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Newsroom: Common Cause Celebrates RI Reform

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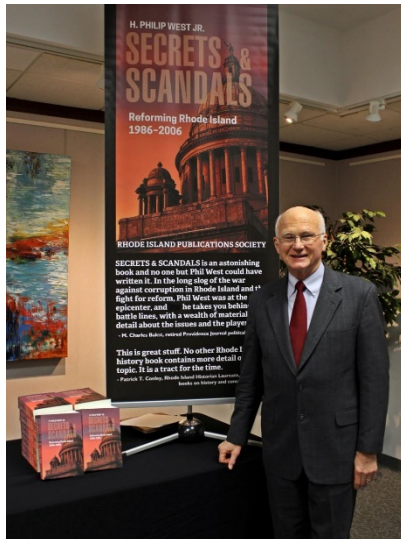
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Newsroom

Common Cause Celebrates RI Reform

Students, alumni, faculty and staff joined Common Cause stalwarts to celebrate Phil West's monumental new book on Rhode Island corruption and reform.



Between 1986 and 2006, a sort of revolution occurred in Rhode Island: even as a dispiriting series of scandals shook the state's corrupt political culture, activists, media and public disgust prompted an updraft of investigation and reform that ultimately changed Rhode Island for the better.

One of the premier activists of the period was **Philip West**, former Executive Director of Common Cause of Rhode Island, who has just penned a monumental insider's account of the period, titled "**Secrets & Scandals: Reforming Rhode Island, 1986-2006.**"

A crowded room of RWU Law students, alumni, faculty and staff joined numerous Common Cause stalwarts for an evening of reminiscing – as well as an address and book signing by West himself.

"One of the things I feel most amazed about is its accuracy," **RWU Law Professor Carl Bogus** said of West's book. "It's an amazing feat; I was quite flabbergasted by it."

Bogus, who became chairman of the Common Cause/RI State Governing Board's Separation of Powers Task Force in 1999, said "The book is a little Marxist in its approach to history, in that things have to get really horrible before they get better!"



Former Common Cause National Governing Board member **Nancy Rhodes** lauded West's "enormous sense of justice," while **Professor Ross Cheit** of Brown University remarked that West's book displays "no ill will; he just conveys what happened."

M. Charles Bakst, former political columnist for the Providence Journal, highlighted the central role that publication played in exposing government corruption, and said the decline of print journalism there and elsewhere "makes me want to cry."

Bakst noted that while some non-print journalists – such as WPRI's Tim White, Ted Nesi and Dan McGowan; or Rhode Island NPR's Scott MacKay and Ian Donnis – are doing yeoman's work in calling out government corruption, "they'll never be as good as a newspaper." **Amy Goins '12**, current president of Common Cause Rhode Island's Governing Board, noted that the Journal's articles were what first exposed her to the work of West and Common Cause.

In his own remarks, West pointed out that RWU Law now plays a vital role as a government watchdog. "We needed some lawyers in the state who weren't dependent on the courts or the General Assembly. So I celebrate this place and its meaning."

