



Ethics in the News 2009

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Updated March 4, 2009

INDIANA The Legislature is considering a measure that would prohibit nepotism in township government. Peggy Kerns of NCSL's Ethics Center says that while family hires sometimes can make sense, but "when public money is involved, there should be a lot of effort to make (hiring) an open process." At the state level, Indiana is considered to have some of the toughest nepotism laws.
Indianapolis Star. March 1, 2009. <http://www.indystar.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090301/NEWS05/903010400>

KENTUCKY The Senate passed a bill that would institute ethics reforms for the executive branch. The changes include a revision to the revolving door law as applicable to state employees, more timely and complete personal financial disclosure by executive branch officials, and a pay-to-play provision.
Courier-Journal. February 28, 2009. <http://www.courier-journal.com/article/20090228/NEWS0101/902280403/1008/NEWS01>

MAINE EDITORIAL: Lawmakers should vote on issues they have expertise about.
Kennebec Journal. March 2, 2009. <http://kennebecjournal.maintoday.com/view/columns/6013536.html>

MASSACHUSETTS The House defeated an amendment to a rule that would have incorporated values-based ethics training into the rules-based trainings that lawmakers, officers and legislative employees already receive.
Wicked Local - Saugus. March 3, 2009. http://www.wickedlocal.com/saugus/town_info/government/x844652751/Beacon-Hill-Roll-Call

MICHIGAN The House will consider a revolving door law that would ban elected officials and state executives from becoming lobbyists for two years after leaving their positions. The House Ethics and Elections Committee is also studying a change to the state's personal financial disclosure law for elected officials.
Lansing State Journal. March 3, 2009. <http://www.lansingstatejournal.com/article/20090303/OPINION01/903030311/1086/OPINION01>

NEVADA The Senate will vote on a bill that would empower the Legislature, rather than the state Ethics Commission, to consider alleged improper votes by members. The bill seeks to codify a district court decision that ruled the Senate and Assembly are the only bodies with the power to discipline their members for actions related to the legislative process. That decision is being appealed before the state Supreme Court.
Mercury News. February 26, 2009. http://www.mercurynews.com/news/ci_11792169?nclick_check=1

NEW MEXICO The House has passed ethics legislation, including a bill that would create an ethics commission. The Senate Rules Committee is now examining the legislation, as well as bills concerning campaign finance. Members of the committee explained that the process will take time, due to their desire to reach consensus.
New Mexico Business Weekly. February 27, 2009. www.bizjournals.com/albuquerque/stories/2009/02/23/daily71.html
New Mexico Independent. March 3, 2009. <http://newmexicoindependent.com/20301/ethics-reform-bills-frozen-in-glacial-process>

UTAH Two Senate and two House bills instituting new ethics laws are making their way through the legislative process. This article provides a synopsis and status report on each.
The Spectrum. March 2, 2009. <http://www.thespectrum.com/article/20090302/OPINION/903020317>

ALABAMA The Legislature held a voluntary ethics training for all members sponsored by the Alabama Law Institute. Members heard from the National Conference of State Legislatures and state legislative attorneys.
The Associate Press. February 10, 2009. <http://www.al.com/ap/stories/index.ssf?/base/news-41/123429658158210.xml&storylist=topstories>

Editorial: Ethics bills in the spotlight this session of the Alabama Legislature: if issues about public corruption lead to reform legislation, this should be a banner year in Alabama.

The Birmingham News. February 15, 2009.
<http://www.al.com/birminghamnews/stories/index.ssf?/base/opinion/123468933619570.xml&coll=2>

The House is considering comprehensive ethics reform legislation that would mandate ethics training, expand the definition of lobbyist, provide for electronic filing of campaign finance and lobbying activity, and change the Ethics Commission's process for investigating a complaint, among other provisions. The Governor also plans to introduce reform legislation, the most sweeping overhaul of the state's ethics laws since 1973, according to his office.

The Montgomery Advertiser, February 23, 2009. <http://montgomeryadvertiser.com/article/20090223/NEWS0201/902230314/1009/NEWS02>

ILLINOIS The General Assembly, other public officials, and good government groups are examining a variety of reforms centered on campaign finance, lobbyist disclosure, revolving door, gift bans, contracting with government, and the Freedom of Information Act. President Cullerton and Speaker Madigan have created the 16-member Joint Committee on Government Reform, a bipartisan effort to consider these and other ethics reform issues.

