



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Griffo Says Scandals Point to Need to Completely Revamp System

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO April 11, 2013

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State Senator Joseph A. Griffo (R-C-IP, Rome) today called for sweeping changes in the penalties for elected officials who are convicted of corruption and pressed for adoption of a series of initiatives to overhaul the elections process.

“The recent high-profile revelations of corruption allegations of several state and local government officials have prompted a surge of suggestions to combat the problem,” said Griffo. “Governor Cuomo has unveiled a series of proposals to create new crimes for violating the public trust, to toughen penalties for public corruption and to permanently ban those convicted of serving in office again. While the Governor and Legislative leaders will be looking to approve such measures, I contend that there are further, more systemic changes that if made, could make more of a difference in stemming corrupt elected, in increasing transparency and accountability of those who violate the public trust.

LIMIT TERMS FOR STATEWIDE OFFICEHOLDERS AND LEGISLATORS

Griffo said the incidents highlight the need for further changes to reform the culture of doing business in Albany. He pointed to legislation ([S.3556](#) & [S.2218](#)) which would limit the tenure of statewide electeds, as the kind of systemic-level action needed in Albany.

“One of the very first pieces of legislation I sponsored when I came to Albany in 2007 – and one that did pass that term -- was a bill that would impose term limits on the most powerful offices in Albany, because I felt then and still believe that a structure that does not allow change cannot provide the climate of openness and transparency that I believe are vital elements in the functioning of government,” Griffo said. He noted that the State Senate has adopted term limits for leadership positions as a rule governing Senate operations, but said he still wants the limits formalized into law and also enacted by the Assembly to cover both houses.

Griffo also said that time has come for a serious consideration on term limits for rank and file legislators. “Imposing term limits on rank and file positions jump-starts change to build a better system, and in the end state government must be built with a structure that gets the job done, not one that allows for the development of powerful demagogues to secure a lifetime position.”

The Senator also supports an amendment to the constitution that would limit the tenures of the offices of the governor, comptroller and attorney general. Griffo said that it could go a long way in keeping New York State's leadership fresh and innovative and allow an influx of new voices and perspectives in order to make better and broader the representation of the people of New York in the state's executive branch.

INITIATIVE, REFERENDUM AND RECALL

The Senator believes that his legislation ([S.2214](#)) would foster greater participatory democracy in New York State by allowing voters to 1) place proposed laws on the ballot for New Yorkers to adopt or reject (initiative); 2) place an already existing law on the ballot for New Yorkers to reject or accept (referendum); and 3) place the question of whether to remove and replace a public official on the ballot (recall).

“Twenty-four states presently allow citizen initiative measures of some type,” Griffo noted. “Establishing initiative and referendum and recall in New York would be an important check on the power of special interests in the State.”

FORFEITURE OF PUBLIC PENSION FOR CONVICTED POLS

Griffo’s co-sponsorship of a bill ([S.3048](#)) which would bar any elected official convicted of a felony offense that occurred during their time in office from collecting their pension benefits earned while in such office. “While we passed a law in 2011 that would allow prosecutors to apply for the revocation of a convicted official’s pension, there are still constitutional considerations that need to be addressed that would allow authorities to strip pensions from an officeholder convicted of a felony,” Griffo added. “Since the prospect of jail-time hasn’t proved to be a complete deterrent to those indulging in public corruption, the idea of forfeiting a nest egg earned over a lifetime of public service would strengthen the incentive to stay straight.”

“My colleagues and I in the Senate Republican Conference are going to continue to work with the Governor to pass meaningful public integrity and campaign finance reform legislation this session that will raise the stakes for those electeds who are convicted of betraying the public’s trust,” Griffo concluded. “I hope to discuss and advance more ideas, recognizing that there are no ‘silver-bullets’ that will end criminal behavior by public officials. We won’t agree on every aspect or idea proposed, but we need to address and implement initiatives to reflect change and incur consequences for criminal behavior while holding public office. If we are serious about fighting corruption, then constitutional questions need to be confronted and resolved, but we have an opportunity here to affect generational changes that will shift supervision and power back to the citizenry who entrust public officials with responsibility.”