

Common Cause is reborn in Delaware

Group resumes role of public watchdog

BY J.L. MILLER • THE NEWS JOURNAL • FEBRUARY 25, 2010

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A newly reorganized chapter of **Common Cause in Delaware** is working to put the problems of the past behind it and re-establish itself as a presence in the fight for government [ethics](#) and transparency.

Next month, the reconstituted group will honor two champions of ethics and transparency: former Gov. Russell W. Peterson and former News Journal editorial page editor John Taylor, executive [director](#) of the Delaware Public Policy Institute.

"We've got our work cut out for us," said James Browning, director of development for **Common Cause Delaware**.

Common Cause had been an active force in promoting good government in Delaware since the chapter's founding in 1975.

But in 2007, the organization foundered due to personality clashes among board members. Longtime Common Cause lobbyist John Flaherty wouldn't renew his contract, and after continuing turmoil the national organization shut down the group.

Last spring, Browning contacted Jeffrey A. Raffel, a professor of public administration at the [University of Delaware](#), to see if he would be interested in leading a new Common Cause Delaware.

Raffel, a professor at UD since 1971, is a board member and was vice president of Delaware's chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

"Frankly, although I had been a contributor to Common Cause over the years, I knew Bob McBride, who had been its chair for many years ... I really respected the organization. I knew that it had blown up two or three years ago and I wanted to be careful before I said yes," Raffel said.

So he contacted people who are knowledgeable about Delaware government and politics to seek their advice on whether to take on the task.

"The answer was basically or almost unanimously yes," Raffel said. "It was the voice of open government and responsibility in government, and this would be a worthwhile effort."

Raffel contacted Wilmington attorney Chuck Durante, who was vice chairman of Delaware's Common Cause in the 1980s, and the two set about finding people who would serve on a reconstituted board of directors.

Some months later, the new board reads like a Who's Who of academia, business and government.

With Raffel as president, it includes former state Sen. Steve Amick, a Newark Republican who served in the General Assembly from 1986 until he retired from his Senate seat in 2008.

Also on the board are Bob Barker, director of corporate relations for graduate and executive programs at the Lerner College of Business and Economics at UD; Judy Mellen, former Delaware ACLU executive director; and former Common Cause lobbyist Jan Konesy, a senior vice president at Bank of America.

"We really have tried to get a mix and we're not done. We're going to continue to build the board," Raffel said.

Although Flaherty served as the public face of Common Cause for many years, the new board decided not to seek his services because its members wanted "a clean slate" and a clean break from the turmoil of the past.

Flaherty now serves as head of the Delaware Coalition for Open Government.

Browning, who is based in Philadelphia, was director of the group's Maryland organization from 2001 to 2005.

He will be doing regional work for Common Cause and plans to take on some of the Delaware lobbying duties "in the near term."

The newly re-formed group wants to focus on open-government laws, election reform and redistricting reform, among other issues.

On April 29, Common Cause will hold a dinner at the Blue Ball Barn off Concord Pike in Alapocas to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the national Common Cause organization. The event initially had been scheduled for today, but was postponed due to the threat of snow.

Still scheduled to speak are Gov. Jack Markell, Sen. Ted Kaufman, D-Del., and Bob Edgar, president of the national Common Cause.

Peterson and Taylor were chosen because they "have been fighting for more open government since before there was a Common Cause," Browning said.

The event will be 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. April 29. Although the event was nearing capacity before the postponement, tickets may still be available. They are \$50 apiece and can be reserved by visiting **Common Cause Delaware**.