

## Proposal tightens legislative ethics rules

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Lawmakers would not be able to accept free tickets to sporting or entertainment events and also would have to pay for any work-related trips they take under new ethics laws being pushed by House members.

The new laws also would prevent legislative interns from being paid by private companies while working at the Legislature, require lawmakers and certain employees to complete annual disclosure forms, ban lawmakers' spouses from being lobbyists and prohibit gifts from lobbyists, except small items given on opening day of the Legislature.

Complaints would be taken up by new three-member ethics panels in each legislative branch consisting of two members of the majority and one from the minority who would weigh the charges and mete out punishment.

"We are here trying our best to improve the conduct of all elected officials ... and trying to bring the trust and confidence back to the people," House Speaker Calvin Say said yesterday at a news conference.

The proposal was touted as a bipartisan measure, although some House Republicans said the bill was submitted late and that they did not have a chance to sign it.

Still, most applauded the move.

"From the Republican point of view, it's about time," said Rep. Gene Ward (R, Kalama Valley-Hawaii Kai). "Hopefully, this will get a foot in the door where we can start with some enforcement and we can get the disclosure so we really know what's going on."

Rep. Colleen Meyer (R, Laie-Kahuku) said she also thought the proposals were a good start, but worried that the three-member commissions could lead to minority Republicans being outvoted in most cases.

"I would hate to see it turn into a witch hunt," she said.

The ethics proposal comes after new House and Senate rules were adopted this year in a 74-page administrative and financial manual. The manual bars practices such as businesses and industry representatives working as legislative interns.

Say (D, St. Louis Heights-Wilhelmina Rise-Palolo Valley) said Democrats were seeking changes in the law to make them more permanent and harder to change in the future.

Senate President Colleen Hanabusa said her members were not consulted on the House proposal but that the chamber would give it serious consideration if it passes over from the House.

"I think there's no question the Legislature is committed to see some kind of ethics procedure established," said Hanabusa (D, Nanakuli-Makua).

Both chambers have had instances of alleged ethical violations in recent years.

Some concerns have been raised over lawmakers hiring interns from private companies, one lawmaker potentially benefiting from a proposed land deal, and a former senator accused of improperly using his office to try to punish a private employer.

No wrongdoing was found in those instances, and none of the legislation at issue ever moved forward.

"The whole objective is to try to prevent the types of incidents that have occurred in the past," Say said.

One of Say's critics said he still had concerns.

"In the past we have seen instances where ethics complaints have been bottled up by the leadership, and this legislation does not address that situation," said Rep. Scott Saiki (D, Moiliili-McCully).

Senate Minority Leader Fred Hemmings said he was amused by the proposal and took issue with the provision barring lawmakers' spouses from lobbying. Hemmings' wife, Lydia, is a lobbyist for the Hawaii Psychiatric Association.

Hemmings noted that former lawmaker and state Democratic Party Chairman Alex Santiago also is a lobbyist on health care issues, sometimes opposite Hemmings' wife.

Hemmings (R, Lanikai-Waimanalo) said former lawmakers lobbying the Legislature is "the real conflict of interest."