

No Good Deed: Minnesota Lobbyists and Gifts

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A Minnesota legislator's recent misfortune with a power saw serves as a reminder that ethics rules apply to lobbyists in their private, as well as professional, lives. After a state representative accidentally cut off three of her fingers, a GoFundMe page was set up by another state representative. The names of registered lobbyists began appearing on the GoFundMe's list of donors shortly thereafter.

In Minnesota, lobbyists and lobbyist employers are prohibited from making gifts or requesting that others make gifts to state officials, including members of the legislature. There are no exceptions to the gift ban that would apply to this scenario.

State House Speaker Melissa Hortman, who tweeted the GoFundMe link, says she directed a staffer to request a formal opinion from the Minnesota Campaign Finance and Disclosure Board to determine the permissibility of any lobbyists' and lobbyist employers' donations to the GoFundMe. At time of publishing, at least one lobbyist has sought the return of his \$125 donation.

This story serves as an important reminder that ethics rules, including gift bans, apply in both professional and private life. Good intentions are not an exception!

Wiley's Election Law and Government Ethics Practice frequently counsels clients on compliance with federal, state, and local ethics and gift rules.

Authors

Caleb P. Burns
Partner
202.719.7451
cburns@wiley.law
Hannah J. Miller
Associate
202.719.3573
hmillier@wiley.law

Practice Areas

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