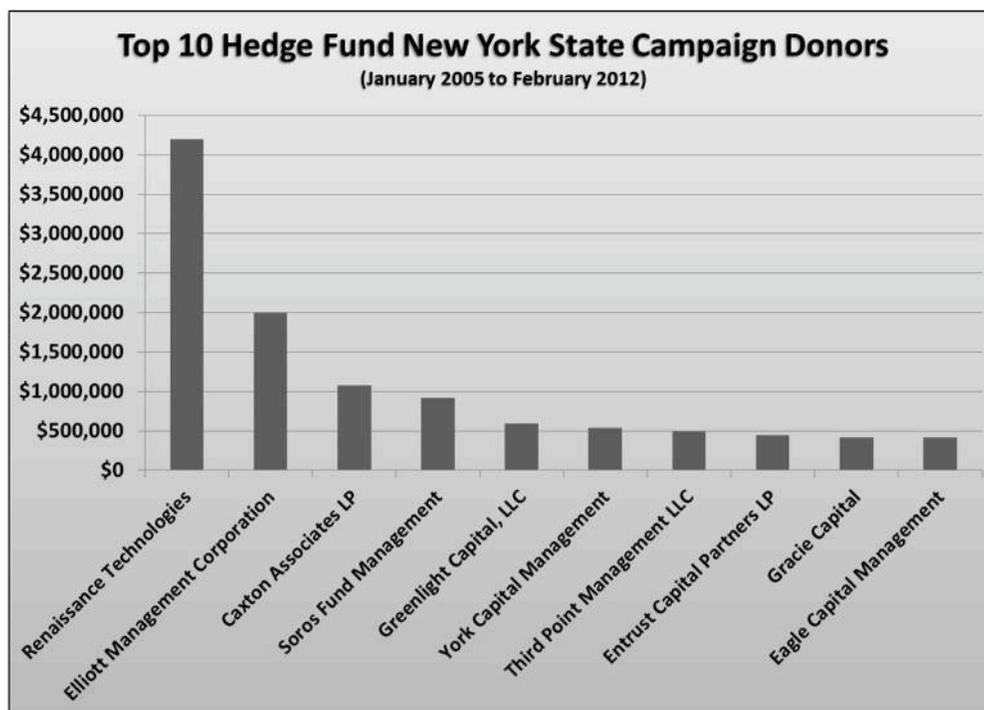
In just the last fifteen years, hedge funds have exploded out from the exotic fringe of the financial industry to play a growing and influential role in our economy. Unlike mutual funds, which are generally limited to simple buying and selling of stocks and bonds, hedge funds are free to engage in all kinds of complex investment tools and strategies including short selling, options, futures, foreign exchanges, commodities, credit swaps, and other derivatives. In 2011, forty hedge fund managers earned \$40 million or greater in compensation, with the top 12 each earning over \$200 million, and the top three each earning over \$2 billion in a single year.

Alongside the hedge fund industry's economic rise has been an equally rapid rise in political influence. New York City is the center of the global hedge fund industry and should come as no surprise that hedge fund executives are increasingly active in New York's local politics. We found that from 2005 through February 2012, hedge funds, hedge fund executives, and their immediate family members made over \$23 million in New York State and local campaign contributions. Almost half of the contributions -- \$11.1 million -- came from just the Top 10 identified hedge funds and their employees.

Hedge fund donations peaked in the 2010 cycle when the industry contributed over \$10 million to state and local candidates throughout New York. This sum ranks hedge funds alongside real estate, health care, lawyers and lobbyists, and the more traditional sectors of the financial industry at the top of the list of industry donors in the state. In 2006 and 2008, hedge fund donors gave to Democratic candidates and committees over Republicans at a rate of greater than 4 to 1. In the 2010 cycle, the overall Democratic Party advantage narrowed to closer to 2 to 1 and in 2011, Republican candidates and received more donations than Democrats, \$1.4 million to \$1.1 million.

