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Republicans Pledge Open State Senate

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Four Republican challengers for State Senate seats have joined the eight Republican Senators in pledging to open up Senate operations to public access and information after the November election.

Candidates Greg Chambers (1st District), Everson Bullen (7th District), Mike Ramone (8th District) and John Feroce (14th District) pledge to join the sitting Republicans to take immediate and specific steps to open up Senate Rules and procedures. The eight current Republicans & their Districts are Senators Charlie Copeland (4th), Cathy Cloutier (5th), Liane Sorenson (6th), Steve Amick (10th), Dori Connor (12th), Colin Bonini (16th), John Still (17th) and Gary Simpson (18th).

Minority Leader John C. Still said “The members of the Senate Republican Caucus have consistently advocated more transparency in the legislative process through change in Rules and procedures. We are proud to have these outstanding candidates running for the Senate this year and to have them join us in promising a more open Senate for the future.”

Senate Minority Whip Liane Sorenson said “The candidates tell us that, as they have gone door-to-door listening to voters, a common theme is the goal—and demand—for a process that is more open and more accountable to the public. If the voters will help by electing these committed people, we will have the votes in Dover to make positive change a reality for the next General Assembly.”

Senator Cathy Cloutier (5th District) said “When asked early in the campaign to identify my #1 priority, I said my goal is to make the legislature more open, representative and accountable. People are skeptical of decisions made behind closed doors, and opening up government is the most important action we can take to help restore public confidence in the process.”

Senator Dori Connor (12th District) said “In the course of my work with the National Conference of State Legislatures, I have learned how legislatures conduct their business in many other states. We should adopt some of their best practices such as having public discussion on all legislation proposed from both sides of the aisle.”

The 12 Republicans pledge to take the following specific actions to promote public participation, confidence and trust:

- Pass legislation under FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) to define the General Assembly and all its standing and ad hoc committees as “public bodies”
- Change Senate Rules to do away with the power of a Senate Committee chair to single-handedly kill legislation by preventing public debate.
- Change Senate Rules to create a deliberative process that guarantees legislation will get a public hearing in committee within a reasonable time frame.
- Post Senate Roll Call votes on the General Assembly website giving the public access to an accounting of individual votes by all Senators.
- Close loopholes to avoid the potential and appearance of conflict inherent in holding dual roles in government, including a prohibition on paid registered lobbyists holding office on state Authorities, Boards, Commissions and statutory Committees.

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All the Republican challengers say the need for these reforms is a frequent complaint from citizens they meet.

1st District candidate Greg Chambers said “the public’s business ought to be conducted in the light of day, and it is outrageous for the Senate to exempt itself from the good government requirements it mandates on every other public body in the state.”

7TH District candidate Skip Bullen said “Every bill and issue ought to get a public discussion, and committees ought to vote bills up or down.”

8th District candidate Mike Ramone said “Open government is not just a concept or theory; it can be as simple as giving the public access to Senate votes on the General Assembly website. People find it unbelievable that they can look up how their local Representative voted on a bill, but the Senate gives only statewide vote totals.”

14th District candidate John Feroce said “the power of a Committee Chair to arbitrarily suffocate a bill in his desk drawer is undemocratic and a terrible abuse of the process. The people expect open and honest government, and it’s the right thing to do.”

Senator Still called open government “the #1 issue in this election, because it affects all other issues.”

“There are very few things that have not changed in the past 3 decades. One thing that has NOT changed is the “34”-year majority stranglehold on the Delaware State Senate that has purposefully allowed these out-dated practices to continue. A new majority will mean a better Senate, a more representative and public-friendly Senate.”

“The agreement among the 12 of us—and the voters—on this is more important than any other issue on which me may agree or disagree. In a representative legislature, the process is as important as the outcome. An open, inclusive process will lead to better quality results and more importantly, can restore the public’s confidence and trust in their government.”

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