

New York State campaign finance reform in the spotlight

By George Morin

Representatives of government and private organizations involved in campaign finance reform gave Club members sharp insights into the issues, benefits and roadblocks surrounding this contentious and often explosive issue.

Program Chair Arthur Schiff moderated the program and introduced the speakers: Suzanne Novak from the Brennan Center for Justice, Pam Bennett from Citizen Action of New York, Eric Friedman from the New York City Finance Board, Assembly Member Jonathan Bing and State Senator Liz Krueger.

Important goals

Ms. Novak, the first to speak, outlined the campaign finance reform goals: inform the electorate, prevent corruption, promote political equality and reduce the burdens of candidate fund raising.

Elements of finance reform include disclosure of where the contributions come from, contribution limits, effective enforcement of the campaign finance laws and the cost-effective need for public financing.

"With public financing," Novak said, "you reduce the burden of fund raising and allow people to seek public office who don't have access to wealth.

"At the federal level," she continued, "we've had public financing of presidential elections since 1971, but it has fallen into disrepair and will probably not be used by candidates in the future."

Dysfunctional New York

According to Novak New York State's campaign finance laws are "off the charts" because the sky-high limits on contributions.

"For governor in New York State, you have an individual contribution limit of \$50,100, an amount that most families don't even earn in a year," she said.

Novak also points out that among the other faults with New York State's system is the state's abominable enforcement of the laws that do exist. For example, there are no penalties for exceeding contribution limits.

"Today the elected officials in Albany do not need to talk to ordinary people because they can rely on their big donors," she said.

Campaign finance model

As much as the state is considered dysfunctional in campaign financing, the city is looked upon as a model, one the state would do well to emulate.

Eric Friedman, an official with the New York City Finance Department, described some of the elements of the city's campaign finance system.

The first \$250 contribution from a resident is matched \$4 for every \$1, turning that contribution into \$1,000. In 2009, the formula will change to \$6 for every \$1 of the first \$175, turning that amount into a \$1,050 contribution.

The effect, of course, is that candidates will reach out more to the small contributors.

"That small contribution magically sparks more political involvement, more volunteers, more reading and watching the news and better informed voters," Friedman said.

Serious civil rights violation

In her presentation, Pam Bennett of Civil Action New York, observed, "Campaign finance reform is not just a matter of the corrupting influence of money, it is also a serious violation of the civil rights of poor people because it virtually shuts out their voices."

Assembly Member Jonathan Bing, long an advocate of campaign finance reform, pointed out that closing loop holes in Albany is "really a stop-gap measure because they just create other loop holes.

"I believe the question should be about public financing. In 2008, we'll have a more receptive audience for public financing in the State Senate when Democrats take control."

State Senator Liz Krueger observed that "Every time you win an election you spend 40 percent of your time fund raising for the next one just around the corner. ... So for me public finance reform is a very personal agenda because I don't want to spend my entire career raising money for myself or others." **LDC**

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Suzanne Novak of the Brennan Center (left) with Lex Club president Heather Leifer

Speaking of campaign finance reform: here are some ways and means

By George Morin

In his State of the State address in January Governor Spitzer made clear that “full public financing must be the ultimate goal of our reform effort.”

With the Brennan Center for Justice issuing white papers excoriating New York State as having campaign finance laws that are “among the nation’s weakest” and organizations such as Citizen Action of New York pushing for “Clean Money, Clean Elections” reform in the state, it’s useful to take a look to see what New York State campaign finance laws are now and how they might change under the proposed scenarios.

My how the money flows

As many readers know, the individual contribution limit for candidates for governor in New York State is \$50,100 for a primary and general election cycle. Compared with Ohio’s \$20,000 limit and Wisconsin’s \$10,000 limit, New York looks like the backwater of campaign financing limits – except that 13 other states allow *unlimited* individual contributions to gubernatorial and legislative candidates.

New York State

That said, New York State’s campaign finance laws do allow virtually unlimited contributions from individuals, corporations, unincorporated businesses and labor unions for gubernatorial candidates.

Corporations are limited to one \$5,000 contribution per year to the candidate, but each subsidiary of the corporation can also make a yearly \$5,000 contribution .

Each corporation and subsidiaries can also make \$5,000 contributions to political action committees and political party committees.

In addition, unincorporated businesses and individuals are permitted to contribute \$84,400 to political party committees and to make *unlimited* contributions to political action committees.

A Brennan Center report, “Paper Thin: The Flimsy Facade of Campaign Finance Laws in New York State” puts it succinctly: “The flow of money in New York [State] runs freely. One need only learn the proper channels through which to direct it.”

New York City

On the other hand, the New York City finance laws are lauded in contrast with the State laws.

Candidates for city council, borough president, public advocate and mayor who join the program get matching funds from contributions that have strict limits. (See article on page 1)

Those who participate in the city program have strict spending limits ranging downward from over \$6 million for mayoral candidate to \$161,250 for city council candidate.

The downside of all this largesse of course is that the candidates still must constantly fundraise for private donations to get the matching dollars.

