NYPIRG's Mahoney: Senate Hearing on NYC Campaign Financing A 'Kangaroo Court' *Updated*

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The Senate elections committee will hold hearings on corruption in the New York City public campaign finance system at 11 a.m. tomorrow. Oral testimony is by invite-only, and it just so happens that a good number of campaign finance experts from New York are not welcome to speak.

Bill Mahoney, New York Public Interest Research Group's number-cruncher extraordinare, just happens to be one of those campaign finance experts.

"Oral testimony is by invitation only," Mahoney said. "I suppose they are not interested in hearing from actual New Yorkers who have been effected by the system. They just want to hear people criticize a system that works better than ours."

Members of some of the state's largest government watchdog groups wrote the committe chairs — Sens. Thomas O'Mara and Diane Savino — to ask to be allowed to testify but they were not allowed to give oral testimony. The groups include Common Cause/NY, The Brennan Center, Citizen Action New York and Center For Working Families.

When asked about why good government groups were not allowed to give oral testimony, Senate Republican spokesman Scott Reif replied:"I don't believe that is accurate. Dick Dadey, from Citizens Union, is on our confirmed speaker list."

When the Gazette clarified that the quesiton was about specific watchdog groups, Reif replied:

"The witness list reflects a wide range of views on taxpayer-funded political campaigns. Anyone who is not testifying is welcome to submit written testimony for the committee to review and

consider."

Jessica Wisnewski of Citizen Action New York has her own thoughts on why Republicans wouldn't want to have a group of diverse experts speaking on the issue. "Report after report shows massive corporate donations benefit the Senate Republcians. Big money goes where power is," she said. "Senate Republicans are protecting the status quo rather than bringing real people's voices into the process."

Speaking of reports, Mahoney will issue one tomorrow showing that there have been 103,805 campaign finance violations since 2011. Mahoney and a number of people who have not been allowed to testify before the elections committee are in favor of the state adopting a public campaign financing system like New York City's.

Senate Republicans have spent a great deal of time recently attacking the city's financing system, calling it corrupt and pointing to scandals like one involving two former members of Comptroller John Liu's campaign staff.

Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb recently told the Gazette that he is "excited" to hear about more corruption in the New York City system.

Senate Republicans have mailed constituents in the recent past attacking Democrats for wanting the public to fund their campaigns but they have been loathe to talk about campaign finance reform in public. Until, that is, the recent string of legislative scandals that has brought campaign finance reform to the forefront of public discussion.

"It certainly seems like the most urgent time in recent memory," said Mahoney of campaign finance reform. "The longer politicians like Thomas O'Mara hold off on real hearings and real discussion of reform, the more indictments and scandals we are going to see."

Tags: Tagged in: Bill Mahoney Brennan Center Citizen Action Common Cause
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