

Political Law Changes in CO, GA, WA and WV

May 2011

Colorado Increases Gift Limits

The Independent Ethics Commission in Colorado released Position Statement 11-01 on April 8, 2011, which raised the limit on gifts to public employees and officials in Colorado from \$50 to \$53 per calendar year for the next four years. The limit is to be adjusted based on changes in inflation every four years. This is the first adjustment and will be recalculated again during the first quarter of 2015.

Georgia Makes Additional Lobbying Change

The Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission issued an Advisory Opinion on April 5, 2011, stating that, while such law requires lobbyists to report expenditures with respect to family members of public officers, it does not require disclosure of expenditures made for the benefit of public employees. See "Updated State Campaign Contribution Limits (CA, GA, OH)" from the March 2011 issue of *Election Law News*. However, this opinion supposedly created a loophole in the original legislation for lobbyist expenditures on public employees. In response, at the end of the 2011 legislative session on April 14, the Georgia General Assembly passed Senate Bill 160, which closes the loophole by requiring lobbyists to disclose spending on public employees. Senate Bill 160 also permits public utilities to make contributions in Georgia.

Washington Changes Campaign Reporting Law

On April 22, Governor Chris Gregoire signed into law former Senate Bill 5021, providing for increased campaign transparency. The new law amends the definition of "electioneering communication" to lower the reporting threshold to a fair market value of \$1,000 from \$5,000.

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The new law also requires the names of political action committees to include their sponsors and strengthens the criminal and civil penalties for violations.

West Virginia Amends Its Ethics Law

On April 4, 2011, West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin signed into law former House Bill 2464, which amends the state's Ethics Act. The new law will take effect on July 1, 2011. This ethics bill requires public servants and their spouses to disclose additional information on their financial disclosure statements to help identify possible conflicts of interests. Also, it prohibits certain public employees and servants from registering as lobbyists for one year after leaving state government. Finally, the new law directs the West Virginia Ethics Commission to publish publically a list of public servants who are delinquent in filing their financial statements.