

## Following Scandals, A Bunch Of Plans For Reforming Albany

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Legislators returning from a spring break that saw the arrest of two of their colleagues on corruption charges find themselves in a new Albany where ethics reform is at the top of everyone's to-do list. And everyone has got a plan.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver [unveiled his plan](#) for public financing of campaigns today that includes six-to-one matching funds that would be paid for by taxpayers who opt in on state tax forms and with money recovered from securities fraud.

Silver's plan did not address the Wilson Pakula law that allows for cross-party endorsements. The law has come under scrutiny since state Sen. Malcolm Smith, a Democrat, was arrested on corruption allegations that he tried to bribe his way onto the Republican line for New York City Mayor.

The group that took perhaps the biggest hit from the recent scandal was the breakaway Independent Democratic Conference that had appointed Smith the chair of their five-member conference.

The IDC expelled Smith and, last Friday, issued its own campaign finance reform plans.

[Those plans include](#) a comprehensive public campaign finance system with a six-to-one match for candidates that opt into the system. It also establishes a minimum threshold a candidate must raise to opt in to the system while running for different elected positions. Meanwhile, candidates who choose not to opt in to public financing would face a system with far more restrictions and on corporate donations and contribution limits. The IDC plan would also create a statewide database to track campaign finance data and do away with the Wilson Pakula law.

For their part, Senate Democrats [unveiled their own plan](#) yesterday, which calls for the passage of a number of bills they have previously proposed. Among the proposals: Legislators convicted of corruption would lose their pensions, legislators could not use campaign cash for defense lawyers or for expensive meals and cars, and lobbyists would have to better document their spending. The Demcorats' proposal did not deal with [fusion voting](#) or restricting corporate donations.

IDC leader Sen. Jeff Klein responded harshly to the proposals from Silver and the Senate Democrats because of their lack of action on Wilson Pakula.

"The IDC appreciates Speaker Silver's commitment to public financing," said Klein in a statement today. "Nevertheless, our members believe that unless we repeal Wilson Pakula, eliminate party slush funds, and prohibit multi-million dollar transfers from party committees to individual candidates, then we will fail to address the fundamental problems of our current campaign finance system. The proposal put forth by the IDC last week accomplishes all of these goals and will finally deliver the type of reform that voters demand."

However, ending the law would effectively destroy third parties like the Conservative and Working Families parties.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo previewed part one of his anti-corruption plans last week. You can expect that he has been negotiating with legislators on some sort of package. We could hear an announcement from him as early as today. Cuomo has championed public financing but Senate Republicans have stood firmly against it.

Republican Spokesman Scott Reif told the Times Union earlier this week that "allowing politicians to use taxpayer money to finance their campaigns is not a solution."

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