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Office of Senator Vincent Sheheen
District 27 - Chesterfield, Kershaw & Lancaster Counties



COMMITTEES:
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JUDICIARY

November 11, 2013

Dear Senator Rankin,

Thank you for your work examining needed changes to the ethics laws in South Carolina. It is critical that we plug the holes in the current laws, clarify gray areas, and stop the constant abuses in order to clean up our state government.

The Senate Ethics Committee made progress with bipartisan support of some of the proposals I introduced last session. As a follow up to our recent conversations about the importance of advancing true ethics reform in this coming legislative session, I offer a few specific suggestions to address ongoing violations.

1. **Clarify the law and strengthen rules to protect taxpayers' hard-earned money from continued abuse and use for campaign activities:**
 - a. Bar any elected official from using the state plane to carry political staff or for political purposes.
 - b. Ban any elected official from using state-owned cars or other state-owned vehicles for carrying campaign staff or facilitating campaign fundraising activities.
 - c. Prohibit the use of the governor's mansion and grounds, and the Statehouse building and grounds for any political fundraising activity.
2. **Eliminate political manipulation of oversight boards by appointing an independent ethics committee that is not dominated by any branch of government.** Allowing a governor to appoint (or neglect to appoint) members of the Ethics Commission that judges his or her ethics violations is worse than the fox guarding the henhouse and has not worked for South Carolina. Similarly, having the House and Senate select their own committees is questionable and results in irregular enforcement. We need a new, independent committee with fresh eyes to ensure our leaders are living up to the standard the people of South Carolina deserve.
3. **Stop the revolving door of elected officials and lobbyists.** We should create at least a five year cooling off period after elected officials' service before they can become a lobbyist.
4. **Require full income disclosure by all elected officials.** We have seen too many instances of elected officials who fail to disclose income, or delay disclosing income from government contractors or similar entities that pose as a conflict of interest. It's time for full transparency on finances.

Backing an ethics bill without strong reforms is a meaningless political gesture. Those who call for reform in public while continuing to abuse ethics standards display the height of hypocrisy. It is critical we halt the predatory and self-serving activities that we have seen all too often over the last few years. We need ethical leaders for ethical leadership, but passing comprehensive ethics reform with teeth is an important place to start.

Thank you for your hard work. I hope these changes will be included in any bill that the committee and the Senate debate. I look forward to working with you to finally enact meaningful ethics reforms this year.

Very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vincent Sheheen".

Vincent Sheheen