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Subject: Ethics - on the move!

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Ethics - on the move!

Dear Friends:

The time is overdue to strengthen our South Carolina's ethics laws.

I have written about this issue a number of times over the past two years as the House has studied and debated improvements to the Ethics Act that was put into place in the early 90s. At the time, that initiative was touted as the strongest ethics legislation in the country and a model for other states. It's now time to improve and update.

This week, the House put the finishing touches on a bi-partisan Ethics Reform Act that passed 110-0. This is so important I'm devoting this newsletter to this one issue. A true recounting of this legislation would take many pages, so here are the highlights of the major reforms we approved and sent to the Senate:

Independent Investigations for Reported Ethics Violations: We established a 12-member independent panel responsible for investigating every ethics matter that arises for members of all branches of the government: executive (including local officials), legislative, and judicial. This body will have the authority to receive and, most importantly, investigate complaints independently.

Two members would be appointed by the House, two by the Senate, four by the Governor, and four by the state Supreme Court. Adjudication of complaints will go back to the appropriate enforcement committee.

Who would be on this committee was a point of contention, since it is imperative that we remove as many sources of conflicts of interest as possible. Nobody on the committee may be a public official, an office holder, a family member of an official, been a lobbyist for the previous four years, or a judge. In addition, we excluded anybody who had made a campaign contribution to the person who nominated them or anybody who is a business associate of the person nominating them. The members of the committee must also avoid making any political contributions or engaging in any political activity covered by the ethics act.

Expanded Income Disclosure: This legislation requires reporting of the source of any private income

by the filer or their immediate family members. It requires the reporting of the specific source of income received from a lobbyist principal, state or local government source, or business regulated by the filer. This will give the public new access to information on the potential conflicts of interest that may arise with public officials.

Banned "Leadership PACs": We call for the elimination of political action committees controlled directly or indirectly by a candidate.

Financial Records: The legislation allows an official's ethics supervisory committee to request banking records that are required to be maintained by public officials. Public officials must now keep these records for four years (to match the statute of limitations). We changed this so the committees may substantiate information on a candidate's quarterly disclosures.

"Black Out" Period: We require candidates to file a final pre-election report 48 hours before the election in order to disclose final contributions and expenditures they may receive in the final days before an election.

New Restrictions on Campaign Funds: The law adds language detailing how candidates may reimburse themselves with campaign funds for travel and associated expenses by limiting mileage reimbursement to the IRS established rate, and limiting other travel expenses to either campaign events or events that fall within the scope of the candidates official duties. (And the law more strictly defines what official duties are.)

The legislation also clarifies that equipment purchased for campaign use must be consumed by the campaign or become an asset of the campaign. It requires payment for campaign services to be contemporaneous with the provision of those services and disallow immediate family from being paid by a campaign. It also disallows cash expenditures from campaign accounts.

While this legislation may not fix every ethics issue that every person may have, this goes a long way toward updating our 20-year-old Ethics Act to better reflect the realities of modern campaigns. There is no doubt that more tweaks and clarifications will be needed as these reforms are implemented, but after two years of bi-partisan study and debate in the House, this is a strong reform law that duly earned the support of many outside watchdog groups after it was approved this week.

The Ethics Reform Act returns to the Senate: It is my fervent desire Senators join us and quickly approve this much needed modernization of our ethics law before this legislative session ends in a few weeks. Otherwise we'll be forced to start all over next year.

More News To Come

Much more occurred in the General Assembly this week; the House passed some significant legislation. I'll follow up early next week with all that news.

Memorial Day!

On this Memorial Day, let us all pause to remember those who paid the ultimate price of service to America with their lives. We also pay special tribute to those who served and continue to serve here at home.

For those of you in or near Aiken County, I invite you to come show your support for our military at the Annual Memorial Day Parade in downtown Aiken. It starts Saturday at 1:00 p.m. On Monday, before the hot dogs, hamburgers and BBQ, please take time to join us for the annual Veteran's Day Ceremony at Veteran's Memorial Park on Richland Avenue East at 11:00 a.m. There's no better way to honor those who gave their lives for our freedom and liberty.

Thank you for the privilege of serving you in Columbia. If I can ever be of assistance to you, or if you have ideas on issues you want me to share with the rest of the General Assembly, please don't

hesitate to contact me.

In your Service,

Bill Taylor

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Photos of the Week

We said THANK YOU this week to all the Salvation Army volunteers in the Aiken area who serve the many in need. At the Annual Volunteers Appreciation Dinner we said farewell to Majors David & Angela Repass who have been reassigned to Conway. It was my privilege to present them a Resolution from the SC House of Representatives honoring their six years of service to the Aiken area. God bless them.

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