

Ethics Update

A newsletter from the Anne Arundel County Ethics Commission

March 2009, Issue 47

Questions of honor are raised as much by appearances as by reality in politics and because they incite public distrust they need to be addressed no less directly than we would address evidence of expressly illegal corruption.

- John McCain, Senator

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE- BIG NEWS – well, sort of . . .

County employees who file financial disclosure statements and have Groupwise addresses will receive their notifications and forms by electronic mail this year. The forms will arrive as attachments. Each filer must print, fill out, sign and send or hand-deliver the form to the ethics commission office as usual.

Volunteers who file financial disclosure or conflict of interest statements will be asked to provide e-mail addresses so that all future communications with the ethics commission may also be done electronically where possible.

Lobbyists have also been asked to provide e-mail addresses. We will be publishing the names of those lobbyists who insist upon receiving forms and other communications by snail-mail. (Just kidding.)

We're cutting costs and going green(er).

WEBSITE UPDATE

1. Attention financial disclosure filers and everybody else: the ethics commission

website has been updated to include the names of controlled donors for 2008- the year covered by the disclosure statements that will be due on April 15.

Controlled donors include people doing business or seeking to do business with the county, lobbyists, and people who are regulated or controlled by a county government agency. The lists include license and permit holders, liquor license holders, lessees of the county, and vendors and contractors with contracts worth \$5,000 or more.

The ethics law, §7-2-104(b), requires the ethics commission to make this list available for anybody who files a disclosure statement.

Now you will have no reason to say, "I didn't know the donor of this gift did business with the county!"

2. Recently added to the ethics commission website: minutes from the February commission meeting and the 2008 Annual Report.

WHAT'S SO ETHICAL ABOUT THE PUBLIC ETHICS LAW?

That's actually a good question. People get confused because the "ethics" law doesn't really cover the kinds of things that most of us consider to be ethics issues. The broad subject of ethics covers everything from religious belief and moral values to personal conduct and criminal activity.

The Public Ethics Law covers only a small fraction of what is considered as "ethics." Specifically, the law deals only with conflicts of interest.

A conflict of interest is official conduct that is subject to improper influence or even the appearance of improper influence.

A conflict of interest is a conflict between official duties and personal (or financial) interests.

The ethics law establishes only a *minimum* standard of conduct. For example, under a minimum standard of conduct, it is usually okay to accept a gift from a vendor that is worth less than \$25.00. What is your standard of conduct? Will you accept such a gift because the law permits you to do so, or will you refuse to accept all gifts from vendors because it is your higher ethical standard of conduct?

No people is wholly civilized where a distinction is drawn between stealing an office and stealing a purse.

-Theodore Roosevelt

SUMMARY OF RECENT OPINIONS

Summaries of opinions issued since the last *Ethics Update* follow. Do not rely on a summary for guidance. Full opinions are available at:

<http://www.aacounty.org/Ethics/indexOpinions.cfm>

AO-00-03: A special assistant to the county executive may serve as president of the board of the Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts, Inc. subject to a number of limitations imposed by the ethics law and described in the opinion.

An honest politician is one who, when he is bought, will stay bought.

*-Simon Cameron, 1799-1889
(Sec'y of War under President Lincoln- resigned amid allegations of corruption)*

RESOLUTION 14-09

On February 17, 2009, the county council introduced Resolution 14-09, nominating three currently serving ethics commission members for reappointment to the commission. If the resolution passes, the three members, Carol Lewnes, the current chairperson, John Moses, and Cathy Conlyn, will serve additional terms of one year, two years, and three years respectively.

This resolution marks the first time the county council has exercised its new charter responsibility to nominate three people for appointment to the ethics commission. A result of an amendment to the county's charter, passed by the voters in November, 2008, the council is now required to make these nominations.

The ethics commission thanks the council for nominating the commission members- each of whom has become an invaluable member of the ethics team.

ETHICS TRAINING

Spring brings the promise of new life. And it can be an

opportunity to bring new life to your New Year's resolution to become a more informed county employee. Don't let the spring grass grow under your feet. Sign up for ethics training. Spend a couple of hours reinvigorating your ethics know-how, and reestablishing connections with your co-workers.

Each session begins at 9:00 a.m., ends by noon and includes a 20-minute video. Training may also be scheduled for your own group at your own work location. Just call to arrange it.

Upcoming training sessions will be held on:

Wednesday, March 11
Friday, March 20
Wednesday, April 15
Friday, April 24
Wednesday, May 6
Wednesday, May 27
Wednesday, June 10

Voters want a fraud they can believe in.

- Will Durst, political commentator and many other things (b.1952)

AND NOW, A TEST!

Which one of the following individuals was not mentioned in the media in connection with an ethical issue in the past six months?¹ Be one of the first three to answer correctly and win a genuine ethics commission mug of nominal value. County employees

¹ Naming these individuals is not intended to suggest any guilt. It is intended only to provoke thought and discussion. . .

and their friends and relatives are totally eligible for these prizes.

1. Rod Blagojevich
2. Tom Daschle
3. Michael Bloomberg
4. David Mills
5. Roland Burris
6. Ronald H. Lipscomb
7. Nancy Killefer
8. Timothy Geithner
9. William J. Lynn, III
10. Charles B. Rangel
11. Salvatore DiMasi
12. Drew Sanders
13. Michael Steele
14. Sheila Dixon
15. Nancy Pelosi

Ethical conduct in government should be more than an aspiration. It should be a requirement.
- Russ Feingold, Senator, Wisconsin

NEW ETHICS PANEL AT THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Board of Education recently appointed five members to a newly reconstituted ethics panel. The new members are:

Jacqueline Boone Allsup
Charles D. Jeffries
Eric G. Moran
Konrad M. Wayson
Dr. Irene M. Zoppi

Read about the new members and look for more information about the ethics panel on the public schools website at:

www.aacps.org.

(Click on the "board of education" link.)

Rumor travels faster, but it don't stay put as long as the truth.
-Will Rogers (1879-1935)