

For Immediate Release  
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## **Statement by Dick Dadey, Executive Director On the Announcement of Ethics Legislation by Governor Spitzer and State Legislative Leaders**

Citizens Union supports the effort by the Governor, Senate Majority Leader, and Assembly Speaker to address serious deficiencies in the regulation of lobbying and oversight over ethics in government with the announcement today that a three way agreement on legislation had been reached. It is a promising start to changing the culture of state government. It hopefully will end the lax way in which business has historically been done in Albany.

We support the direction of several elements of the proposal that have been announced today by the Governor and the leaders of both houses of the State Legislature, specifically the strengthening of the prohibition on gifts to public officials and the ban on honoraria. We have long argued for these important reforms.

However, it has been our position that the current bifurcated system of ethics enforcement, with the Executive and Legislative branches having separate agencies that monitor themselves, remains in need of reform. We support the creation of an independent ethics commission with broader jurisdiction to monitor and enforce New York's ethics laws in both the executive and legislative branches. A key element of this structure is ensuring that the commission is independent and not beholden to those that appoint them.

The current proposal would fold the New York Temporary State Commission on Lobbying (Lobbying Commission) and the State Ethics Commission into one body that would be composed of 13 members, seven of whom would be appointed by the Governor. While we applaud the Governor's commitment to reform, and his resolve to pursue a reform agenda, we are concerned that the Lobbying Commission, which we believe has been effective and has lived up to its mandate, will be reshuffled and lead to little more than a consolidation of power. We hope that this new body will pursue enforcement of the lobbying law much in the same successful way that the current state lobbying commission has operated.

Citizens Union is encouraged that a proposal has been put forth and expects the Governor and Legislative leaders who have drafted this to remain open to suggestions on how to further strengthen ethics oversight and enforcement.

We hold out hope that the Governor and legislature will also address the following ethics and lobbying

issues this legislative session:

- **End “Pay to Play” Practices**

The influence that contractors, developers, and lobbyists have with elected officials, not only here but throughout the country, is at times enhanced by the ability of these persons and entities to contribute directly to a candidate’s campaign for office. The infusion of large sums of money by businesses and unions with public contracts and lobbyists into the campaign coffers of elected representatives has generated a widespread public belief that contributors are “paying” those officials for the opportunity to “play” with the government. Legislation should be passed to restrict this activity.

- **Restrict the personal use of campaign contributions.**

Restrictions on the personal use of campaign funds must be strengthened and enforced. In recent years, reports of politicians using their campaign funds to cover arguably personal expenses have exposed a serious inadequacy of current legal restrictions on such behavior.

Click [here](#) to read the draft legislation.



Citizens Union of the City of New York, a non-partisan force for good government for more than 100 years, works to inform and engage New Yorkers, to ensure local and state government values its citizens, addresses critical issues, and operates in a fair, open, and fiscally sound manner.

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