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Independent Democratic Conference Hosts Public Hearing on Campaign Finance and Ethics Reform in Albany

ALBANY, NY – Today in the capital, the New York State Senate’s Independent Democratic Conference hosted its fourth statewide hearing on campaign finance and ethics reform. At the hearing, experts offered testimony on proposals to publicly finance campaigns, overhaul the state’s porous campaign finance laws, and eliminate conflicts of interests between lobbyists and campaign consultants.

Senate Co-Leader and Independent Democratic Conference Leader Jeff Klein (D-Bronx) said, “After debating these issues statewide, it’s clear that New Yorkers want real reform. Today’s hearing is another opportunity for experts and voters to weigh in on the type of change they want to see.”

Last month, the IDC introduced the most comprehensive campaign finance reform bill in Albany. The IDC’s legislation would implement a publicly financed campaign system funded by unclaimed funds in the State Comptroller’s office, a surcharge on civil settlements won by the state, and an optional “check-off box” on state income tax forms.

In addition to an optional public financing program, the IDC’s plan would (1) ban all corporate contributions, (2) slash contribution limits for all candidates to \$2,600 (3) eliminate loopholes that allow campaign slush funds known as “housekeeping” accounts to prosper, (4) empower the Attorney General to enforce campaign finance violations, and (5) create a statewide “doing business” database to enable the Board of Elections of track those donors who have business before the state. The IDC’s proposal would also repeal the so-called Wilson-Pakula law, which currently enables party chairmen to unilaterally determine their party’s candidate.

Experts at Monday’s hearing included: League of Women Voters’ Legislative Director Barbara Bartoletti, NYPIRG’s Bill Mahoney, and the Co-Directors of the State Board of Elections Robert Brehm and Todd Valentine, among others. The hearing was live streamed via www.livestream.com/nysenate4

Senator David Valesky (D-Oneida) said, “Voters deserve a voice in this debate. These hearings are a great opportunity for us to hear from them directly, and to learn about the changes that they would like to see.”

Senator Diane Savino (D-Staten Island/Brooklyn) said, “These public hearings are a great way to hear from voters and experts about the best way to change the system. After everything that’s happened, it’s clear that we need reform.”

“These hearings provide the public with an opportunity voice their concerns about the process and to offer common sense solutions. It’s clear that we owe our constituents real reform,” said Senator David Carlucci (D-Rockland).