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Leon Democratic Party Calls for Lobbying Reform in Local Government

Lobbying reform package will allow more sunshine in local government

TALLAHASSEE, FL – In the wake of recent news reports about the Leon County Commission's May 8th vote on the Comprehensive Plan, the Leon County Democratic Party today announced a new initiative to bring lobbying reform to the county commission.

"It is time to let more sunshine into Leon County's government. Residents have a right to know how much money is spent trying to sway our local elected officials," said Rick Minor, Chair of the Leon County Democratic Party.

During the 2006 general election, Leon County voters had the highest percentage voter turnout of any county in Florida. "The voters of Leon County are some of the most community-minded, politically aware residents in Florida," said Minor. "They deserve a local government that is honest, open, and accountable."

We recommend that the county commission adopt the following measures to Policy No. 03-05, Code of Ethics:

1. **Disclosure of Lobbyist Fees.** All lobbyists must register and disclose their fees on a quarterly basis, similar to state law. Category values of \$0.00 - \$4,999.99, \$5,000.00 - \$9,999.99, \$10,000.00 - \$19,999.99, \$20,000.00 and up.
2. **Disclosure of Lobbyists' New Clients.** All lobbyists must register new clients with the Clerk of Court prior to engaging in lobbying on their behalf.
3. **Gift Restrictions.** Lobbyists and any principal who hires a lobbyist are:
 - a. Prohibited from giving any cash gifts above \$1.00.
 - b. Prohibited from giving any individual gift above \$100.00 in value including lodging or travel expenses.
 - c. Prohibited from giving gifts totaling more than \$500.00 in value for individual County Commissioners, County Officers, or County Employees during a calendar year.
 - d. Required to report any gifts or meals valued at over \$10.00 in quarterly reports.

4. Disclosure of Commissioners' Relevant Business Relationships Prior to Voting.

Any County Commissioner must disclose, in writing, any business or professional relationships with anyone that has any business before the county prior to a vote. This does not intercede in or supersede the state law banning voting, this is simply a disclosure requirement that must be made prior to voting.

The new reform proposals are meant to provide citizens with information on lobbyist activities and expenditures, without placing an undue burden upon lobbying firms.

"Lobbyists are an integral part of our local economy, and so any responsible reform proposal mustn't damage their businesses. But first and foremost, the people of Leon County have a right to know who and how much is being paid to influence their elected officials," said Minor.

Prior to this announcement, Minor reached out to every member of the County Commission, speaking directly with Chairman Ed DePuy and Commissioners Bryan Desloge, John Dailey, Bob Rackleff, and Cliff Thaell. The Leon County Democratic Party will continue working in a non-partisan fashion to build support for this reform package.

"We've reached out to every commissioner, regardless of their registered party affiliation," said Minor. "This isn't about Democrats versus Republicans, but about how we can make local government more responsive to the residents of Leon County."

"I hope that every member of the Commission will embrace these reforms. Now is the time for change," said Minor. "It WILL play a major role in the 2008 elections, and we consider it our job to inform voters whether our local elected officials support or do not support lobbying reform. We will not let this issue die."

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