Chicago Tribune. February 21, 2009. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-reform-bills-22feb22,0,3148147.story>

Springfield Journal-Register, February 23, 2009. <http://www.sj-r.com/news/x863266035/First-topic-for-Illinois-reform-panel-open-government>

The recent revelations resulting from Governor Blagojevich's impeachment and the appointment of U.S. Senator Roland Burris have triggered a proposals in both chambers requiring that U.S. Senate vacancies be filled by a special election rather than governor appointment. A House resolution reprimanding Senator Roland Burris and calling for his expulsion was also filed. There is yet another House bill circulating asks the U.S. Senate Ethics Committee to conduct an investigation.

Northwest Herald. February 23, 2009. http://www.nwherald.com/articles/2009/02/20/r_v32oku_ysneknwixvg87q/index.xml

MISSISSIPPI A Senate bill that would have banned state agencies and departments from using general funds to hire contract lobbyists and limited legislators from receiving campaign contributions during the state's legislative session narrowly failed to pass. The legislation was filed after a six-month study by the Senate Ethics Committee into the use of contract lobbyists by state agencies.

Commercialappeal.com, February 13, 2009. <http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2009/feb/13/bill-to-reform-states-lobbying-practices-fails/?printer=1/>

NEBRASKA The Legislature is looking at a proposal that would double the size of gifts that lobbyists could give to legislators and their immediate family members, and would continue to exempt food and entertainment.

Omaha World-Herald. February 15, 2009. http://www.omaha.com/index.php?u_page=2798&u_sid=10565256

NEW YORK Editorial: Don't let financial worries mask need for ethics reforms. A coalition has released a proposal to alter the state's ethics laws, creating a new commission, enhancing disclosure requirements for elected officials and placing limits on campaign fundraising.

Star Gazette. February 9, 2009. <http://www.stargazette.com/article/20090209/OPINION01/902090317>

Editorial: Our view: state needs independent ethics panel. Two agencies currently are charged with enforcing state ethics laws, but neither provides the independent oversight that is necessary because of conflicts of interest.

Utica Observer-Dispatch. February 4, 2009. <http://www.uticaod.com/viewpoints/x1851010314/Our-view-State-needs-independent-ethics-panel?view=print>

UTAH Ethics reform legislation continues to advance. The House will debate bills that impose a one-year revolving door provision; disclose the names of legislators who accept gifts; redefine gifts; and impose more timely campaign disclosure requirements. There are three House proposals that would create an ethics commission that remain in the bipartisan ethics committee.

Deseret News. February 13, 2009. <http://deseretnews.com/article/content/mobile/1,5143,705284656,00.html?printView=true>

Salt Lake Tribune. February 12, 2009. http://www.sltrib.com/ci_11692396

ILLINOIS Senate votes to remove Governor Blagojevich from office. The Senate voted, 59 to 0, to convict him on an article of impeachment that alleged a pattern of abuse of power. After the first vote, the Senate held a second, deciding again by 59 to 0 to bar Mr. Blagojevich from ever holding public office again in Illinois.

The New York Times. January 30, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/30/us/30illinois.html>

NEW MEXICO House grapples with how to structure its proposed Ethics Commission. Lawmakers are considering create an independent ethics commission, but the commission would have to ask the state Attorney General's office to issue subpoenas. Lawmakers are also considering creating an ethics enforcement office within the Attorney General's office.

The New Mexico Independent. January 28, 2009. <http://newmexicoindependent.com/16478/an-independent-ethics-commission-or-a-branch-of-the-ag%E2%80%99s-office>

ALABAMA For the third straight year, two legislators are sponsoring a package of ethics and campaign finance reform legislation. The bills aim to facilitate access to disclosure and contribution forms and institutes other filing requirements.

The Huntsville Times. January 27, 2009. <http://www.al.com/politics/huntsvilletimes/index.ssf?base/news/123305132396040.xml&coll=1>

ILLINOIS The impeachment trial of Governor Blagojevich began in the Senate. Senators are examining one article of impeachment that lists 13 actions by the Governor demonstrating an abuse of power. The Senate is scheduled to meet for six straight days, breaking only on Sunday, after which they will resume meeting if necessary. The Constitution requires that 40 of 59 senators must find the Governor guilty in order to remove him from office.

The Peoria Journal-Star. January 26, 2009. <http://www.pjstar.com/extra/x1099987007/Stage-set-for-states-trial-of-century>

Lieutenant Governor Quinn authorized the appointment a 12 member ethics reform commission, charged with examining how to "clean up" state government.

