

Republicans introduce new ethics plan

Latest House proposal said to be toughest yet

AUSTIN (AP) — House Republicans unveiled Tuesday what they said is the toughest ethics plan yet, a bill that would limit campaign donations, make legislators wait before becoming lobbyists and ban lobbyist-paid out-of-state vacations by lawmakers.

Rep. Tom Craddick of Midland, leader of the 57 GOP House members, said his fellow Republicans believe the time has come to quit tinkering with ethics reform and overhaul the rules.

"About every 10 years, we have somebody that gets in trouble — either spends too much money or gets caught with their hand in the cookie jar," Craddick said. "Then we piece-meal ethics (reform). This bill ... is the thing that's needed to straighten out the ethics problem in the Texas Legislature."

"We are here today to show our willingness to take the bold measures

necessary to restore the confidence of the people of Texas in state government that has been lost over the last several years," he said.

A key provision of the bill would impose a two-year wait before legislators or the heads of state agencies could become lobbyists. In the past, many lawmakers and agency leaders have held office one day, then lobbied their old colleagues the next.

Another major proposal would ban out-of-state trips for lawmakers with lobbyists paying the bills. In the past, lawmakers have traveled to Europe, Mexican resorts and Las Vegas on lobbyists' tabs.

The GOP plan also would strengthen reporting requirements so lobbyists would have to report spending on an elected official or

state agency head, by name, when spending more than \$50 per event.

"The people sent us to Austin expecting us to be good stewards for them, and they deserve that kind of treatment," Rep. Robert Eckels, R-Houston, said. "This (bill) changes fundamentally the way we look at ourselves as legislators and our role in the community. It makes us more accountable and more the type of stewards the public deserves."

Eckels, who helped draft the bill, said its reforms are stronger than either the Senate proposal or the Democrat-written House plan.

"This is a lot tougher bill than anybody's come up with," Eckels said.

But he said ethics reform shouldn't be a partisan issue. "There

are a lot of Democrats that support this position. The issue is not a Republican-Democrat issue. It's an issue of the confidence in our government."

House Speaker Gib Lewis, D-Fort Worth, who is currently under a two-count misdemeanor indictment by the Travis County grand jury for alleged ethics violations, said the GOP plan would receive a "full hearing" from the Democrat-controlled House.

"Everybody's on that (ethics) bandwagon," Lewis said. "It's good, kind of like apple pie, motherhood, the American flag and (Operation) Desert Shield. I've got no problem with any of those issues that have been presented."

Among its other provisions, the

GOP plan would:

— Prohibit "money laundering" of campaign donations through political action committees. Eckels said some officials now skirt the current ban on accepting contributions during legislative sessions by raising money for PACs. The PACs then make large donations to those officials after the Legislature adjourns.

— Adopt federal limits on campaign donations of \$1,000 per individual and \$5,000 per PAC.

— Limit to \$250 contributions that could be given to members of regulatory agencies by those in business before that agency.

— Treat any individual who contributes more than \$25,000 to a serious candidate as a political action committee, requiring them to file full disclosure of all donations with the secretary of state.

Federal hearings focus on MHMR conditions

DALLAS (AP) — Conditions at the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation will be the focus of a series of federal hearings this spring.

U.S. District Judge Barefoot Sanders granted the hearings, tentatively scheduled for April or May, at the request of a lawyer representing state school residents.

The hearings will determine whether the MHMR is meeting the needs of its patients.

Sanders, who has been handling a long-running lawsuit concerning state school conditions, held the state in contempt in 1987 after witnesses testified how residents were abused while under state care.

David Ferleger of Philadelphia, the lawyer for the residents, contends that MHMR officials have failed to meet the terms of a court-approved settlement and is asking that the state again be held in contempt.

But attorneys representing the state say MHMR workers have already complied with the agreement and have asked for an end to federal monitoring.

Being tried without a case Speaker Lewis asserts lawyers will have no evidence in probe

AUSTIN (AP) — Indicted House Speaker Gib Lewis declared Tuesday that prosecutors trying to convict him of alleged ethics violations don't have a case.



Lewis

Lewis, D-Fort Worth, said Travis County District Attorney Ronnie Earle has "found out that what he claimed is not true."

Lewis blasted Earle's handling of the investigation, saying a grand jury probe was not necessary to charge him with misdemeanors "unless you want to grandstand." "This whole thing has been kind of spooky from the beginning," he

said in an interview.

Lewis was indicted by the grand jury in December on charges that he failed to report a gift from the law firm of Heard, Goggan, Blair and Williams, and of failing to disclose his interest in a business for which the law firm allegedly paid some property taxes.

Lewis said he paid the taxes, but there is a question about who paid the penalty and interest on the delinquent bill.

