



# COMMENTARY

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## **PAR SAYS BILL WOULD MAKE BAD ETHICS PROVISION WORSE**

HB 33, which passed the House Thursday, would add an exception to the Ethics Law to allow third parties to pay the fees for legislators and legislative staff to attend educational seminars or conferences. This so-called "minor exception" would add to a long list of exceptions that already allow legislators to receive food, drink, entertainment and transportation paid for by private interests. The bill would simply expand on an already bad policy.

In a 1995 study of the Ethics Law, PAR criticized the practice of allowing lobbyists to wine, dine and entertain public servants. The study recommended either entirely prohibiting public servants from receiving any gifts or at least limiting the food and drink a public servant could be given by one person to \$50 per event and \$200 in any one year. Neither alternative was adopted.

Proponents of HB 33 have argued that it would relieve the public of the expense of educating legislators and legislative staff. However, if the education is legitimately needed to improve legislative performance, it should be paid for by the public. The bill also implies that legislators should expect to be treated differently from other public servants—a poor message to be sending.

One of the state's chief economic development objectives should be to improve its image. It is ironic that legislators should use a special session focused on economic development to propose further opening up the legislative process to special interest money—if only in a "minor" way.