



Gibbons Capitol Report
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Spring Cleaning in the Missouri Senate

With spring around the corner, we decided it is time for some spring cleaning. For us in the Missouri Senate, that means cleaning up Missouri's campaign ethics laws.

National attention of illegal campaign contributions and ethics violations led us to reexamine Missouri's campaign finance laws. And, just this week, the Missouri Ethics Commission handed out one of the largest fines ever assessed. A series of campaign finance violations, dating back to 2002, will cost the Missouri House Democratic Campaign Committee \$104,000. Violations include failure to report certain contributions and expenditures, failure to maintain and produce committee records and failure to report which candidates received what amounts of direct support during the 2002 general election.

This fine came at a pivotal time for our state, one week after the Missouri Senate passed a bill to clean up campaign ethics and reporting laws. Every Senate Republican and five Senate Democrats co-sponsored SB 1254 that significantly reforms Missouri's campaign fundraising and lobbyist reporting laws.

Voters' Right to Know

People believe that in an election a lot of money is moving around and changing hands. The public should be able to follow that movement of money and know where campaign donations are coming from, rather than reading about it in the paper after they have already cast their vote. This knowledge means a better informed electorate and can help can help a voter in his/her decision-making process. SB 1254 removes contribution limits directly to candidates but calls for complete transparency with full, timely reporting. Candidates must also report any money earned by working for another candidate or campaign on their personal financial disclosures.

Timely Reporting

Our responsibility to the voters doesn't end with full reporting of records. 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 the election, candidates will have to file campaign money reports every day. To end delays in uploading the information to the State Ethics Commission's public Web site, the bill requires all reports

to be filed electronically. Visit www.moethics.mo.gov to see updated lobbying reports, campaign contributions and campaign finance reports.

No Fundraising During Session

Perception is reality, and if candidates are raising money while we're in session, people could draw the conclusion that bills are being passed for the wrong reasons. In order to remove all doubt, this ethics reform bill limits the timeframe of when candidates can raise money for their campaigns. Candidates for state representative, senator and statewide office cannot accept campaign contributions during the legislative session, which runs from January to mid-May each year.

Curbing Lobbyists Gifts and Expanding Reporting

It is also important that elected officials refrain from accepting over the top excesses and gifts from lobbyists. 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 ballgames or concerts, or for travel and lodging. Tickets to ballgames and concerts are now off the table, and travel expenses are limited to expenses approved in advance by the House or Senate Administration Committees.

Last year, lobbyists representing corporations, cities and interest groups spent more than \$331,000 worth of meals, entertainment and travel to caucuses. When caucuses consisting of at least 10 General Assembly members are invited, expenses go unreported on individual lobbyists' disclosure reports. This bill ends unreported expenses because of the proliferation of small caucuses. If a lawmaker gets treated by a lobbyist, it's going to be reported. Voters need to know who is getting what.

The bill also addresses some other concerns that have come up in past Missouri elections. It prohibits convicted felons and people who have not paid their state and local taxes from running for public office. State employees can lose their jobs if they haven't paid their taxes, and public officials should be held to the same standard.

Everyone plays by the rules in the Missouri Senate, but we've inherited a system of reporting and ethics laws that need to be updated because every Missourian has the right to know how much money candidates are raising and where it's coming from. Voters also deserve to know that bills are passed for the good of the people of Missouri, and not because of lobbyists' gifts or campaign contributions during the session. Senate Bill 1254 sets a new standard for ethics and reporting in this state, a standard long overdue that voters need and deserve.