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Campaign Finance Reform Not Lost in 2008 Legislative Session

Assembly bill a strong step forward in fight for public funding of campaigns

Albany – On Wednesday, the New York State Assembly passed A.11507 sponsored by Speaker Sheldon Silver. The bill would institute a voluntary public campaign finance system for statewide, legislative and constitutional convention delegate races in New York. The legislation combines elements of Speaker Silver’s former matching funds public financing legislation and the Clean Elections style of public financing represented in S.7175a sponsored by Senate Minority Leader Malcolm Smith.

“This is a clear and bold step forward in the fight to curb the influence of special interests in Albany and level the playing field for candidates across the state,” said Jessica Wisneski, Campaigns Director of Citizen Action of New York, the statewide advocacy organization that has been leading the grassroots effort to pass Clean Elections, full public financing of elections in New York State. “The Assembly Majority and the Senate Minority are listening to the vast majority of New Yorkers who understand that until we replace our old and broken campaign finance system with a system of public financing, corporate campaign contributors will keep getting their way: no expanded bottle bill, no bulk purchasing of prescription drugs, no end to vacancy decontrol.”

A.11507 would allow candidates who met threshold requirements to receive a \$4-\$1 match of public funds for contributions of \$250 or less from New York State residents. Participants would agree to strict spending limits and new campaign contribution limits of \$2000. If a participating candidate is outspent by a non-participating opponent, the participant would then receive a grant of additional public funds of 25% of their original public match in order to stay competitive. If they continue to be outspent by a non-participating opponent, additional grants of funding would continue until the participant received 100% of the original grant given, doubling their public funds.

“Speaker Silver has long been a leader on public financing of campaigns. Today Speaker Silver and the Assembly have shown their firm commitment to fundamental reform of our campaign finance system,” said Karen Scharff, Executive Director of Citizen Action of New York. “Citizen Action of New York has long supported a Clean Elections, full public financing system like the system passed by Connecticut’s state legislature in 2005, and supported by Senator Malcolm Smith (S7175a). We are glad to see aspects of a Clean Elections system incorporated into the

Speaker's bill, along with a very robust matching system, and we look forward to both houses of the legislature passing a strong public financing system in the 2009 legislative session.”

An April 2008 Zogby International Poll commissioned by the Public Policy and Education Fund of New York (Citizen Action's research affiliate) showed strong public support for public financing of elections, with 74% in favor, including 45% strongly in favor and 22% opposed (13% strongly). The poll showed that the public believes such a system would ultimately save taxpayers money and would level the playing field so that average people can run for office and represent voters, not the special interests. (For full poll results go to: www.citizenactionny.org/about/ppef_index.html)

There are currently three states and a number of cities across the country using Clean Elections, the full public financing system outlined in the Smith Bill S7175a, and New York City has used a matching funds system to similar to A11507 since 1980.

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