



A newsletter published at the direction of the

# LEGISLATIVE ETHICS BOARD

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## ETHICS ALERT

January – 2006

### Complimentary Admission from Charitable/Civic/Governmental/Community Organizations.

The Ethics Act contains a presumption that legislators may accept a complimentary ticket to certain events and that the \$50 gift limit will not apply to the value of the ticket. The TVW dinner on February 6<sup>th</sup> is an example. A third party may be encouraged to “buy a table” and donate those spots back to TVW so that TVW may invite a legislator to attend on a complimentary basis. The Ethics Act presumes a legislator may accept that invitation notwithstanding the \$50 gift limit. If, however, there is an arrangement, agreement, or understanding that the donation from the third party would pay for the attendance of a particular legislator, then the invitation has come from the third party, not TVW, and the gift limits are applicable.

Suggestion: It is always helpful for legislators to know who is making the offer of free or reduced admission to events. House and Senate Counsel, and Ethics Board Counsel, may be able to assist legislators in making this determination before the fact.

### Use of Public Resources in Private Disputes

The general rule is that public resources, also referred to in the Act as “facilities of an agency,” may be used by legislators in the performance of an official duty. Recently (Complaint 2005 – No. 7) the Board concluded that official duty did not include a purely private workplace dispute and that a legislator should not have intervened, with the use of public resources, on behalf of one of the parties to the dispute.

Suggestion: Questions to ask before using public resources to become involved in constituent matters/disputes include: (1) What is the legislative nexus to the question at hand – is it tangible or negligible? (2) Am I being asked to contact an agency to right a wrong, or to gather information for a constituent, or to supply information on the status of the law, or is this simply a private argument such as one might find exists between the parties to a dissolution proceeding (or a private labor dispute)?