

Democracy North Carolina

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For Release Tuesday, June 30, 2015

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24 State Legislators Receive Sunshine Award for Filing “Superior” Campaign Disclosure Reports

Two dozen state legislators are receiving a pleasant surprise today, June 30, as politicians across North Carolina close the books on the campaign fundraising and spending that will soon be revealed in the first disclosure reports of the 2016 election cycle.

The 24 legislators, Republicans and Democrats, are receiving a “Sunshine Award” from the nonpartisan watchdog group Democracy North Carolina for submitting “superior” disclosure reports during the 2014 election.

“These legislators are a model for others,” said Bob Hall of Democracy NC. “As candidates and elected leaders complete their disclosure reports over the next several days, we encourage them to follow and even outdo the example of these legislators. Submit your report electronically, on time, and provide complete details about who’s giving the money and exactly how it is spent.”

“Missing information and misleading reports can get you in deep trouble,” Hall said, noting the State Board of Election’s recent decision to refer Sen. Fletcher Hartsell to state and federal authorities for possible criminal prosecution, based on its investigation of his campaign reports.

“Strong disclosure laws protect the public interest and help educate voters about who is backing a candidate and how they are using that money,” he said.

The Sunshine Award winners for 2015 include a bipartisan group of 16 state House members and 8 Senators. The list has 8 Democrats led by House Minority Leader Larry D. Hall and 16 Republicans led by Senate Majority Leader Harry Brown. Winners represent all parts of the state and include newcomers Rep. Jay Adams and Sen. Andy Wells and veterans Rep. Verla Insko and Sen. Jerry Tillman. See next page for the list.

“At a time of intense partisan wrangling, we commend legislators across the ideological spectrum who respect the public’s right to know how money flows during elections,” said Hall. “These lawmakers are role models for their colleagues in recognizing that campaigns and elections are public activities, not private affairs.”

Democracy NC evaluated the campaign reports of legislators elected in 2014 and now serving to see who did the best job of disclosing where they got their campaign money and how they used it.

Winners of the Sunshine Award: (1) filed up to six reports in 2013-2014 on time and in an electronic format; (2) had more than 10 individual donors who gave them over \$50 during the campaign; (3) listed the full address and occupational information for at least 98% of the individuals who gave them over \$50; and (4) identified the payee and purpose of at least 98% of their expense items over \$50.

“The level of detail in the reports has improved in the last few years, thanks in large part to the training program now required for campaign treasurers,” said Hall. He noted that criteria for winning a Sunshine Award have become stricter as the quality of reporting has improved.

Because of legislation adopted last year, all state and local candidates will be required to file their disclosure reports electronically, beginning in 2017. Paper reports slow down the State Board of Elections' review process and hamper public access to the information, Hall said.

“We applaud the General Assembly’s decision to require electronic reporting – and the decision of these legislators to use it before it’s required,” said Hall. “The next step is to require more frequent and thorough reporting by the so-called independent groups that spend millions in mystery money to influence elections. They report less than the candidates but can determine who wins or loses.”

A bill last year (H-918) to require increased disclosure by electioneering groups passed the state House but died in the Senate.

The disclosure report covering legislators’ campaign activity for the six-month period, from January 1 to June 30, 2015, is due on July 31 at the State Board of Elections.

Sunshine Award Winners - 2015

Distr.	Party	LEGISLATOR	Counties Served
HOU-96	Rep.	ADAMS, JAY	Catawba
HOU-41	Dem.	ADCOCK, GALE	Wake
HOU-32	Dem.	BASKERVILLE, NATHAN A	Granville, Vance, Warren
HOU-52	Rep.	BOLES, JAMES L	Moore
SEN-34	Rep.	BROCK, ANDREW C	Davie, Iredell, Rowan
HOU-81	Rep.	BROWN, RAYNE	Davidson
SEN-6	Rep.	BROWN, HARRY	Jones, Onslow
HOU-25	Rep.	COLLINS, JEFFREY L	Franklin, Nash
HOU-106	Dem.	CUNNINGHAM, CARLA D	Mecklenburg
SEN-44	Rep.	CURTIS, DAVID L	Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln
SEN-23	Dem.	FOUSHEE, VALERIE	Chatham, Orange
HOU-44	Dem.	GLAZIER, RICK	Cumberland
SEN-24	Rep.	GUNN, RICK	Alamance, Randolph
HOU-29	Dem.	HALL, LARRY D	Durham
HOU-17	Rep.	ILER, FRANK	Brunswick
HOU-56	Dem.	INSKO, VERLA	Orange
SEN-10	Rep.	JACKSON, W BRENT	Duplin, Johnston, Sampson
HOU-93	Rep.	JORDAN, JONATHAN C	Ashe, Watauga
HOU-34	Dem.	MARTIN, GRIER	Wake
HOU-8	Rep.	MARTIN, SUSAN L	Pitt, Wilson
HOU-89	Rep.	SETZER, MITCHELL S	Catawba
HOU-15	Rep.	SHEPARD, PHIL	Onslow
SEN-29	Rep.	TILLMAN, JERRY W	Moore, Randolph
SEN-42	Rep.	WELLS, W ANDREW (ANDY)	Alexander, Catawba