



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Ethics Legislation to End Albany's Pay-to-Play Culture, Restore Public Trust

SENATOR MICHAEL H. RANZENHOFER August 15, 2018

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Senator Ranzenhofer's column appeared in the Amherst and Clarence Bees on August 15th. From bid-rigging scandals to corruption trials and guilty verdicts, hard-working Western New Yorkers are fed up with the lack of ethics in state government. That is why I am pleased to report that two of my ethics reform bills passed the New York State Senate as part of the most sweeping package of good government initiatives proposed in years.

The first bill ([S8409](#)) that I sponsored prevents the appearance of “pay-to-play” by limiting political donations– from parties applying for grants, licenses, or doing business with public entities– to the public officials or candidates who would approve such grants, licenses, or contracts.

Unfortunately, disclosures of significant donations by people or businesses who have received significant public contracts or licenses gives rise to public suspicion that there may be a relationship between the two occurrences. This suspicion creates public cynicism and distrust of the process of how public bodies make their decisions.

The second bill ([S8404](#)) that I authored prohibits Executive appointees from making political contributions to the Governor, as well as his or her political campaign. The appointees would be prohibited from making campaign contributions within a year of appointment, during their term, and for a year after the term ends.

A February 2018 New York Times article profiled a current trend whereby Executive appointees have donated nearly \$900,000 to the Governor’s re-election campaign. An atmosphere where appointees operate under the practice of making routine political contributions to the individual appointing them to their positions leads hardworking citizens to believe that Albany is rife with a “pay-to-play” culture.

Simply put, private companies should not be allowed to make campaign contributions to politicians while under consideration for state contracts, and appointed officials of the

Executive branch should not be permitted to make donations to the Governor's re-election campaign. This only fosters distrust and skepticism of the process in state government, and my legislation stops these questionable practices from continuing.

The comprehensive legislative package also incorporates numerous bills to prevent the misuse of taxpayer dollars, including:

- Protect taxpayer dollars when economic development agreements do not meet expectations;
- Develop a searchable state investment database;
- Create the New York State Procurement Integrity Act;
- Open an Independent Budget Office; and
- Reform START-UP NY.

These measures will help ensure taxpayer dollars are invested in effective programs, prevent real or perceived conflicts of interest and enhance transparency in agreements made by state government agencies.

I voted in favor of this comprehensive ethics reform package when it passed the State Senate. Unfortunately, the State Assembly has failed to advance this legislation, and the time is now to enact real reforms.

This legislation would help to end Albany's pay-to-play culture and restore the public's trust in their state government.