

Restore to the Ethics Commission the ability to investigate and prosecute members of the General Assembly for their "core legislative acts."

This amendment returns the Ethics Commission to the status quo that existed for the 22 years prior to June 2009. The State Supreme Court decided in June 2009 that former Senate President William V. Irons was protected by the "speech-in-debate" clause in the Rhode Island Constitution on his "core legislative acts."

The reasoning for this Supreme Court opinion [click here](#) rests on the idea that when the voters approved a constitutional amendment in 1986 creating the Ethics Commission, they did not simultaneously repeal the "speech-in-debate clause" of the Constitution. OCG believes that the Constitutional Convention Ethics Committee in 1986 intended for the Amendment to cover "core legislative acts" of legislators. OCG also believes that when the voters overwhelmingly passed that amendment that read in part "all public officials shall be subject to the code of ethics," they intended to include the General Assembly.

These "core legislative acts" included Irons' role in preventing passage of the Pharmacy Freedom of Choice legislation in 1999, while he chaired the Senate Corporations Committee and his continued activity to oppose such legislation in 2000. The Freedom of Choice legislation would prohibit insurers from limiting where their subscribers can buy their medications and was opposed by Blue Cross and CVS. Irons received \$25,000 in 1999 in commissions on a Blue Cross health-insurance policy for CVS employees, and \$70,000 in 2000 and 2001.

Does anyone feel that the actions of former President Irons were not promoting his own self-interest? Do we want this behavior to continue? This amendment would carve out a small exception to the "speech in debate" clause, allowing only the ethics commission to investigate and adjudicate possible conflicts of interest for legislators speech and votes on legislation that would benefit them. Legislators would still be protected in all other areas by "speech in debate."

The system was working during the past 22 years. There was never an accusation that the Ethics Commission overstepped its bounds during those years. Operation Clean Government and Common Cause have worked together to promote this legislation. Join with us to get these resolutions passed.