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Secretary of State Jim Condos Applauds Signing of Ethics Reform Law

Montpelier – Today S.8, the ethics bill establishing an ethics commission and implementing some important ethical reforms was signed into law.

Vermont Secretary of State Jim Condos has called the new ethics law a good start, saying “before this law was enacted, Vermont was one of the last states without any ethics laws and an ethics commission. Restoring the public’s trust in government is critical, and this is the first step in a comprehensive ethics reform process I’ve been advocating for since 2011.”

As a strong advocate for open government, transparency and accountability Secretary Condos has been a longtime advocate for ethics reform. In 2015 Secretary Condos released an Op-Ed calling for the establishment of an independent ethics commission (<https://www.sec.state.vt.us/media/686597/Op-Ed-2015-06-03-Ethics-Commission.pdf>), saying “the time has come for Vermont to enact a clear law regarding ethics, conflicts of interest, and financial disclosure for our elected officials.”

While the legislature failed to pass ethics reform in the 2015-2016 biennium, Secretary Condos remained committed, and in an Op-Ed released in January of this year Secretary Condos renewed his charge saying “the key to our democracy is the public’s access to open and transparent government. This sacred trust must not be taken lightly. We must restore and improve that accountability or risk Vermonters’ faith in our ability to govern.” (<https://www.sec.state.vt.us/media/824150/01-18-2017-op-ed-ethics.pdf>)

During the 2017 legislative session Secretary Condos provided testimony, guidance and information to both the House and Senate Government Operations Committees, in addition to advocating for ethics reform with individual legislators. Through a strong team effort alongside the League of Women Voters, Campaign for Vermont, VPIRG, the ACLU, and a handful of dedicated citizen advocates, S.8 passed with strong tri-partisan support.

Vermont’s new ethics law will establish an ethics commission with a part-time executive director, responsible for collecting and referring ethics complaints. S.8 will also require legislators to disclose any source of income over \$5,000 that they receive and contains measures to stop ‘pay to play’ donations to candidates from individuals or businesses seeking government contracts. In addition, the new law creates a one year prohibition on lobbying for legislators leaving office and requires municipal governments to adopt conflict of interest policies.

In response to the signing, Secretary Condos said, “this is a good start, but it is only a start. I commend the Governor and the members of the legislature for taking action to start the process of comprehensive ethics reform in Vermont. As we implement S.8, I look forward to future discussions about independence, resources and authority for the commission to ensure its success. As I’ve said before, establishing an ethics commission will not suddenly provide government with a moral compass. However, it will be a step in the right direction by shining a brighter light on improved transparency and accountability.”

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