

Committee Chairman Confirms Advancement of Supreme Court Ethics Legislation Following Alito Revelations



Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin has announced that his committee will move forward with marking up ethics legislation for the U.S. Supreme Court following new revelations about an undisclosed free trip taken by a Supreme Court justice. The chairman's decision comes as concerns about ethical conduct within the high court continue to mount.

In a tweet on Wednesday, Senator Durbin, a Democrat from Illinois, expressed his belief that the Supreme Court is facing an "ethical crisis" due to justices accepting lavish gifts from parties with cases before the court, without proper disclosure. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island joined Durbin in expressing these concerns.

Currently, trial-level and appeals judges in the federal judiciary are guided by the Code of Conduct for United States Judges. However, this code does not apply to Supreme Court justices. In February, the American Bar Association (ABA) House of Delegates called on the Supreme Court to adopt a binding code of ethics for its justices, similar to the code that governs other federal judges.

See also: [Supreme Court Justice Alito Accused of Failing to Disclose Trip with Billionaire](#)

The announcement by Durbin and Whitehouse followed a report by ProPublica, revealing that Justice Samuel Alito had accepted a free vacation to an Alaskan fishing lodge in 2008. Hedge fund billionaire Paul Singer and lodge owner Robin Arkley II provided the trip. Alito subsequently ruled in favor of Singer's hedge fund in a case that resulted in a \$2.4 billion recovery. Alito claimed to be unaware of Singer's connection to the case or other cases that came before the Supreme Court.

This report is not the first instance of justices allegedly accepting free trips. ProPublica had previously reported that Justice Clarence Thomas had accepted similar gifts from billionaire Republican donor Harlan Crow.

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Durbin and Whitehouse expressed their hope that Chief Justice John Roberts would take the lead in aligning Supreme Court ethics with the standards applied to other federal judges. However, in April, Roberts declined an invitation to testify before Durbin's committee. Instead, he provided a "Statement on Ethics Principles and Practices" that the justices have agreed to follow. Democrats criticized the statement, stating that it does not go far enough.

In February, Senator Whitehouse reintroduced his Supreme Court Ethics, Recusal, and Transparency Act. The bill requires the Supreme Court to adopt a code of conduct within 180 days. It also seeks to enhance transparency by requiring disclosure of gifts for justices and law clerks and amicus curiae funding. Parties and amicus curiae must also disclose any recent travel, gifts, or reimbursements provided to justices. Additionally, the bill aims to establish a mechanism for reviewing recusal requests and calls for written explanations for recusal decisions.

Passing a Supreme Court ethics bill through the Senate Judiciary Committee requires a simple majority. However, Senate Democrats would need the support of at least nine Republican votes to overcome a potential filibuster in the Senate.

The developments surrounding the Supreme Court's ethics have sparked ongoing debates about the need for transparency and accountability within the judicial system. As the Senate Judiciary Committee moves forward with marking up the legislation, the focus remains on whether meaningful reforms can be achieved to address the growing concerns surrounding the ethical conduct of Supreme Court justices.

Don't be a silent ninja! Let us know your thoughts in the comment section below.

