

MAKE GEORGIA WORK:
RESTORE
ETHICS
TO STATE GOVERNMENT



Roy **2010**

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ROY BARNES: A Long Record of Walking the Walk on Ethics Reform

“At a time when politicians talk the talk about open records, open meetings and open government even as they close ranks on public disclosure, Georgia Gov. Roy Barnes is walking the walk.”
—Columbus Ledger Enquirer, May 2002

WALKING THE WALK: Encouraging full disclosure. In May of 2010, Roy released 25 years of his complete tax returns to the public.¹ The 1,500-page report is available online to anyone wishing to view the documents—friends, opponents, voters, and the press. You can view the report here: <http://roy2010taxreturn.s3.amazonaws.com/index.html>. Roy also released his tax returns during each year that he was in the Governor’s office, from 1999-2002.²

WALKING THE WALK: Opening government to the people. In 1999, Roy passed legislation expanding the scope of Georgia’s open records and open meetings laws.³ *The Clarion-Ledger* reported, Governor Barnes “took a firm stand on government openness,” when he signed ethics legislation that expedited the government’s response to document requests [to three days] and set up criminal penalties for officials who violate the law. Barnes, who viewed public transparency as “a key component of public service” was responsible for making it a felony to break Georgia’s Sunshine Laws while he was in office.⁴

WALKING THE WALK: Working for Georgians – and no one else. As Governor, Roy’s first act of the new administration was to sign an order banning all lobbyist gifts to employees working in the executive branch.⁵ If elected, he will do it again.

When Roy launched his gubernatorial bid in 2009, he announced that his campaign would not accept campaign contributions from registered Georgia lobbyists. To date, Roy 2010 has not accepted a dime of Georgia lobbyist money.⁶ Roy believes that Georgia’s next Governor should be able to focus on the obstacles that stand in our state’s path, without being burdened by questions of ethical impropriety.

WALKING THE WALK: Avoiding conflicts of interest. In 1998, after being elected Governor, Roy severed ties with the Marietta law firm he had started 23 years prior to taking office, and put his personal assets in a blind trust to avoid any appearance of a conflict of interest.⁷ As Governor in 2010, Roy will once again place his assets in a blind trust for the duration of his governorship and sever ties to his law firm. Georgians deserve a leader who is open and honest with nothing to hide, who will only focus on the people’s business, not his own.

WALKING THE WALK: Cracking down on corrupt public officials. In 2001, Roy enacted the Corruption Prevention Act. The legislation authorized suspension of an appointed member of a governing body of a local authority upon being charged with a felony. The bill also provided for charging public officers with a misdemeanor offense for malpractice, misfeasance, or malfeasance in office, or other misuse of public office, and to be removed from office if they were convicted.⁸

WHAT’S NEXT: Open Government to the People

*“Roy Barnes [was] probably the best governor in the nation on access issues.”
—Editor & Publisher Magazine, November 18, 2002*

Open records in state government should mean all of state government. Roy will close the loophole that allows the General Assembly and the Governor’s office to be excluded from Georgia’s Open Records Law. As Governor, he directed his office to comply with the law. When he is Governor again, he will put it into law.

Promote access and transparency. Georgia’s elected officials should be spending their time fighting for the needs of Georgia families, not sorting out financial entanglements. That’s why Roy will require all candidates for statewide office to release seven years of complete income tax returns, including all schedules and addendums, before campaigning. Roy has always chosen to make his financial information available because he believes that those seeking public office should be committed to the principles of open government and full disclosure—and, as Governor, Roy will do all that he can to uphold those principles.

Strengthen Georgia’s disclosure laws. To make the politicians more accountable to the people, Roy will require state elected officials to adhere to election year disclosure requirements every year. Georgians deserve to know how elected officials are handling their finances every year, not just when they are running for office.

Require all state vendors to register as vendor lobbyists. To strengthen transparency and Georgia’s ethics laws, all corporations, partnerships, and individuals who earn over \$10,000 in non-salary earnings from the state shall register as vendor lobbyists.

