SHIRLEY CHISHOLM or CLAIBORNE PELL AWARD Nomination

Based on publicly available information and his legislative history, here's how Sheldon Whitehouse (D, RI) aligns with the criteria for either the Claiborne Pell Award or the Shirley Chisholm Award:

Legislative History

Sheldon Whitehouse has been serving as the junior United States senator from Rhode Island since 2007. He has held various roles, including the United States Attorney for the District of Rhode Island and the Attorney General of Rhode Island. His tenure in the Senate has been marked by advocacy for climate change action, healthcare reform, and campaign finance transparency.

In the Senate, Sheldon Whitehouse has earned a reputation as a fierce advocate for progressive values and a thoughtful legislator capable of reaching across the aisle to achieve bipartisan solutions. He has been at the center of bipartisan efforts to pass laws overhauling federal education policy, rebuilding our nation’s infrastructure, reforming the criminal and juvenile justice systems, protecting Americans from toxic chemicals in everyday products, and addressing ocean plastic waste.

Recognizing the devastating toll of addiction in Rhode Island and across the nation, Whitehouse authored the first significant bipartisan law to address the opioid crisis, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act.

Representing the Ocean State, Whitehouse plays a key role in crafting policies addressing climate change, environmental protection, and a price on carbon. He passed into law a dedicated fund to support ocean and coastal research and restoration and bipartisan legislation to confront the crisis of marine plastic and other waste polluting our oceans. He has worked to enact bipartisan measures to reduce carbon pollution and boost America’s clean energy economy.

Whitehouse has stood as a staunch defender of Social Security and Medicare, and has made improving care and reducing costs in our health care system a hallmark of his career.

To counteract the corrosive effects of special interests in our democracy, Whitehouse has championed efforts to root out dark money from our elections and make Congress and the courts accountable to the American people.

Committee Assignments:

Whitehouse has served on several key Senate committees, including:

- Committee on Finance: Focuses on taxation, revenue, and other financial matters.

- Committee on Environment and Public Works: Deals with environmental protection, resource conservation, and infrastructure.

- Committee on the Judiciary: Covers legal and judicial matters, including crime and terrorism.

- Committee on Budget: Oversees the federal budget process.

Current Initiatives:

Whitehouse is actively involved in various legislative initiatives, including:

-Supreme Court Reform:

“The highest court shouldn’t have the lowest ethical standards – Supreme Court Justices and the decisions they make should not be influenced by billionaires and political insiders. I’m leading the charge to ensure that Congress will step in if the Supreme Court refuses to deal with its own ethical mess”.

-Growing the Middle Class:

“As Budget Committee Chairman, I am fighting to ensure economic security for all Rhode Islanders. I have always championed proposals to grow the middle class by increasing wages, protecting hard-earned benefits like Social Security, and ensuring the highest earners and big corporations pay their fair share”.

-Veterans:

“We owe our service members and their families a great debt of gratitude, and we need to support them in meaningful and lasting ways. We must ensure our troops have everything they need for success in their missions and when they return home”.

- Marine Debris Cleanup: Advocates for bipartisan efforts to clean up marine debris and protect ocean ecosystems.

- Social Security Fairness Act: Supports legislation to eliminate policies that reduce Social Security benefits for public service employees.

- Clean Energy Future: Introduced bills to improve nation's power infrastructure and promote renewable energy.

Contributions to Education in New England:

Whitehouse has made significant contributions to education, particularly in Rhode Island:

- Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Funding: Secured federal funding to support Rhode Island College's designation as an HSI, helping Latino and Hispanic students succeed.

- Educational Talent Search: Advocated for federal funding to support programs that assist low-income and first-generation college students.

“We need to strengthen our nation’s public schools and ensure that children in every zip code have access to a first-rate education. There are steps we can take to make college more affordable and relieve the crushing burden of student debt”.

Impact with TRIO:

from Stephanie Cruz, Community College of Rhode Island):

“I do not think Sheldon has ever missed a Hill visit with the RI contingent. Even when he had scheduling conflicts, he made time to meet with the RI team. One year he met with the contingent while he was attending a committee meeting. His aide escorted the team to the committee room and we had a seat in the anti-room while we watched the meeting on C-Span on the monitors in the room. He excused himself from the meeting, came out, met with our students and returned to the meeting.

On another visit, we met in the hallway outside a committee meeting. Senator Whitehouse was so engaged in conversation with our alumni that on one occasion after three requests for the senator to conclude the meeting, to free up the room for his next appointment, we returned to the waiting room to see Senators Elizabeth Warren D-MA, Brian Schatz D-HI, and a third senator waiting patiently.

He is a strong advocate for TRIO programs and has signed on to every letter we have asked him to.

It would be fitting to honor the sitting senator from RI, with an award named after one of RI greatest former senators (Pell), while we celebrate the annual NEOA conference in the state of RI”.

Submitted by Sarah Morrell with Stephanie Cruz