



THE LOUDON TIMES

Senator John Loudon
Senate District 7

Capitol Building, Room 422
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Column for Week of:
March 13, 2006

Contact: Nick Bengston
(573) 751-9763

Improving Public Access to Political Donations

Missouri citizens landed a victory this week as the Senate overwhelmingly approved legislation revising state laws concerning lobbyist gifts and campaign contributions. After the national attention that has been given to alleged improprieties at the federal level, it became clear that Missouri's ethics laws are outdated. State law needed a change to ensure that all Missourians can easily access information on how much money candidates are raising and where that money is coming from.

Lobbyists are ubiquitous in the State Capitol, and this legislation cracks down on what kinds of gifts lobbyists can give to lawmakers. Currently, any expense a lobbyist makes on behalf of an elected official must be reported to the State Ethics Commission. But lawmakers can accept tickets to ball games or concerts, or for travel and lodging. Senate Bill 1254 prohibits lobbyists from paying for entertainment, lodging or travel for lawmakers or their staffs without prior approval from House and Senate administration committees. It also ends the proliferation of small caucuses consisting of at least 10 General Assembly members. These caucuses currently can receive lobbyist expenses that go unreported because of the number of legislators in attendance.



Sen. Loudon with his newly adopted son Samuel Christian Loudon.

Regarding campaign contributions, SB 1254 requires candidates to file full disclosure reports every month instead of only four times a year, which is the current law. In the final weeks leading up to elections, candidates will have to file campaign funding reports every day and disclose who they work for and any money they might earn by working for other candidates or on other campaigns.

SB 1254 also requires all campaign funding reports to be filed electronically to end delays in uploading the information to the State Ethics Commission Web site. The ethics reform bill also bars lawmakers and candidates from raising campaign funds during the legislative session, which runs from January to May.

An amendment to the bill eliminates limits on individual campaign contributions, which currently cannot exceed \$325 for a House candidate, \$650 for a Senate candidate and \$1,275 for a statewide candidate. The original purpose of these ceilings has been negated by the ability of individual donors to instead pump unlimited amounts of money into political party committees, which are allowed to give candidates 10 times the amount that individuals can give. In that system, there is no way to tell how much individual contributors are giving to candidates.

Because these kinds of contributions essentially have been lawfully laundered, the public is left unaware of the money source. Removing the limits on what individuals and interest groups can give will replace this laundering system with one that lets the public see how much money is going to each candidate and from whom the money is coming.

This legislation offers a clearer picture of how campaigns are financed and who is receiving gifts in Jefferson City.

If you have questions or comments about these issues or any other topic, please call my Capitol office at (573) 751-9763. Thank you for your support.

Quote of the Week

“Government growing beyond our consent had become a lumbering giant, slamming shut the gates of opportunity, threatening to crush the very roots of our freedom. What brought America back? The American people brought us back -- with quiet courage and common sense; with undying faith that in this nation under God the future will be ours, for the future belongs to the free.”

Ronald Reagan