

THE DAILY TARGUM

NJ encourages public financing for 30 years

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Efforts to change campaign finance have prevailed in New Jersey, New York City and Connecticut, but lessons can still be learned in order to improve election conditions in the future.

Campaign election officials convened at a conference at the Eagleton Institute of Politics Friday morning to discuss successful changes in public financing of campaigns.

Ingrid Reed, policy analyst and the New Jersey Project director who organized the event, said they are recognizing important milestones of public financing in New Jersey for 30 years, New York City for 20 years and Connecticut for one year.

With public financing, the rules are the same for everyone, said Executive Director of New York City Campaign Finance Board Amy M. Loprest.

“We audit every single contribution before public contributions are made,” Loprest said.

School of Arts and Sciences first-year student Allie Howard said public financing helps level the playing field and prevents a money race from occurring among candidates.

“Contributions will always be a part of politics but elections should not be determined by money alone,” Howard said.

Public financing also raises questions of how candidates encourage more diversity in the types of people that run and how they provide information to voters, Reed said. Requiring candidates in exchange for some kind of public involvement to debate and provide information to voters and encouraging citizens to participate by donating money raises other questions.

“Today we have an opportunity to explore it further,” Reed said.

The campaign election officials touched on the benefits and requirements of public financing observed in their respective locations.

In New York City, Loprest said the matching funds program works really well because it allows citizens to participate in the political process by creating an incentive for the candidate to reach out for low contributions.

They continually review elections and add amendments to campaign acts in order to support public financing, she said.

But in Connecticut, Beth Rotman, the first director of the Connecticut State’s Citizens Election Program for



Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., pictured above at his 2008 post-election celebration, has received public donations toward campaigns since 1994.

the State Elections Enforcement Commission, said she has seen a wide range of candidates that never would have run before they joined the program and ran for office.

Within Connecticut, the road to public financing began in 1999 after a scandal involving State Treasurer Paul Sylvester, said Executive Director of the Connecticut State Elections Enforcement Commission Jeffrey Garfield.

School of Environmental and Biological Sciences first-year student Joseph Rua said compared to the past, there have been a lot of developments made in terms of fairness of elections because of public financing. The matching rate makes politicians pay more attention to the average American than the wealthy because they are encouraged to go out and get small donations, he said.

“[The matching rate makes] the issues they stand for known to the public so they can make a better choice politically,” Rua said.

But in New Jersey, Albert Burstein, former assemblyman and Election Law Enforcement Commission member, said he saw the connection between significant political contribution and subsequent governmental favors and decided to write a bill that would isolate candidacy from the poisonous impact and influence of money.

William E. Schluter, a former New Jersey State Senator who currently serves on the State Ethics Commission, said the bill faced many obstacles but was able to beat down many amendments that were designed to kill the bill.