

POLITICS

# New York Republicans Hammer Proposed State Campaign-Finance System Over Cost

A state commission is exploring how to set up public system that costs no more than \$100 million a year



New York state Senate Minority Leader John Flanagan criticized the potential costs involved in establishing a statewide public campaign-finance system. PHOTO: HANS PENNINK/ASSOCIATED PRESS

*By Jimmy Vielkind*

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New York Republicans on Tuesday stepped up their attacks against a state commission set up to create up a public campaign-finance system, questioning the cost of such a system and the methods for crafting it.

State lawmakers created the commission as part of the budget adopted in April. The commission's job is to develop a public campaign-finance system for state and local offices throughout the state with an annual cost of no more than \$100 million.

State Senate Minority Leader John Flanagan, a Long Island Republican, held a press conference Tuesday outside a hearing of the state Public Financing Reform Commission to warn of the system's potential costs.

“People want to see money spent on education and health care,” Mr. Flanagan said. “I don’t believe for a second that they’re going to cap it at \$100 million. If it’s oversubscribed, the first thing the people who invented this debacle will do is say they need to get more money into the system.”

Mr. Flanagan said legislators, not a commission, should make decisions about such a system. Mr. Flanagan and Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb, a Republican from upstate Ontario County, have both joined a lawsuit challenging the commission’s power to alter the practice of fusion voting, which allows candidates for office to combine votes received on multiple party ballot lines in an election.

The suit, in state Supreme Court in Niagara County, was filed by leaders of the Working Families and Conservative parties. It asked a judge to declare fusion voting a constitutional right. A lawyer for the commission said in court papers that a judge shouldn’t rule amid a continuing public debate.

On Tuesday, the commissioners listened to testimony from activists and elected officials, then passed a resolution, by a 5-4 vote, to restrict the award of any matching funds to money raised from donors in a given district.

Democrats, including Assemblyman Phil Ramos, of Suffolk County, spoke up in favor of public matching funds. Mr. Ramos said it would increase participation in politics and let lawmakers spend less time raising money.

Democratic State Committee Chairman Jay Jacobs, who sits on the commission, said the body hoped to release a final report by the day before Thanksgiving, a time frame Republicans denounced. Members of the Legislature then have 20 days to reject or modify its findings, otherwise they become law.

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