He said he asked Heard, Goggan to send him a bill for the penalty and interest. The law firm sent him one for about \$2,000, Lewis said.

But Lewis said he hasn't paid that bill because he is not sure the amount is correct.

In addition, Lewis questioned whether grand jury examination of documents related to the cur-

rent indictments was proper.

Prosecutors have denied they are trying to bolster their case in the two misdemeanor indictments through the examination of documents that cover the same period. Instead, they have said, the investigation, is pursuing additional allegations that could amount to a felony indictment against Lewis.

"We don't need any more information about the transactions that form the basis of the misdemeanor indictments," Earle said.

On Tuesday, the grand jury received records on Heard, Goggan's tax collection business. The San Antonio-based law firm is the largest private collector of delinquent taxes in the state.

Richard Pachecano of San Antonio, the law firm's director of data processing, appeared before the grand jury.

Conserving water doesn't mean sacrifice

CHICAGO (AP) — It's possible to strike a balance between conserving water and using your appliances effectively, says the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers.

The organization surveyed its members to find out how operation of water-using appliances can affect water consumption. While adequate water is needed for effective results, it says, consumers can make sure they don't use too much by being aware of appliance capabilities:

- The shortest wash-rinse cycle of your dishwasher, designed for lightly soiled loads, uses the least amount of water, averaging 9.21 gallons per dishload. Heavily soiled loads require 12.41 gallons per load because they need a greater number of washes and rinses, each averaging two and a quarter gallons. The normal cycle on most newer models uses an average of 11.12 gallons.

- The fabric, load size and amount of soil affect how much water a clothes washer uses. The average for all types and sizes of washers is 24.4 gallons, with water level control at the lowest setting. Large capacity machines set on maximum setting will use 43.3 gallons. AHAM says that tub size makes a difference. Surveying top-loading models — the kind most commonly owned — they found that large-capacity washers use at least 25.8 gallons per load, while compacts use a minimum of 15.9 gallons. Top capacity is 47 gallons for large models and 25.9 gallons for compacts.

- Water use for a food disposer depends on how long you run it and intensity of flow. Manufacturers say that cold water should run full force while the disposer is in use, plus a minute to ensure effective, sanitary disposal.

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Police Beat

The following events were reported to the University Police Department between Jan. 23 and 29:

- HARASSMENT:**
 - A woman reported she received several sexually suggestive telephone calls from an unidentified man.
- MISDEMEANOR THEFT:**
 - Four bicycles were reported stolen.
 - A student reported his Sony AM/FM cassette radio was stolen after he left it unattended outside a classroom.
 - A compact disc carrier and 44 compact discs were stolen from a room in Dorm 12. The student was moving from the dorm and left the door unlocked.
- BURGLARY OF HABITATION:**
 - A man reported someone entered his unlocked dorm room in Hart Hall and stole a car stereo.
- BURGLARY OF A BUILDING:**
 - A woman reported someone took \$36 from her desk in Harrington Tower.
- BURGLARY OF A VEHICLE:**
 - Someone broke the left rear vent window of a tan Chevrolet Malibu and broke a speaker cover.
- CRIMINAL MISCHIEF:**
 - A student tearing down engineering society banners in Zachry was taken to the Health Center because of medication problems.
 - A University police officer reported a 1981 Honda Civic with a broken left rear window. The owner was notified and said nothing was missing.
- CRIMINAL TRESPASS:**
 - Two people forcibly entered a room in Leggett Hall and damaged the window frame and venetian window blinds. Two students were arrested in connection with the incident.
 - A woman reported her boyfriend would not leave her room in Fowler Hall, but did not press formal charges.
- MINOR IN POSSESSION:**
 - A student was issued a citation at the Southside parking garage for minor in possession of alcohol.
- TERRORISTIC THREAT:**
 - A woman reported she received several obscene and threatening telephone calls.
- UNLAWFUL CARRYING WEAPON:**
 - A student was arrested near Davis-Gary Hall for carrying a five-inch double-edged "Explorer" dagger, public intoxication and minor in possession.
- VIOLATION OF UNIVERSITY REGULATION:**
 - A man was soliciting money from pedestrians near Puryear Hall. He said he needed the money to repair his car which had broken down. The man was issued a criminal trespass warning and told to leave campus.
- SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION:**
 - The Department of Public Safety reported it recovered a Ford Tempo stolen from campus. The car was badly damaged.

In Advance

Pop-folk songwriter Vila performs tonight

Houston's pop-folk singer-songwriter Tony Vila performs tonight at the Front Porch Cafe with his band Wide Awake. Vila has been described as a "cross between Tracy Chapman and Sting," and his music has been characterized as having "passion out the wazoo." Vila's style capitalizes on his icy clear vocals and original, melodic songs.

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