Shine a light on ties with lobbyists. Our state leaders under the Gold Dome can’t make decisions based on what is best for Georgians while they are being influenced by special interests. As Governor, Roy will end lobbyists’ and vendor lobbyists’ spending on legislators – there should not be meals—not even cups of coffee—spent by lobbyists to affect public policy or contracts. Additionally, Roy will ban lobbyist gifts and vendor gifts to state employees, just as he did during his previous tenure as Governor. He will also restrict government employees and elected officials from lobbying the state for two years after leaving office.

No backroom meetings. It is simply wrong for powerful members in the legislature and in Congress to inappropriately use their influence to secure and keep secret, sweetheart deals with the state, and maintain them by improperly meeting with executive officials. To ensure that government runs above-board, Roy will prohibit any executive employee from having private meetings with state or federal elected officials about his or her personal business.

Reveal any contract or business arrangement with State of Georgia within past 10 years. The people of Georgia deserve to know whether their legislators have financial interests with the state. Any candidate for state office should be required to disclose any contract or business arrangement with state of Georgia within the past 10 years.

WHAT’S NEXT: Fight Corruption and Increase Ethical Standards Under the Gold Dome

“Roy Barnes’ first act as governor—an executive order prohibiting state employees from accepting gifts from lobbyists—sets a commendable tone of probity and professionalism for his administration. Both from symbolic and practical standpoints, it’s an excellent way for him to get started.”

—Atlanta Journal-Constitution, January 1999

Bolster Georgia’s Corruption Laws. When Georgia’s public officials do wrong, we should be able to prosecute them to the fullest extent. As Governor, Roy will make sure Georgia’s anti-corruption laws are as strong as or stronger than the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Laws.

Strengthen the authority of the State Ethics Commission. Ethics reform without enforcement is useless. In order to ensure that Georgia’s elected officials are following the law, Roy will allow the State Ethics Commission to initiate investigations based on reliable and publicly disseminated information – such as reports from credible media outlets – without waiting for a formal complaint to be filed as the law now states. Roy will ensure that the State Ethics Commission is given the tools and the authority they need to weed out corruption in Georgia state government.

Implement ethics training. As Governor, Roy will ensure that all department heads, senior staff, and elected officials complete a mandatory ethics training class. Additionally, all state employees and officials will be required to certify on an annual basis that they are familiar with, and will abide by, Georgia’s ethics requirements.

WHAT’S NEXT: End the Conflicts of Interest

“Barnes deserves praise for his willingness to be open and upfront about his own finances.”
—*Atlanta Journal-Constitution, June 2002*

Require statewide elected officials to put their financial interests in a qualified blind trust. Blind trusts are a proven way for elected officials to avoid conflicts of interest by insulating their personal financial interests from their public actions. They help ensure that elected officials work for the interest of the people, not themselves. Georgia’s statewide elected officials should be required to place their holdings into either publicly traded mutual funds or a qualified blind trust that is managed in accordance with Georgia’s personal financial disclosure laws.

Require financial accountability for board members. Recently, Georgia’s state leaders passed a law that allows appointed members of state boards, commissions, and authorities to bypass the statutory requirement to disclose property and business holdings, investments, and employment.⁹ Roy will ensure that there are appropriate financial accountability measures in place for the members of boards, commissions, and authorities, so that there will be no conflicts of interest.

Endnotes

1. Atlanta Journal-Constitution, May 6, 2010
2. Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 3/13/06; Associated Press, 4/20/04; Atlanta Inquirer, 5/1/04
3. The Clarion-Ledger, February 17, 2008; Atlanta Journal-Constitution, January 29, 2006; Atlanta Journal-Constitution, March 13, 2005;
4. The Clarion-Ledger, February 17, 2008
5. Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 1/12/99; Atlanta Journal Constitution, 1/15/99; Atlanta Journal Constitution, 1/14/99
6. Barnes Campaign Finance Reports 2009-2010
7. Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 4/17/99; Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 11/7/98
8. HB 367, Georgia General Assembly, 4/20/01; Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 4/21/2001
9. Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 8/30/10; SB 17, Georgia General Assembly, 6/4/2010



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