With sky-high contribution limits in which individuals are free to give up to \$60,800 in a single year to a statewide candidate and unlimited cash to state party soft money accounts, New York's campaign finance system clearly advantages large dollar donors like hedge fund managers over ordinary New Yorkers. As long as the rules of the game make politicians accountable to the corporations, lobbyists, and small groups of extremely wealthy individuals like hedge fund managers who finance their campaigns, they're never going to be accountable to the public who elected them. Read the full report here:

www.commoncause.org/ny/hedgefunds



Help Build the Momentum for Fair Elections and Move to Amend

By Susan Lerner, Executive Director

You have told us over and over again that you believe the problem of money in politics is one of the key issues - if not THE key issue - facing our system of government. That's why it's so exciting to see momentum building in New York State to reform our dysfunctional campaign finance system for state races. Governor Cuomo has made campaign finance reform one of his top priorities moving forward. We are going to call on each one of you in the coming months to help educate and mobilize your friends and neighbors. Many people understand how damaging the flood of political money is to our democracy. What they are not as sure of is what can be done about it.

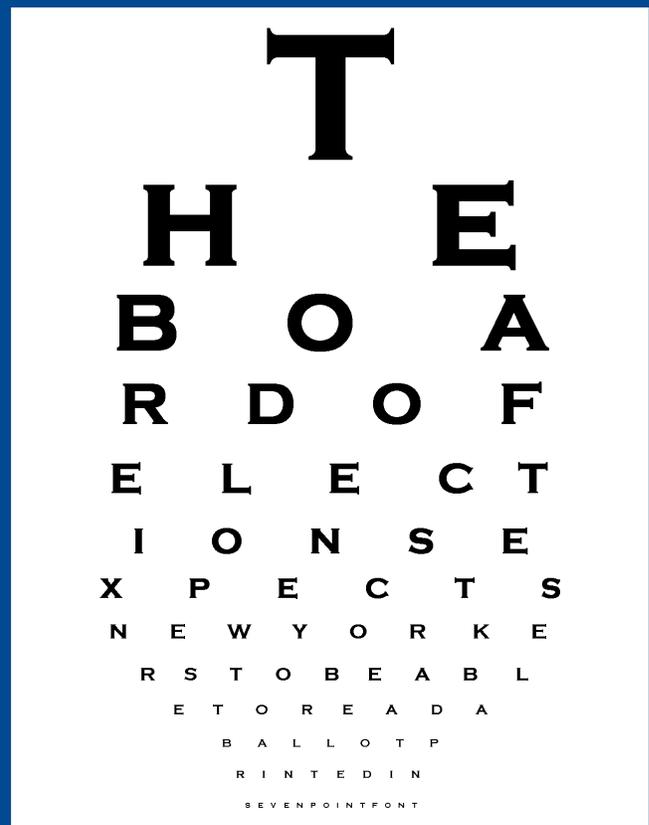
Here are some of the campaign finance reforms that Common Cause/NY advocates for:

- Lower New York's sky high contribution limits
- Close loopholes that allow individuals and companies to give even more than the high limits.
- Require full and meaningful disclosures from campaign contributors
- Require disclosure of who is paying for independent campaign ads and materials.
- Provide public funding of elections, a Fair Elections system based on New York City's matching fund system to encourage small dollar donations and community-supported candidates.
- Insure strong enforcement of campaign finance laws

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YOU CAN'T MAKE SOMETHING LIKE THIS UP

Candidate names on ballots for the September 13 state primary in New York and Kings Counties in New York City were printed in 7 point type. This is 7 point type. The Board of Elections blamed the Legislature for not revising the election law. The Legislature blamed the Board. The voters were caught in the middle. Presenting voters with a ballot that is virtually unreadable because of the small size of the print is simply unconscionable. We are working with seniors, disability rights groups and good government colleagues to insure that this state of affairs is not repeated.



Upcoming Moyers Documentary Will Highlight Common Cause Drive to Expose ALEC

By: Susan Lerner, Executive Director

For more than a year, Common Cause has been highlighting how some of the nation's richest corporations, including New York-based media giants Verizon and Time-Warner, bankroll the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a pro-business lobby that masquerades as a charity.

Our work on ALEC has focused media attention coast-to-coast on the link between ALEC's corporate leaders and noxious legislation like the Florida "Stand Your Ground" gun law, Arizona's infamous anti-immigration law and voter ID legislation that could deprive hundreds of thousands of Americans of their right to vote.

Now, The United States of ALEC, a firm presented by veteran journalist Bill Moyers, is about to give

ALEC and our work an even higher profile. There's no better way to get involved than to host a house party to show the Moyers' ALEC documentary and talk about how special interests are dominating our political system. We'll provide you with New York-specific information about ALEC's activities and ways that you and your friends and neighbors can get involved.