The Register-Mail. January 6, 2009. http://www.galesburg.com/news/news_state/x1369590889/State-Capitol-Q-A-Ethics-in-government

The Chicago Tribune. January 26, 2009. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/chi-ap-il-ethicscommission,0,6423946.story>

LOUISIANA The Ethics Board will be asked to appoint a temporary administrator next week, one who would likely serve through the end of the

legislative session in late June. The Board has been without an administrator since June 2008, despite a civil service search for a replacement. The Board is considering a reorganization plan to change the staffing structure, which would require legislative approval. The Advocate. January 24, 2009. <http://www.theadvocate.com/news/38262094.html>

UTAH A recent poll shows that 79 percent of surveyed registered voters believe that most or all of the state's legislators behave ethically, but 87 percent want an independent ethics commission created to investigate complaints against legislators. The Salt Lake Tribune. January 26, 2009. http://www.sltrib.com/ci_11546228

WISCONSIN The Assembly will vote on a rule that bans members from fundraising while developing the state budget. The ban on fundraising would last from the date the Governor introduces the budget until it is signed into law. The Senate has no plans to adopt a similar rule, although there has been support for it in the past. The Journal Sentinel. January 20, 2009. <http://www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/37857269.html>

UTAH House Republicans have presented ethics reform bills that would create a one-year cooling-off period before state legislators or elected state executives can become registered lobbyists. The GOP proposals would also further restrictions on legislative gift-taking, restrict personal use of campaign funds after leaving office and require more timely filing of campaign contribution reports. Utah House Democrats have criticized the plan saying that certain contributions that currently must be reported will become exempt from reporting under the GOP proposal. The Desert News. January 13, 2009. <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/1,5143,705277222,00.html>

NEW MEXICO The investigation into whether Gov. Bill Richardson's aides had steered a consulting contract to a political backer has highlighted the lack of ethics laws in New Mexico. New Mexico is one of a handful of states that have no caps on campaign donations and has no independent ethics commission to investigate potential conflicts of interest. The New York Times. January 11, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/us/11newmexico.html?hp>

NEW YORK The Chair of the state commission that regulates lobbyists - the Commission on Public Integrity - has resigned. Buffalo Business First. January 13, 2009. <http://www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/stories/2009/01/12/daily21.html>

MASSACHUSETTS Governor Deval Patrick unveiled new comprehensive reforms aimed at restoring public confidence in state government. His proposal would give the Secretary of State subpoena powers over lobbyists and political campaign records. Additionally, the State Ethics Commission would be permitted to share information with the State Inspector General, the Attorney General, and several other enforcement offices. The Boston Herald. January 6, 2009. http://news.bostonherald.com/news/politics/view/2009_01_06_Mass_ethics_panel_recommends_higher_penalties/srvc=home&position=0

ILLINOIS For the first time in state history, the House voted to impeach the Governor upon the recommendation from the investigatory committee charged with examining the case. The chair of the committee stated that the Governor Blagojevich's actions had betrayed the public trust and proved he was unfit to govern. The Governor has said he will not resign. Chicago Tribune. January 9, 2009. http://newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/clout_st/2009/01/live-blog-of-il.html

MASSACHUSETTS Governor Patrick proposed an overhaul of ethics and lobbying laws after reviewing recommendations made by his ethics task force. Among the suggested reforms are granting subpoena power to the Secretary of State, wiretapping authority to the Attorney General, increased fines for violation of conflict of interest laws, a greater gift ban restriction, and a broader definition of "lobbying." Boston Globe. January 7, 2009. http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2009/01/07/patrick_targets_ethics_lapses/

NEW MEXICO The Attorney General is proposing ethics reforms and changes to the campaign finance laws. Senators will sponsor two of the reforms - one that would create an ethics commission and another that would require former members wait one year before registering as lobbyists. Legal Newsline. January 9, 2009. <http://www.legalnewsline.com/news/218419-new-mexico-ag-seeks-range-of-new-laws>

UTAH The House has created a new standing Ethics Committee, composed of four republicans and four democrats. Like all standing committees, the Ethics Committee will hold public hearings and votes on bills. The previous Ethics Committee met infrequently and was limited to hearing formal ethics complaints. Deseret News. January 9, 2009. <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/0,5143,705276186,00.html>

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