

Chris Giunchigliani on Ethics and Campaign Reform

A statement from Chris G:

I spent decades as a middle school special education teacher. And it has always been important to me to instill the values of honesty and integrity in the children I teach. I took that same approach to my work in public service with a strong commitment to ethics in government.

I was chair of the Assembly Committee on Elections, Procedures, and Ethics for four sessions, and served on it for another two. I passed bills strengthening the powers of the commission on ethics, and the state's oversight of campaign contributions; one prominent political commentator even called me "the bane of many a lobbyist's existence".

I continued that work on the County Commission, amending the county ethics code to ensure that lobbyists had to declare what issues they came to speak about, because the public should have a right to know. As governor, I will continue to work towards improving the ethics of Nevada's political landscape.

There are many big ideas Nevada should be exploring. Public financing of elections is one such big idea, designed to help get big money out of politics. We should also explore whether elected officials who aren't termed out should resign their current office in order to run for another one. This would cut back on politicians using their current office to help leverage support for their run for a higher office. Another idea is whether to limit or even allow funds that roll over from one campaign to the next, to try to reign in the amount that is spent on our elections. These ideas have merit and should be considered in the future.

For now, there are tangible things we can move forward with next session that would make a real difference in improving our state's dubious ethics reputation.

The following are my proposals:

Increasing Disclosure and Penalties:

Too many politicians get away with failing to disclose conflicts of interests and relationships, because enforcement of these violations is lax and penalties too light.

- **Mandatory disclosure of conflicts of interest, and increased penalties:** Current law is too vague about what constitutes a “conflict of interest” and when this conflict must be disclosed. Failing to disclose conflicts of interest isn’t only misleading and unethical- it does real damage to the public’s faith in government.
 - Allow penalties for “knowing” failures to disclose conflicts of interest, not just “willful” ones
 - Streamline the investigative process to speed up findings
- **Require registration of lobbyists for the executive branch:** Currently, only legislative lobbyists, whether paid or unpaid, are required to register and disclose their clients.
 - Those who lobby the executive branch should be required to do the same, in order to increase government transparency.

Campaign Finance Reform:

There is a lot we can do bring our elections out of the dark and break the influence of big money. More reporting and lower fundraising limits would be a good start. We also need to once and for all force campaigns to identify their top “bundlers.” These are powerful and wealthy people who make large contributions themselves and also steer money from their companies and family members towards their favorite candidates. Bundling itself isn’t inappropriate, but voters deserve to know the top people behind each campaign; we can’t let individuals hide behind contributions through family members and businesses.

- **Publicizing roll-over cash:** When a sitting elected official announces a run for another office, he or she must report how much money they are rolling over from previous campaigns.

- **Increase campaign finance reporting:** Beginning with 12 months of an election, require campaigns to report fundraising and expenses monthly.
- **Require all PAC's making independent expenditures to list their top five largest donors in electronic and print communications.** While PAC's will still be able to run nasty attack ads, voters will at least get to see where the big money to these groups is coming from.
- **Look at amending the constitution to change assembly terms from two years to four.** The goal is that by increasing the length of terms, assembly members would be less pressured to continually raise money, and instead focus more on passing good legislation.
- **Require campaigns to regularly disclose their top bundlers.** A bundler should be defined as any individual who meets all of the following: donates at least \$5,000 to Candidate A, is the CEO of at least one company who makes a contribution of at least \$5,000 to candidate A, and is related to at least one person who makes a contribution of at least \$5,000 to Candidate A.
- **Ban "dark money" expenditures for state and local races, and require LLCs to disclose their ownership if they contribute to political campaigns:** The disastrous Citizens United decision is threatening to undermine our democracy, with undisclosed spending by shadowy groups who don't disclose their donors or ownership influencing our elections.
 - In the interests of transparency, if groups want to influence the Nevada electorate, they should have to let people know who they are.
 - Any organization spending over \$5,000 in an election year for the purpose of affecting the outcome of any election must disclose their donors or ownership.
 - This includes dark money groups that donate to existing PACs to hide their true origins, and LLCs that normally conceal their true owners