



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruben Diaz

What You Should Know

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WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

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The Magnificent Seven Members of the Moreland Commission

Late Monday afternoon, after most people had left work for the day, the Moreland Commission to Investigate Public Corruption released its preliminary report. The Moreland Commission, as it is commonly called, was convened by Governor Andrew Cuomo in July and included significant involvement from members of his staff.

As expected, the report painted a very bleak picture of New York State politics. According to Thomas Kaplan of the New York Times: “While providing limited details, the report described ‘a pay-to-play political culture driven by large checks,’ in which wealthy interests exchanged campaign contributions for legislation; candidates spent campaign money on personal items like clothing and cigars; and the Board of Elections consistently failed to enforce election

laws. The report suggested that campaign finance laws were so lax that fund-raising can amount to 'legalized bribery'."

As was also expected, the Moreland Commission presented recommendations to clean up New York State's political mess, including the public financing of campaigns similar to the system that is already in place in New York City and implementing limits on campaign contributions.

Ladies and gentlemen, you should know the report did not have the unanimous consent of all the members of the Commission. There were seven dissenters and I stand with these magnificent seven members of the Moreland Commission. I stand with these magnificent seven members of the Moreland Commission in their statement that public funds should not be used for political campaigns. Why should public funds be used for my political campaign when just the other day the New York Daily News described the Bronx as "the hungriest borough?" Why should public money be used to finance political campaigns when our homeless shelters are overflowing and affordable housing is so scarce? How can any politician in good conscience accept public money for his or her campaign when so many of their constituents continue to struggle to support their families?

You should also know that the majority of politicians who have been indicted, found guilty and who are presently serving or waiting to serve prison sentences, are not in prison as a result of campaign finance and election law violations. They are in prison or have been found guilty for other unrelated crimes. The simple reality is that had the Moreland Commission's recommendations already been in place, the recommendations would not have prevented these politicians from committing the types of crimes for which they were found guilty and subsequently sent to prison.

My dear reader, don't get me wrong, the current system needs to be fixed and loopholes exist that you could drive a Sherman Tank through. Take for example Governor Cuomo's birthday fundraiser bash he held at the Roseland Ballroom in New York City on Tuesday night. The top ticket came with a price tag of \$50,000. How can he honestly look at any politician with a straight face, especially on the heels of his Moreland Commission's report, and call for campaign finance reform while he blatantly increases his already-bloated war chest? Shouldn't the Governor be the role model for campaign finance reform? Shouldn't the Governor eliminate the influence of big money donors who have business before the State? Shouldn't the Moreland Commission be looking into the Governor's campaign contributions as well as the Legislature's?

You should know that just because the Governor's big money fundraiser is not technically illegal, it doesn't mean that it is morally and ethically justifiable. As I have written before in this column, "In ancient Rome there was a saying that says Caesar's wife should not only be pure, but have the appearance of purity."

That is why I agree with the Magnificent Seven Members of the Moreland Commission. And I hope that all my colleagues in the Senate do the same.

I am Senator Rev. Rubén Díaz and this is what you should know.