



VAN TAYLOR
TEXAS STATE SENATOR
DISTRICT 8

COMMITTEES:
NOMINATIONS, VICE-CHAIR
EDUCATION
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
TRANSPORTATION

Saturday, May 30, 2015

Dear House Conferees on Senate Bill 19,

As the deadline to pass legislation this session quickly approaches and the two chambers maintaining vastly different visions for meaningful ethics reform, the Senate stands firmly committed to doing whatever it takes to deliver to the people some compromise on measures centered on elected officials.

Enclosed are two versions of SB19 that I will present to the Senate Conference Committee for signature. The first is the stronger version passed unanimously out of the Senate earning the praise of Governor Abbott. Included in this version are additional provisions the House added centering on elected officials. These additions make the Senate version even stronger and I applaud the House for their efforts to add these reforms. Removed from this version are Senate provisions the House dismissed and deemed unnecessary.

The second version contains only measures passed by the House that are relevant to our charge of increasing disclosure and terminating conflicts of interest of elected officials. While I maintain this version does not go as far as it should to affirm to the people of Texas that the actions of elected officials rise above even the appearance of impropriety or self-service, it is better than what we have in place today. I remain hopeful that the House will come to the realization that stronger ethics reforms on elected officials are needed, but rather than let this bill die I will encourage the Senate to adopt either version, or any combination of the two.

Since the House did not appoint its conference committee until last night we don't have much time left before tonight's midnight deadline to have conference committee reports printed and distributed. Therefore, I request your decision at the earliest possible convenience, recognizing that signed reports received after 3:00pm puts the bill in jeopardy.

While we disagree on substance, it is our hope that the House shares our desire to be accountable to the people we serve. It would be an embarrassing failure of leadership if the House opts to let this important legislation die in conference committee, especially during a session supposed to be devoted to strengthening the ethical standards of elected officials. Texans expect us to deliver.

Semper Fidelis,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Van Taylor".

Van Taylor

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Senate and House combined version:

- Require state officers and candidates for state office to disclose contracts for goods or services, including professional, consulting, or legal services, with governmental entities
- Require state officers and candidates for state office to disclose bond counsel services to a public issuer disclosing specific information regarding the issuances to which they are counsel, and the fees paid for those services
- Require state officers and candidates for state office to disclose legal referral fees
- Require a lobbyist to file a detailed report, listing the amount of an expenditure and the legislative or executive branch individual who benefitted, if the expenditure exceeds \$50 per individual per day (current threshold for disclosure is \$114)
- Prohibit lobbyists from "splitting" costs to avoid disclosure by requiring disclosure if the total value of the benefit exceeds the \$50 per person per day cap
- Require state officers and candidates for state office to disclose of all sources earned or unearned income not already reported in state law, including public benefits or a pension and federal or state disability payments
- Institute a one full legislative session "cooling off" period before members of the Legislature may become lobbyists
- Prohibit elected officers from registering as lobbyists
- Automatically eject felons from serving in the Legislature or statewide elected office upon final conviction
- Affirmation of submission of federal tax returns and tax payments
- Pre-appointment statement of political contributions made by appointed officer or spouse
- A former elected official cannot make political contributions from their campaign account for two years after becoming a lobbyist
- Addition of ethics counselor at Legislative Counsel to provide oral and written opinions on potential conflicts of interest.
- Revokes government benefits from elected officials convicted of a felony related to their public service
- Electronic filing of personal financial disclosure

Provisions that were included in both, or from SB19 as it passed the House:

- Require state officers and candidates for state office to disclose legal referral fees
- Require state officers and candidates for state office to disclose some contracts for goods or services
- Allow the Texas ethics commission to determine the rate within a range of \$50 and 60% of per diem (currently \$114) in which a lobbyist must file a detailed report, listing the amount of an expenditure and the legislative or executive branch individual who benefitted, if the expenditure exceeds \$50 per individual per day (current threshold for disclosure is 60% of per diem, or \$114)
- Require state officers and candidates for state office to disclose of all sources earned or unearned income not already reported in state law, including public benefits or a pension and federal or state disability payments
- Affirmation of submission of federal tax returns and tax payments
- Pre-appointment statement of political contributions made by appointed officer or spouse
- A former elected official cannot make political contributions from their campaign account for two years after becoming a lobbyist
- Addition of ethics counselor Legislative Counsel to provide oral and written opinions on potential conflicts of interest.
- Automatically eject felons from serving in the Legislature or statewide elected office upon final conviction
- Revokes government benefits from elected officials convicted of a felony related to their public service
- Electronic filing of personal financial disclosure