

## Corruption in Government

Is the government of South Carolina corrupt, or are all the allegations being surfaced false? Voters and taxpayers need to know the truth and a few brave souls are trying to make that happen.  
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For several years, I have been studying the life of Wade Hampton III. The third Wade Hampton was a wealthy South Carolina Plantation owner who pledged everything but his principles and honor to the defense of his state. He sacrificed his wealth and worldly possessions in defense of the Palmetto State. A decade after the War for Southern Independence, he led the “Second American Revolution” in 1876 to rid South Carolina of the most corrupt state government in the history of the United States. That corrupt government, headed by Governor Moses “the Robber Governor” was kept in power by 96,000 black troops with bayonets, backed by the federal government.

South Carolina currently has a government elected by the people of the state and allegations of corruption are rampant. To understand the temptation of corruption in South Carolina, one must recognize that in South Carolina corruption is legal for individuals who make the laws governing corruption, appoint the judges and control the ethics committees that exercise oversight.

Government is very expensive in South Carolina because of the lax procurement laws that legalize corruption and fraud in contracting for goods and services. To violate procurement laws in South Carolina and get in legal trouble elected officials and bureaucrats must be especially stupid and incompetent. It happens – but rarely.

South Carolina laws allow each government entity, school district, county or city government to write their own procurement regulations. The regulations may be unethical, immoral, and unfair to honest businesses, but as long as the government agency does not violate the rules they write, they are legal in the eyes of state law.

In recent years many miles of asphalt on I-385 were dug up, hauled off and replaced with concrete. It has recently been alleged that an influential State Senator had a financial interest in the concrete company that received the multimillion-dollar contract. If true, it was probably profitable but legal.

A decade ago, the Greenville County School Board circumvented the State Constitution that set a limit on debt by creating a “dummy” corporation that they controlled, and borrowed more than a billion dollars using school property and property owners of Greenville County as collateral. All of the board members of the dummy corporation were and are former members of the school board. They gave the contract to manage the billion-dollar construction project to a corporation formed by a former school board chairman and a local connected developer who planned the scheme for the district. The scheme is now a violation of state law- after the fact.

House Speaker Bobby Harrell is under investigation for allegedly writing approximately \$300,000 in checks to himself from his campaign funds. Recently, the House Judiciary committee passed a bill that would remove all criminal penalties from ethics law violations. The maximum penalty would be a \$2,500 fine. Interesting!

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Business executives who seek unfair advantage over their competitors find appointments to state and county boards and commissions lucrative.  
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A few years ago Greenville County Council wisely passed an ordinance making it illegal for business owners, their relatives or employees of a company doing business with a county entity governed by a board or commission to serve on the board or commission.

It was discovered recently that the county administrator was not enforcing the ordinance and it was being abused for profit by some board members. The county began enforcing the law and special business interest pressure began building to force County Council to eliminate the ethical requirement. Council members Jim Burns and Liz Seman are the lead opponents of the current ethics ordinance and they are gaining support. An ordinance that would eliminate the current ethics ordinance and make it easier for business interests with political connections to legally profit financially from service on certain county boards or commissions is set for a third and final vote during the May 7 County Council meeting.

Wade Hampton and the Red Shirts cleaned up corruption in 1876 against people with bayonets. Looks like we need another Wade Hampton to lead a 2013 cleanup.