

House Passes Gift and Travel Ban

by Bend Weekly News Sources

SALEM—Oregon House Speaker Jeff Merkley (D-Portland) applauded his colleagues in the House for adopting rules Monday that set strict limits on gifts to legislators. According to the new rules, Members of the House may not accept gifts of value worth more than \$10.

“This is an important first step toward changing the way business is done in the Legislature,” Merkley said. “Adopting these rules right off the bat sends a message that gifts serve no public purpose, and really shouldn’t be a part of the lawmaking culture or process.”

The House also adopted a set of guidelines that clarify the new gift rules. A three member Guidelines Committee will regularly review the guidelines and suggest changes or further clarification as questions arise.

“This is a new day in Oregon. We will rebuild the public’s trust in the Legislature this session, and this sets us off on the right foot,” Merkley said.

During this session of the Legislature, the House Committee on Elections, Ethics and Rules will also review the recommendations on ethics from the Public Commission on the Legislature and the Oregon Law Commission and will address such issues as lobbying disclosure, revolving doors, and empowering and funding the Government Standards and Practices Commission.

GIFTS AND FAVORS, PROHIBITED ACTIONS

19.50 Gifts Prohibited. Members of the House of Representatives as well as to their employees and the staff of the Office of the Chief Clerk shall not solicit or accept gifts from individuals, businesses, or organizations that have business before the Legislature.

19.55 Definitions. "Gifts" are items of value worth more than \$10, entertainment, out-of-state travel and lodging, and meals. More detailed definitions of these categories of gifts are in the Gift Guidelines dated January 8th, 2007, which is adopted by reference in this rule.

19.60 Guidelines Committee. The Speaker shall appoint a Guidelines Committee that will provide guidance to members regarding these rules. This committee will work with the Speaker and Chief Clerk to issue revised editions of the Gift Guidelines as needed.

Gift Guidelines:

Items of Value:

Members may not accept from individuals, businesses, or organizations that have business before the Legislature: items of value that have a value more than \$10.

Members may accept: items made available to the public on the same terms as to legislators; gifts from family members; promotional mugs and t-shirts; gifts of recognition, like plaques or certificates, which have a resale value of less than \$25; items of value over \$10 if the item is donated within thirty days to a public body or a bona fide educational or charitable organization; traditional gifts of appreciation for service from other members of the House; and books or pamphlets related to state issues.

Entertainment:

Members may not accept from individuals, businesses, or organizations that have business before the Legislature: tickets to entertainment that one would normally pay for such as: movies, musical performances, or sporting events (Example: tickets to the Trail Blazers); fees for sporting activities (Example: rounds of golf).

Members may accept: incidental entertainment (Example: high school choral group performing at the start of a Chamber of Commerce meeting); entertainment made available to the public on the same terms as to legislators (Example: free movie at the local recreation center).

Out-of-state Travel:

Members may not accept from individuals, businesses, or organizations that have business before the Legislature: gifts of out-of-state travel or lodging.

Members may accept:

Nonprofit Policy Training: scholarships for attendance at interstate meetings of legislators organized and

hosted by a non-profit organization under the following circumstances:

- ** training or policy is a significant part of the organization's mission;
 - ** the scholarship comes from the non-profit organization;
 - ** the non-profit organization provides trainings on a wide variety of issues;
 - ** the meeting is for training or policy deliberation; and
 - ** attendance is approved in advance as meeting these standards by the Clerk of the House.
- ** Example: PNWER, CSG, & NCSL

Federal Policy Training: scholarships for attendance at training or policy meetings funded by local or federal government grants:

- ** the scholarship comes from the government grant; and
 - ** attendance is approved in advance as meeting these standards by the Clerk of the House.
- ** Example: The Federal Dept. of Housing and Urban Development hosts a conference on a topic such as improving rates of homeownership.

Meals:

Members may not accept from individuals, businesses, or organizations that have business before the Legislature.

- ** Private restaurant meals.

Members may accept complimentary meals in the following circumstances:

- ** events to which all 60 legislators are invited;
- ** events open to the public;
- ** events at which a legislator is asked to participate on a panel or make remarks; and
- ** snacks and beverages with a value under \$10.

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