

A Common Sense Contract for Change

As South Carolinians seeking election to the South Carolina General Assembly, we pledge to devote ourselves not only to changing the direction of our state but, even more importantly, to restoring the bonds of trust between our state's citizens and their elected representatives. It is for that reason that we hereby bind ourselves to an agenda for South Carolina's future – a written contract with no fine print.

This year's election offers the chance to move away from state government that is too big, too arrogant and too loose with our money – a chance to end the cronyism that has held us back as a state for decades. We are running for office because we believe that the public is tired of elected officials who only pay “lip service” to these problems instead of actually working to solve them.

South Carolinians should not settle for an over-priced government that provides mediocre results. We envision a limited but effective government that provides value and real results for our tax dollars and promise that we, starting in our first legislative session and continuing in subsequent sessions, will work with each other, other legislators and our governor to pass common sense reforms in these four areas:

***FIRST, taxing and spending reforms** to more effectively target our finite resources to core services, eliminate wasteful spending, and ultimately return more money to the taxpayers of South Carolina.*

***SECOND, structural reforms** to the executive branch so that it can efficiently execute the laws and serve as an appropriate and effective check and balance on the other two branches of state government.*

***THIRD, legislative and ethics reforms** to lessen the influence of special interest groups, increase the participation of our citizens and enhance the autonomy and powers of local governments.*

***FOURTH, judicial reforms** to increase the independence of our judiciary and to make it a truly co-equal branch of state government*

The specifics concerning the state government reforms that we hereby pledge to support are as follows:

TAXING AND SPENDING REFORMS

Our state government spending has grown at one of the fastest rates in the country – over 40% in just the past three years. Last year legislators spent well over one billion dollars in new revenue and did not set aside sufficient money in a “rainy day” fund and so that we could have avoided this year's cuts to core government services. We believe government spending should increase at a sustainable rate that is commensurate with the incomes of the taxpayers paying for it and therefore propose the following:

1. An annual cap on state spending that requires budgeting at a sustainable level of growth relative to the annual increase in inflation plus the increase in the population. Tax receipts above this spending limit could be applied toward unfunded liabilities (e.g., our state retirement system), put into a “rainy day” fund to cover shortfalls in years when revenues collected fall short of projections, and/or returned to the taxpayers of our state.

2. Comprehensive reform of our state's tax system to make it relevant to the 21st century. Our tax on cigarettes is the lowest in the country, our top marginal income tax rate is one of the highest rates in the country and our tax code is riddled with sales tax exemptions that, assuming they once did, no longer make sense. Our tax structure must be comprehensively reformed, and we will fight against net tax increases and work for an overall reduction in the amount of taxes paid by South Carolinians with special emphasis placed on lowering our high job-killing income tax.
3. Elimination of the so-called "Competitive" Grants Program that one newspaper's editorial board has rightly called a "legislative slush fund."
4. Zero-based budgeting throughout state government rather than the current practice of funding agencies at the previous year's level and only debating new spending and budgeting that reduces the amount of one-time money used to fund ongoing programs (so-called "annualizations"), a practice that creates funding shortfalls in the following year's budget.
5. Creation of an independent Inspector General to be appointed by the Governor and tasked with finding waste, fraud and abuse in state government. The need for this function is evidenced by the recent disclosure that our state's insurance contract, with a \$22 million annual premium, had been placed by for nearly two decades by a company owned by a former legislator and his family without the benefit of a competitive bid process.

STRUCTURAL REFORMS

The structure of our state government as set forth in the 1895 Constitution, and as shaped by a law passed over 50 years ago, leaves us with a system that is ineffective, unaccountable and inefficient. We pay too much for our state government and receive too little, and there are insufficient lines of accountability that would lead to change. A reformed structure would lead to improved delivery of services, cost savings and increased accountability, and to that end, we propose the following:

1. Allowing the voters to decide on a constitutional amendment that reduces the number of Constitutional Officers. We believe voters want an Executive Branch they can hold accountable for results and that the voters should have the opportunity to decide whether to reduce our state's elected nine constitutional positions to, at a maximum, the national average of four in other states. We also believe that the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor should run on the same ticket as the President and Vice President do at the national level.
2. Creation of the Department of Administration to give our state's governor the authority held by chief executives in every other state in the country. The day-to-day administrative functions of government should be the responsibility of one elected individual rather than by the five-person Budget and Control Board established by state statute in 1950.
3. Consolidation of our nine separate health and human service agencies into a smaller number of agencies in the Governor's Cabinet. The Legislative Audit Council recommended this action years ago, showing that it would provide better services at a reduced cost. The fact that these agencies have twice as many secretaries as nurses speaks volumes about the inefficiencies that exist. We cannot continue to waste money while also letting our citizens' needs fall through the cracks of a bureaucratic patchwork of disorganized entities.

LEGISLATIVE AND ETHICS REFORMS

South Carolina has improved its ethics laws since the Lost Trust Scandal, but additional improvements are necessary as other states rank higher than South Carolina in terms of ethics and disclosure laws. Additionally, there are barriers that deter good people from running for office, often enabling incumbents to retain control of their seats for decades without a challenge. We therefore propose the following common-sense reforms:

1. Shortening South Carolina's five-month legislative session to the 40 working days that the legislators in Georgia meet and pushing the current March filing-deadline until after the end of the shortened session in order to provide greater opportunities for challengers to run for office.
2. Requiring recorded votes for all legislation involving expenditures of public funds and changes to the code of law. Legislators should not be able to hide behind unrecorded "voice votes" to prevent voters from holding them accountable for their actions. Roll call votes are necessary to provide voters the information they need.
3. Strengthening ethics and disclosure laws to make them more consistent with "best practices" from other states such as Louisiana which recently passed one of the most sweeping ethics reforms in the country.
4. Stopping the practice of naming roads, overpasses and bridges after living people. Individuals serving in public office should not be "honored" for spending our money on public projects.
5. Ending the gerrymandering of district lines that are typically drawn in order to protect incumbents from challengers. After the 2010 census, we will work to insure district lines are drawn in a logical manner that will allow for increased competition as public discourse is a hallmark of democracy.
6. Expanding Home Rule. We will to expand "home rule" – the notion that the government closest to the people governs best – and work to release local governments from the stranglehold that the General Assembly has historically placed on it.

JUDICIAL REFORMS

Our Judicial Branch needs more independence from the General Assembly. Our state legislature makes the laws, appropriates the judicial budget and is one of the few state legislatures that also elect judges. The result is that the integrity of our judicial system is compromised. We support the gubernatorial appointment of judges as is done in many other states and at the federal level, with the legislature having an "advice and consent" role in confirming judges as per our federal model. It is important to have our three branches of state government – executive, legislative and judicial – strong and independent and able to check and balance each other.

We pledge to work together with a bipartisan way approach to bring the items listed above to the House and Senate floor in South Carolina General Assembly during the 2009 legislative session. We will push for full debate and roll call votes so that the public can be aware of our actions. If any items do not pass in our first session, we will continue to actively work to pass them until they are.

Witness our signatures below to this Common Sense Contract for Change on this 19th day of May, 2008, in Columbia, South Carolina.

Tom Davis

Michael T. Rose

Thomas A. Hall

Scott Perry

Barbara J. Shealy

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Bill McKown

Tommy

Sherril Fen

Jim

~~Ed Rumsey~~

Lee Bright

Danny Stacey

Joe

Michael

Signing but unable to be here in person

Ed Rumsey

Randy Alford

Joe Bustos

Shane Martin

Joey Millwood

Trey Whitehurst