

**Testimony of G. Oliver Koppell**  
**New York City Council Member**  
**before**  
**New York City Campaign Finance Board:**  
**2005 Post-Election Hearings**  
**December 13, 2005**

Good afternoon, Chairman Schwarz and Honorable Members of the New York City Campaign Finance Board. Thank for the opportunity to testify at these Post-Election Hearings.

I am City Council Member Oliver Koppell and I represent the 11<sup>th</sup> Council District located in the North West Bronx, which comprises the neighborhoods of Bedford Park, Kingsbridge, Norwood, Riverdale, Wakefield and Woodlawn. I have been involved with elective politics for nearly 30 years. I have served as Assembly Member, Attorney General and School Board President prior to my current position as Council Member.

How did Program Work?

I am a strong supporter of the Campaign Finance Program (CFP) and I believe that the program does influence candidates' decisions to run for elective office. With regard to my recent reelection, the CFP did not influence my own decision to run; however, I believe it did encourage my primary opponent to enter the race, which was fine with me. (I did receive 76% of the vote.)

The new disclosure and contribution limits had no impact on decision to join the CFP. I would have chosen to avail myself of the CFP with or without the new limits.

The CFP made fundraising much less of a significant aspect of my campaign. Although, I did devote some time to fundraising, I would have had expend much more time, if the CFP had not existed.

I agree that the CFP furthered by all of the governmental reforms that were suggested in the Issues for Consideration: limiting the influence of private money on local campaigns, enabling serious candidates to run competitive campaigns and providing full disclosure of candidates' campaign finance, including non-participant' finances.

The spending limits in the CFP are roughly appropriate. I believe that the aggregate amount allowable for City Council races is slightly low. The aggregate amount available in my opinion should be \$200,000 for Council races. Because of ambiguities in defining exempt expenditures, the Board should increase the aggregate amount and not allow for any exemptions.

The CFP thresholds for receiving public funds are appropriate. I do believe, however that the payments need to be made more expeditiously, because delay can seriously harm a campaign.

The 4 to 1 public matching funds is entirely appropriate.

As I mentioned, I believe that the maximum amount is roughly appropriate, but should be increase slightly for Council races.

With regard to the amount of public funds available, I believe that the CFB should consider reviewing whether or not, as well as how much public funding should be expended when a candidate has no opponent.

The CFB website is excellent. It provides an extremely useful resource for citizens, journalists and candidates to determine the source of campaign finance data.

I support the ban on corporate contributions as well as the political committee registration requirement.

More assistance and regular appointments with the CFB should be made available for campaign staff during elections. Even with my many years of experience in fundraising and compliance, my campaign staff still had problems, because of the complicated nature of the regulations.

#### Ideas for Further Reform

Unfortunately, given the state of the law as enunciated by the Supreme Court, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the CFP to address the issue of high-spending non-participants.

The legislation recently passed by the City Council regarding so-called single source contributions from labor unions satisfactorily addresses this issue. The language may perhaps need some adjustment as we apply this rule, but I do not believe it is appropriate to treat umbrella labor organizations it the same entity as their constituent local unions. Frequently local unions endorse and support different candidates from their Citywide or regional affiliate-organizations.

I support the proposal that entities that do business with the City should be subject to disclosure, but I do not believe that contributions from such business should be prohibited.

I do not believe there need to be any further regulations with regard to the expenditure of government funds on New York City political campaigns, as I have seen little evidence to indicate that this has been an area of major abuse.

The current regulations of the CFP regarding campaigns that make contributions to other candidates and political committees are adequate.

Further, I believe that candidates should be allowed to transfer campaign funds from one campaign to another.

There need not be any further restrictions on the use of public funds. The current regulations on this issue are sufficient.

I absolutely agree that the CFP should be expanded to include other offices, such as District Attorney and judges.

With regard to recommendations for change to the CFP, I believe the Board should closely study the complaints that are made by candidates about the CFP to determine their validity. Many of colleagues in the Council have bitterly complained about what they feel are arbitrary decisions and complicated regulations of the Program.

#### Voter Guide

I think that the Voter Guide is excellent and I do not recommend that any changes to its format be made.

Similarly, I am impressed with the on-line Voter Guide and I do not have any recommendations for changes.

I believe the Voter Guide should be expanded to include other offices and other languages. I did not bring the Guide to the polls with me, but I did find the pro/con statements on the ballot proposals extremely helpful.

#### Debate Program

I think that the Debate Program is crucial to educate voters about the candidates. The Debate Program would have been more effective if there had been more mayoral debates.

I would support proposals to expand the Debate Program to elected offices of every level.

Thank you the opportunity to address the Board on these matters.