The gold standard

Many believe the only way to completely remove the corrupting influence of money out of our election process, the gold standard for campaign finance reform, is full public financing.

Advocates cite analyses that show that full public financing can be relatively inexpensive.

In 2004, for example, the Clean Election Fund in Maine spent \$2.77 per person of voting age to fully fund the election campaigns of participating candidates. **LDC**

Liz upstages Bruno as Albany session ends

As the legislative session was coming to a close at 9:30 on the night of June 21st, Republican Senator Marty Goldman suddenly brought a bill on affordable housing to the Senate floor for a vote.

Senator Liz Krueger had been following the issue very closely and confronted Goldman, telling him she’d be asking questions about it before the vote. He said he couldn’t answer any questions because he hadn’t read the bill, having relied on the Real Estate Board of New York to do his reading.

Joe Bruno had arrived and Krueger was advised to vote no on the bill if she wished, but not to do anything further because Bruno wanted to make his end-of-session speech.

Undeterred, our good senator started speaking on the bill. After awhile she heard people laughing. She looked up and saw Bruno and others laughing while Republican senators waved white handkerchiefs at her.

She had experienced the tactic before and knew the handkerchiefs were not a sign of surrender. She said, “You made me lose my train of thought. And now I have to start all over – so Senator Bruno, if you want to go and come back, I have a lot to say.”

According to senate rules, she had two hours to speak on the issue.

Senator Krueger shared this story at the Club’s forum on campaign finance reform as an example of how money can buy access in Albany.

– George Morin



Speakers at the Club’s forum on campaign finance reform. (Left to right) Suzanne Novak, Brennan Center for Justice; Eric Friedman, NYC Campaign Finance Board; Pam Bennett, Citizen Action New York; and State Senator Liz Krueger.

Joint Democratic Club Presidential Forum

Tuesday, October 9
8:00 p.m.

Presentations by representatives of the major Democratic Presidential candidates with questions and answers

R.S.V.P. to secure your seat by emailing:
nycpresforum@gmail.com

The LGBT Community Center
208 West 13th St. at 7th Ave.

This event is co-sponsored by: CoDA (Coalition for a District Alternative), CUNY Law Democrats, Downtown Independent Democrats, Lexington Democratic Club, NYU Democrats, Stonewall Democrats of New York City, The Village Reform Democratic Club, Village Independent Democrats.

For updated event info and speaker lineup
visit: www.thevrdc.org

Welcome to the Club

Lucas Edwyn Wuertele was born on March 4, 2007 weighing 7 pounds, 13 ounces and 21.5 inches long. At last report, at age six months, he was sitting, crawling and charming his parents Andy and Jessica to pieces.



Charlotte Coleman Bing was born on June 3, 2007 and weighed 6 pounds, 3 ounces.



Now, soon to be four months old, her parents Jonathan and Meredith are looking forward to a full night's sleep.

The Club looks forward to visits from Lucas and Charlotte someday soon. **LDC**

2007 Membership Party

October 30, 2007

You are invited to come and bring a friend

Anyone who joins the Club at the party will be eligible to vote in the January elections

- free admission
- appetizers
- drink specials

The Havana Room

306 East 76 Street
(between 1st & 2nd)
7 p.m. to 10 p.m.



**DEAR
LEX CLUB
MEMBERS:**

I hope everyone had a great summer!

This month will be a busy one. On October 25th we will have the opportunity to vote to endorse a Presidential Candidate. In order to be able to make an informed decision, please look to attend the Joint Democratic Club Presidential Forum on Tuesday October 9th. Details can be found in the newsletter. In the event you cannot attend, we will have speakers representing the candidates from 6 to 7 p.m. at our endorsement vote at Brown Gardens.

Also this month, we will have our first membership event in recent memory, organized by our membership chairs Mike Asta and David Cohen. So mark your calendars for Tuesday, October 30th. We'll be at the Havana Room. Please invite and bring friends and neighbors who may be interested in joining the Lex Club. Anyone who becomes a member at the event will be eligible to vote in our upcoming Club elections in January.

Finally, we will be hosting a community forum about Congestion Pricing with the Lenox Hill Democratic Club in early November. Details will follow.

Best,

Heather Kim Leifer
President, the Lexington Democratic Club

Here's news about holiday cheer that'll make you feel good all year long

By George Morin

As co-chair of the Club's community service committee, Larry Goodman has a very appropriate last name.

He truly is a good man, especially when he volunteers to deliver holiday packages to shut-ins during Jewish holidays.

For the past six years, Larry has volunteered with DOROT, an organization whose mission is to enhance the lives of Jewish and other elderly in the New York City metropolitan area.

Grassroots beginning

The organization started in 1976 as a grassroots effort by a small group of Columbia grad students to reach out to their homebound elderly neighbors.

With a volunteer base of 6,000 adults and 3,500 children, DOROT is now among the largest volunteer corps in the nation serving the homebound and homeless.

