

A Trail Blazed Too Far? Oregon Reins in Reach of Ethics Law

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Concerned that previous reform efforts from the 2007 session had created a large number of headaches, Oregon legislators last month passed a new law revising portions of the state's ethics code, although most changes will not become effective until January 1, 2010. According to staff with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC), the primary purpose of the legislation was to remedy unintended consequences related to the economic interest forms filed by public officials, but the bill also became an opportunity to make changes to other provisions of the state's ethics laws.

Among other changes, the new law will add several additional exceptions to the gift restrictions, including where a public official represents state or local government, or a special government body at a reception, meal or meeting held by an organization. (The old exception required the public official to speak or answer questions as part of a scheduled program before the organization.) The bill also refines a number of allegedly ambiguous definitional provisions, including clarifying who has a "legislative or administrative interest" for purposes of the state's gift restrictions.

OGEC staff has indicated that more detailed guidance—including clarifying regulations—will be available later this year.

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