

**CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK**  
**299 Broadway, Suite 700 ■ New York, NY 10007 ■ 212-227-0342**  
**COMMON CAUSE/NY**  
**155 Avenue of the Americas, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor ■ New York, NY 10013 ■ 212 691-6421**  
**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS/N.Y.S.**  
**62 Grand Street ■ Albany, NY 12207 ■ 518 465-4162**  
**NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP**  
**107 Washington Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor ■ Albany, NY 12210 ■ 518 436-0876**

April 21, 2009

Governor David Paterson  
Executive Chamber  
Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Senator Malcolm Smith  
Senate Majority Leader  
909 LOB  
Albany, NY 12247

Speaker Sheldon Silver  
New York State Assembly  
932 LOB  
Albany, NY 12248

Senator Dean Skelos  
Minority Leader  
907 LOB  
Albany, NY 12247

Assemblyman Brian Kolb  
Minority Leader  
Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12248

**Re: Urge Action on Campaign Finance and Ethics Reforms.**

Dear Messrs Paterson, Smith, Skelos, Silver and Kolb:

Citizens Union, Common Cause/NY, the League of Women Voters/N.Y.S. and the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) write to urge action on measures to reform New York's campaign finance and ethics laws. Given the staggering controversies in these areas that have engulfed Albany over the past few years it is crucial that you take steps to restore New Yorkers' dwindling confidence in their own state government.

The first step must be a comprehensive overhaul of the state's campaign finance law. New York has the nation's highest campaign contribution limits of any state with limits. Those sky-high limits are coupled with a loophole-riddled law, inadequate disclosure requirements and ineffective enforcement. It is a system that cries out for immediate and full-scale change.

The Governor, the Senate Majority Leader and the Assembly Speaker have repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to overhauling the campaign finance laws, yet there has been no meaningful progress on this issue other than the introduction of competing bills, one which has passed the Assembly.

In a June 4, 2008 news release on the topic, Governor Paterson stated that the "Existing contribution limits in New York State are some of the highest in the nation and for certain contributors, the highest. Too often, decisions in Albany are shaped by wealthy donors and special interests. We need to change that and restore New Yorkers' confidence in how Albany does business."

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In a June 6, 2007 letter to our organizations, Senator Smith stated that the “State’s disclosure requirements are unacceptably lax, individual contribution limits are far too high, and loopholes such as treating LLCs like individuals, all expose the obvious need for reform in this critical area. These problems must be fixed as part of a comprehensive campaign finance reform package to change how campaigns are financed in New York and the influence special interest money has in politics.”

In a May 2007 speech to our organizations, Speaker Silver stated, “I and my Assembly Majority colleagues are committed to reducing the influence of special interests. . . . I remain committed to the principal of public financing. . . . ”

We agree. And the public has every expectation that those words will be followed by action.

In addition, the seemingly unrelenting series of controversies, indictments and convictions of public officials cries out for action. The public deserves new measures to restore public confidence in the ethical standards of state government. We continue to urge you to enact the following specific reforms in these areas:

- Establishment of a voluntary public financing system.
- Overhaul of the state’s existing campaign finance system: lower contribution limits, a ban on “soft money,” closing loopholes and stronger campaign disclosure requirements.
- Creation of an independent campaign finance agency with the resources and authority to enforce the elections law.
- Creation of a new, independent ethics oversight agency with jurisdiction over both the executive and legislative branches.
- Establishment of stringent requirements for financial disclosure for public officers.
- Strengthening the ban on the personal use of campaign contributions.
- Specific restrictions on campaign contributions from lobbyists and those receiving government contracts (“pay to play”).

We believe that this session should not end without passing legislation to overhaul the state’s ethics and campaign finance laws. Now that the budget is complete, the remaining time in this year’s session offers a critical opportunity to restore public confidence in state government. We urge you to act now.

Sincerely,

Dick Dadey  
Citizens Union of the City of New York

Susan Lerner  
Common Cause/NY

Barbara Bartoletti  
League of Women Voters/N.Y.S.

Blair Horner  
NYPIRG