Making someone happy

Among its many volunteer opportunities DOROT sponsors Holiday Package Deliveries where volunteers visit the elderly with meals and packages with traditional holiday food.

The most recent delivery Larry made was with his friend Barbara and her four-year-old daughter Maya.

They visited a charming 80-something woman in the East 30s who had a great, granddaughter Maya's age.

What a way to start the day

Larry, Barbara and Maya delivered the holiday package and then enjoyed spending time chatting with the woman. She showed them her family photos and, wise in the ways of four-year-olds, gave Maya a small coloring book.

"What a wonderful way to start the day," Larry said. "It gives you a real sense of satisfaction and joy that for a brief moment you made a positive impact on someone."

Opportunity for the Club

On December 9 there's an opportunity for Club members as a group to participate in DOROT's Chanukkah delivery program. People of all faiths and beliefs are invited.

If you're interested, contact Larry Goodman at 646 314-4189 or e-mail him at lbgseq@aol.com. **LDC**

Presidential Endorsement Vote

Thursday, October 25

Candidates' Representatives Presentations

6 to 7 p.m.

Drop-in Voting

6 to 9 p.m.

(Also a vote to elect Ben Kallos, our interim appointment to the board, to the board until the next election.)

Brown Gardens

225 East 93rd Street

(between Second and Third Avenues)

INSIDE: Club's Finance Reform Forum, Liz upstages Bruno, ways and means of finance reform, news about holiday cheer, important event notices and the introduction of two new members.
ABOVE THE FOLD: Elected officials' news and views

Presidential Endorsement Vote

Thursday, October 25

Candidates' Representations

6 to 7 p.m.

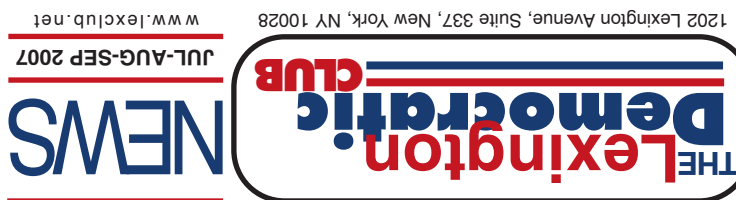
Drop-in Voting

6 to 9 p.m.

Brown Gardens

225 East 93rd Street
(between Second and Third Avenues)

FIRST CLASS
 Return service requested



NEWS AND VIEWS FROM CLUB'S ELECTED OFFICIALS

Jonathan Bing hosts Annual Senior Health Fair.

Once again the Bing health fair will provide free flu shots, health screenings, informational tables and refreshments for the benefit of seniors. Flu shots are provided by New York-Presbyterian Hospital. Among the screenings available are those for glaucoma, blood pressure and cholesterol. Because of the limited number of shots available, to obtain a flu shot you must call Bing's office at 212 605-0937 and schedule your appointment.

The fair is on Tuesday, October 16 in the Community Room of Knickerbocker Plaza, 1751 Second Ave. between 91st and 92nd Streets from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Liz Krueger speaks out for victims of sub-prime mortgage crisis.

Labeling easy-borrowing ads that attracted consumers into mortgages that they could not afford as irresponsible misinformation, Senator Krueger called for reasonable refinancing alternatives instead of only protecting the lenders whose practices triggered the crisis. According to credit monitoring groups, the foreclosure rates for 2007 are expected to be

60 percent higher than for 2006.

Fighting Global Warming

Senator Krueger helped N.Y. Environmental Advocates and St. Bart's Church organize an event to dramatize what New York State can do to fight the growing global warming crisis.

Grammy winner and Country Music Female Vocalist of the Year, Kathy Mattea, will present Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* slide show and Commissioner Pete Grannis of the State's Department of Environmental Conservation will deliver Spitzer's environmental plan for New York State.

The program is at St. Bart's Church on Park Ave. at 51st Street in Manhattan on Tuesday October 23rd at 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. No R.S.V.P.'s are necessary.

Dan Garodnick authors bill to ease scaffolding overload.

The law that required buildings over six stories built before 1982 to have facade inspections had the unintended consequence of clogging our sidewalks with scaffolding every five years. That's because all buildings were all on the same five-year schedule.

Then, along came Dan who authored a bill

to spread out the inspections over the five years; thus relieving owners and shareholders of the high cost of competing for architects and scaffolding at the same time.

It also treats pedestrians to a welcomed return of sky light.

Jessica Lappin goes to bat for tenants and dog owners.

Tenants of Knickerbocker Plaza who face steep rent increases with the end of the Mitchell-Lama program in their building are organizing to fight the conversion with the help of Council Member Lappin.

Jessica also worked with Borough President Scott Stringer to obtain a \$100,000 grant to renovate the dog runs at Carl Schurz Park.

In addition, the council member co-sponsored a free bike helmet giveaway at the park.

Scott Stringer moves to regulate Army recruiters in the classroom.

Military recruiters who use class time to make pitches to students will face restraints if Stringer has his way. The boro prez calls their actions "illegal, immoral and intolerable."