

# Senators oppose tax \$\$ funding of campaigns

By CRAIG McGUIRE

Gazette staff writer

Two state senators say they disagree with a national grass roots movement to "clean out the special interest mess in Washington."

The good government proponents are urging the use of taxpayer dollars to fund political campaigns and reduce the advantage that incumbents have over challengers.

"Clean Up Washington," a movement of more than 300 organizations in over 80 cities, wants reform in campaign contributions and spending limits.

Travis Plunkett, spokesman for the New York Public Interest Research Group, said the groups are asking President Clinton to honor his inaugural day promise to "give this capital back to the people to whom it belongs."

"Clean Up Washington" wants to replace special interest money in campaigns with clean public resources, said Plunkett.

But Sen. Joseph Bruno, RC-Troy, said in hard economic times it's unwise and fiscally imprudent to consider using tax revenue to fund political campaigns.

Sen. Michael Nozzolio, RC-Fayette, chairman of the Senate Elections Commit-

tee, said any call for using taxpayer dollars to finance election campaigns is simply misguided. "In these difficult economic times, tax dollars need to be spent on vital services like health care, social services and crime prevention, not financing political elections."

But a national poll conducted in December by Washington-based pollster Greenberg-Lake, showed 72 percent of 805 likely voters support a public financing system funded by a voluntary tax check-off and new taxes on lobbyists. The poll had a three percent margin of error.

Public Citizen, a Washington-based advocacy group, proposed four ways to "democratically" fund elections:

- End the tax deduction for business lobbying expenses. It would produce \$100 million per year.
- Eliminate the franking privilege for unsolicited mail by members of Congress. It would produce \$100 million per year.
- Reduce the business entertainment tax deduction from 80 percent to 75 percent. It would produce \$600 million per year.
- Increase the taxpayer check-off from \$1 to \$5 to support the congressional public financing system. It would yield \$100 million per year.

Assembly Democrats supported public campaign funding and earlier this year approved legislation that included a tax check-off.

John D. Feerick, president of the Association of the Bar of New York City, said that a public financing program already in place in New York City has reduced the size of the largest contributors, decreased the spending disparity among candidates and increased individual participation in campaign financing.

Richard Kirsch from Citizen Action of New York said that to win national health insurance, Congress must free itself from having to raise millions of dollars from health industry interests to run for election. "The key to unlocking healthcare reform is public financing," he said.

The "Clean Up Washington" movement is represented in New York by NYPIRG, Common Cause, The League of Women Voters and United We Stand, America of New York State.

Last fall, 18 congressional representatives signed the Common Cause anti-corruption statement. By signing this they committed themselves to supporting restrictions on contributions, banning "soft money," and imposing spending limits, which include providing public financing.

An additional three representatives, Michael McNulty, Floyd Flake and Louise Slaughter did not sign the statement but voted for the campaign finance reform bill that passed Congress last year. It was vetoed by President Bush.