

Week of February 8, 2010



[Website](#) | [Biography](#) | [Newsroom](#)

[Time for Ethics Reform](#)

When government operates with greater transparency, the public is better served, and the process of creating laws has less opportunity for corruption. With recent incidents taking place in the Legislature that have eroded some of the people’s trust in the law-making process, I’m happy to report the Senate has made some headway on one of our biggest priorities for the 2010 session—ethics reform in the Legislature.

This week we began floor debate on [Senate Bill 577](#), the Senate’s primary ethics bill. Lawmakers offered their ideas for how to put a stop to “pay for play” tactics and keep special interests from controlling lawmakers who are seeking re-election, while also infusing more transparency into the law-making process.

Some of the proposed changes to current ethics-related procedures in SB 577 include:

- Imposing a 48-hour reporting requirement for contributions greater than \$250 given during the legislative session to legislators and legislative candidates. This would apply to other statewide elected officials and candidates (including the governor, lieutenant governor, treasurer, attorney general, secretary of state and auditor) during session and for the governor, any time when legislation from the regular session awaits the governor’s action.
- Changing the definition of a “legislative lobbyist” to no longer include the requirement that these individuals must influence legislation on a regular basis.
- Requiring all employees and staff of the General Assembly to file yearly financial interest statements disclosing supplemental income received totaling \$5,000 or more. The disclosure must include the source of the income and the general nature of the business conducted. These statements would also be available to the public on the Ethics Commission’s website.

- Allowing the Ethics Commission to conduct investigations without receiving a complaint after a unanimous vote of the commission if there is reason to believe that a violation occurred (currently citizens must file a complaint before an investigation may begin).
- Adding a provision that bars sitting senators and representatives from contracting with other lawmakers for political consulting relating to state or federal elections.

The more transparency and accountability we can add to the process of creating laws, the better Missouri government will be. When voters elect the people who will represent their interests in Jefferson City, they have the expectation that their lawmakers are working on behalf of them and their families—not some special interest or lobbying group. Ethics in the Capitol is a very serious issue that must be addressed, because if the public doesn't trust its Legislature, the democratic process suffers.

I look forward to working on this bill in the coming months with my colleagues in the Senate. While no piece of legislation can stop those who are determined to act unethically as public servants, I believe we can come together to reach a consensus on a new set of higher ethical standards that Missourians have the right to expect from their elected officials.

As always, please feel free to contact me or my staff with any questions or concerns at any time. We look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions and trying to answer any questions you may have. You can reach us by phone at 866-277-0882 (toll-free) or 573-751-2272, or by fax at 573-526-7381.

Senator David Pearce serves Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties in the 31st State Senatorial District.

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