Email NYOffice@commoncause.org or call 212-691-6421 for more details or to sign up to host a house party. Our house party kit makes it easy and it's a fun way to help attack a serious problem.

'Fair Elections' Continued from page 3

Here's where you come in. You can help by hosting a house party or helping set up a public forum in your area. Making phone calls is another way that you can help. There will be petitions to circulate, asking elected officials to support Fair Elections and advocating for a constitutional amendment to reverse Citizens United.

Better at writing? Write an opinion piece or letter to the editor of your

local paper, commenting on the extraordinary amount of money being spent this election season and pointing out the benefits of public funding of elections. You'd be surprised how easy it is to get something published in most smaller papers. Even the largest daily newspapers are looking for well written letters to publish and money in politics is always a relevant topic. We'll let you know when your assembly member and state senator need to hear from

you, urging them to take action. And don't overlook the impact that you can have just by letting your family and friends know how passionate you are about campaign finance reform and Fair Elections in particular. You'll find talking points, facts and figures that you can use on our website: www.commoncause.org/ny

You are Ad Watch 2012

Election season is upon us, and that means it's time to be bombarded by a barrage of campaign emails, radio blurbs, online pop-ups, and television advertisements. An estimated \$9.8 billion¹ is expected to be spent nationwide in the 2012 election cycle. You've seen them all before- "Vote for John Smith", "John Smith will ship jobs overseas", "Vote no on bill 1234", etc. - all of them trying to sway your vote one way or another. But who stands to benefit from these ads? Do you, the voter, know who is providing the funding to third party organizations with vague and bland names to run these ads (Committee for Cute Puppies anyone?)

Here at Common Cause, our focus is on moderating the corrupting influence of money on politics and public policy. This applies to the issue of campaign ads, where we believe that there should be absolute transparency and disclosure of the organizations (and their backers) that sponsor such ads. Until that is a reality, we need your help. We can't be everywhere in the state to track who is advertising.

¹ <http://www.borrellassociates.com/component/content/article/45-general-reports/276-political-advertising-outlook-the-flood-of-2012>

Will you be our eyes and ears and provide with feedback regarding the ads you see and hear, focusing particularly on the sponsoring organizations behind them? All you need to do is go to www.commoncause.org/ny/Ad-Watch, and provide us with a bit of information;

- The medium by which you heard/saw the ad (ex: radio, television, newspaper, etc.);
- What the ad is about (ex: a specific politician, issue, or bill, etc.);
- If the sponsor is clearly disclosed; and
- If you go to the sponsoring organization's website, whether they declare their partnered organizations, third-party organizations, largest donors, or whoever else made their contribution to the ad campaign possible.

Thanks! Your help will allow us to track – and try to counter-balance - the activities of those seeking to secretly use money to sway public opinion and influence policy.

DID YOU KNOW?

Of the 16,102 bills pending in the State Legislature in 2012, only 571 passed both houses. This is the smallest number of bills passed since at least 1914.

Executive Director's Message



Susan Lerner

Dear Common Causers,

While we gear up for our election protection work, the quantum of corrupt New York legislators continues to grow. I hope that the sudden increase indicates that improved ethics oversight systems put in place are paying off and that Albany is getting the message that

corrupt and unethical practices are unacceptable and will be discovered. My biggest concern, however, is how JCOPE, the new ethics commission, will perform. Initial indications are troubling. Common Cause/NY and NOW-NYC filed a joint complaint alleging violations of the ethics laws arising from the conduct of Assembly Member Vito Lopez and the cover-up of that illegal behavior by the Assembly leadership and staff. We filed the complaint because we wanted to be sure that JCOPE would investigate all of the conduct surrounding Lopez' illegal activities, including any involvement by the Assembly leadership and staff. The big selling point for JCOPE when it was set up was that it would provide ethics oversight of the Legislature that was, for the first time, independent of the Legislature. However, the Legislature demanded

"safeguards" in the procedure to be followed before an investigation could be started which have the potential to give the governmental branch targeted an indirect veto over any investigation. How JCOPE handles our complaint arising from the Lopez situation is the first real test of whether JCOPE will actually effectively investigate problems no matter who may be involved. Preliminary reports indicate that a limited investigation is all that has been authorized initially. We hope that JCOPE will conduct a full investigation and we will continue to call for them to do so. Albany needs and New York deserves vigorous independent ethics oversight. With your help, we'll continue to do everything possible to realize that goal.

