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## New campaign law strengthens Ohio

Your voice: Amy Showalter

What is the No. 1 reason people are disengaged from the political process? Legislators behaving badly. That's why Ohioans should not be distracted by two lawsuits filed recently over the state's new campaign finance law.

The law, which took effect March 31, strengthened our political process by making Ohio's campaign finance system more transparent.

Two challenges have been filed against the law in the last several weeks. A judge temporarily blocked a provision that prohibits union dues from being used to pay for political campaigns. And an anti-tax group challenged another part that prohibited paying people who gather signatures for candidates or ballot issues.

The hue and cry over these minor aspects of the law should not change anyone's opinion about the most comprehensive financial disclosure reform in Ohio history.

My support for this new law is based on personal experience with legislators and their constituents. The biggest challenge is in convincing people that their voice matters to elected officials. Several years ago, I surveyed citizen advocates across the country who lobby public officials on behalf of their organizations. The No. 1 barrier that keeps them from doing more of this work, they said consistently, was they believe too many elected officials don't listen, talk at them rather than with them, and are so driven by money that they won't have a voice unless they supplement their advocacy with large checks made out to their elected officials. I have had to train citizen lobbyists how to react when they are approached for a contribution.

The new law was passed during state and federal investigations of two Republican consultants accused of heavy-handed fund-raising methods and using hidden county-party accounts to dodge campaign disclosure rules and contribution limits. The new law, signed by Gov. Bob Taft in December, requires prompt, complete disclosure of all money that pours into the political process.

I know many legislators cringe with shame when they hear about their colleagues' misdeeds. But legislators need to know that 80 percent of the people they represent are very cynical about the process.

So if you see a legislator or any state elected official soon, thank him or her for passing this reform.

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