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Giannoulas Calls for Stronger State Ethics Laws

Secretary of State candidate seeks more restrictions, transparency, oversight to prevent abuse

As part of his campaign for Illinois Secretary of State, former State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulas announced his support for a series of ethics reforms that would require more restrictions, transparency and disclosure regarding lobbyists and elected officials.

The measures come amid the ongoing federal corruption probe of state government that has led to the criminal indictments of several Illinois politicians and insiders. Giannoulas is the first Secretary of State candidate to put forth a series of ethics priorities in advance of the March 2022 primary.

“Illinois needs to take immediate action to change the culture of corruption in our state and enact ethical safeguards that demand accountability among those who serve the public and operate within our government,” Giannoulas said. “Illinoisans are sick and tired of scandal and ethics abuses that have become all too common and viewed as ‘business as usual.’ We need to restore the trust in our public institutions and the public officials who we expect to serve the public’s interests – not their own.”

Giannoulas is encouraged that the Illinois General Assembly is preparing to take action this spring to pass ethics legislation in the wake of the latest scandals and indictments that have rocked Illinois government, but warned that those initiatives must have teeth to make a difference. “It’s gratifying that following all of the corruption the State has experienced, lawmakers are taking action,” he said. “But at the same time, we’ve experienced that despite previous good-faith efforts, problems still persist. We owe it to the people of Illinois to finally get things right and restore people’s trust in government.”

The Secretary of State’s office maintains lobbyist registrations and statements of economic interest, commonly known as “ethics statements,” filed with the office by public officials.

“Giannoulas’ ethics agenda will go a long way toward making government more transparent, holding public officials more accountable and empowering government watchdogs to fight corruption more effectively,” said Andy Shaw, chairman of the CHANGE Illinois Action Fund board and former head of the Better Government Association, statewide watchdog groups that shine a light on government and hold public officials accountable. “By toughening Illinois’ ethics laws, which are among the weakest in the

nation, and making it more difficult for lawmakers to scam the public, these measures can protect our hard-earned tax dollars and help restore our faith in government.”

“As Illinoisans, we’ve experienced first-hand the consequences and cost of keeping this information hidden from the public,” said former Illinois Lieutenant Governor Sheila Simon, who has worked throughout her career to toughen government ethics laws and specifically the information available on the statements of economic interest. “Giannoulis’ plan to overhaul this system is critical in providing meaningful, detailed information about politicians’ financial interests so the public can hold lawmakers accountable for their actions and votes.”

Giannoulis supports proposals that would:

Prohibit Elected Officials from Serving as Lobbyists. Giannoulis supports initiatives that would prohibit state lawmakers from lobbying local governments on behalf of those who also lobby the State, but believes new laws should ban all elected officials from also working as lobbyists at all levels of government.

Close the Revolving Door: Giannoulis supports efforts to enact a “revolving door” policy – of at least two years – to prevent state lawmakers from working as lobbyists immediately after they leave the Legislature.

Ban Shadow Lobbying: Require all behind-the-scenes or “unregistered” lobbyists or consultants who do not lobby directly to register with the Secretary of State’s office and undergo ethics training and file expenditure reports – the same as regular lobbyists – and require the firms or entities that hire them to disclose their identities, compensation and clients.

Create a Lobbyist Database. Establish a statewide, searchable database for the public to access lobbyist information and activity at all levels of state and local government with regularly updated registration and expenditure reports from lobbyists and clients.

Avoid Conflicts: Require state lawmakers who have a personal or private interest in legislation to disclose potential conflicts and prohibit outside employment that creates potential conflicts with their government work.

Provide More Disclosure: Require elected officials to reveal potential conflicts by mandating that their Statements of Economic Interest report outside sources of income, business relationships, ranges of the amount they get paid and from whom. In addition, require strict monitoring and penalties for failing to disclose any interests.

Expand Inspector General Authority. Expand the powers of the inspectors general in state government and in the Legislature to give them more independence and additional resources to pro-actively investigate issues and eliminate corruption without having to get permission from the Legislative Ethics Commission, which is comprised of state lawmakers.

Giannoulas noted that current Secretary of State Jesse White inherited an office that was mired in scandal and implemented sweeping reforms that have cleaned up the office. He vowed to build on White's legacy and work to amend laws to implement further reforms throughout state government.

"Secretary White has made major strides to transform an office that was built on corruption under his predecessor's watch and restore integrity to its operations," he said. "I want to continue his work beyond the operations of the office and establish the Secretary of State's office as an additional firewall to ensure ethical and transparent activities by people and businesses lobbying our elected officials."

As State Treasurer, Giannoulas used his executive powers to implement ethics reforms that eliminated the possibility or even the perception that the Treasurer's Office would receive political contributions in exchange for lucrative contracts or political favors. On his first day in office, Giannoulas enacted the strictest ethical safeguards in state government and ended "pay to play" in the office. The order prohibited his campaign fund from accepting contributions from banks, office employees and contractors who did business with the office.

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