- Susan

New York City Council Redistricting By Brian Paul, Research and Policy Coordinator

If you thought redistricting in New York was over, think again. Although the state legislative and congressional districts were finalized this past spring, redistricting for the New York City Council has just begun. Fortunately we do not expect a repeat of the overtly corrupt gerrymandering that occurred with the State Senate and State Assembly districts. In contrast to the State legislature, the New York City Council re-

districting process is guided by strict criteria laid out in the city charter that include respect for communities of interest, compact district shape, and a prohibition of political gerrymandering.

The New York City Districting Commission is also conducting the process in a much more open and accessible manner. The Commission has made an online mapping tool available on their

website (www.nyc.gov/districting) that allows members of the public to draw their own districts from scratch or begin with the Commission's draft plan. Public hearings on the draft will be held during the first and second week of October. We encourage Common Causers to explore the draft district plan and we would be happy to help prepare testimony for anyone interested in commenting.

Nassau County Redistricting

The redistricting process is also continuing for the Nassau County legislature. Last year, a plan drawn by the Republican majority was rejected by state courts for failing to follow the county charter's requirements for a bi-partisan commission with public review. Now, the Republicans and Democrats appear hopelessly gridlocked. Common Cause/NY is teaming up with Latino Justice PRLDEF and Nassau County based groups to offer suggestions and help resolve this process in the best interest of the public. We'd like to hear from Common Causers in Nassau County who want to get involved.

Intern Spotlight: Claire Stottlemyer

A native of Sarasota, Florida and currently a student at NYU, Claire helped organize voter registration across New York City. She also attended various social actions and engaged the public through teach-ins and trainings. This fall she is continuing with Common Cause/NY as a Youth Engagement Fellow. Her focus is primarily on college-level students, holding registrations and “coffee hours” to facilitate an open discussion amongst students regarding the political issues that concern them most. Says Claire: “The work everyone here does at Common Cause is essential in protecting the citizens of New York and (less importantly) secures my own sanity. I am so happy to have found an organized space where I feel I can make a difference and work with those who are unrelenting in holding power accountable”



Claire running a voter registration table this summer.

Barriers to Voter Registration Drives in NYC

Over the summer, the Common Cause interns worked on a project regarding voter registration in New York City. Common Cause frequently acts to inform and empower citizens by helping them register to vote. But recently, we found that organizations around the city were becoming less and less receptive to our efforts. We were disturbed that organizations seemed to see voter registration efforts as “political,” when in reality they provide nonpartisan support to a citizenry that registers to vote less than that of any other modern democracy.

To do more research on the issue, our interns called over 80 venues around the city to ask whether they would allow for a voter registration drive at their site. We were saddened, but not surprised, that less than half of those venues gave us a positive response. Many did not get back to us at all. A few even told us that voter registration was too political of an act for them to allow it. A report detailing our findings will be published shortly. Hopefully, we can work together to change the perception of voter registration to align with the nonpartisan, public good that it really is.

Read the full report here: www.CommonCause.org/NY/VoterRegReport

Common Cause/New York

74 Trinity Place, Ste 901

New York, NY 10006

www.CommonCause.org/ny

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Activists Corner

If you would like to find out how to get more involved with Common Cause/NY or for volunteer opportunities please call our offices at 212-691-6421 or email us at nyoffice@commoncause.org

MORE WAYS TO TAKE ACTION

- Sign up for our email list by emailing nyoffice@commoncause.org
- Call your representatives in the state legislature and let him/her know that you are a member of Common Cause/NY and want public financing of elections NOW!
- Help with Ad Watch 2012, our campaign to track political ads during the 2012 election cycle, www.commoncause.org/ny/AdWatch
- Contact us to host or join a house party to show the Moyers' ALEC documentary and talk about the problem of special interest domination of our political system
- Help with Election Protection this fall in 3 different ways: Cut the Line, Voter Assistance Hotline, or PollWatchUSA (see page 1)
- Testify to the New York City Districting Commission on the council lines.
- Become a fan of ours on Facebook at www.facebook.com/CommonCauseNewYork and follow us on Twitter @commoncauseny