

January through December 1991

Complaints and Investigations under Wisconsin's Ethics Code and Lobbying Law

The Ethics Board may investigate possible violations of the Ethics Code and lobbying law whenever circumstances warrant and may file complaints alleging violations whenever it concludes there is probable cause to do so.

During the period January through December 1991, the Board investigated the following matters pertaining to possible violations of the statutorily prescribed standards of conduct for state officials, lobbyists, and principals.

PRINCIPAL'S FURNISHING A CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTION. In light of published accounts, the Ethics Board investigated whether Harold Ripps, a registered principal under the lobbying law, had made an improper campaign contribution to Representative David Clarenbach's congressional campaign committee. The Board found that Mr. Ripps had made a contribution of \$1,000 at a time not permitted by the lobbying law. Representative Clarenbach returned the contribution to Mr. Ripps who forfeited the full amount of the contribution to the State of Wisconsin. [91-SC-01].

SENATOR'S EMPLOYMENT BY A PRINCIPAL. In response to a verified complaint filed with the Ethics Board, the Board investigated whether Senator Gary George and Miller Brewing Company had violated the lobbying law as a result of Miller's employment of Senator George in 1988. The Board found that Miller had paid Senator George's law firm a fee of \$750 plus expenses for a seminar by Senator George in December 1988 directed at assisting minority contractors and vendors. The Board concluded that administrative rules promulgated by the Secretary of State, and in effect at the time of the seminar, permitted Miller's payment to the law firm. [91-SC-03].

LEGISLATOR'S RECEIPT OF REWARD FOR PAST ACTION. In response to information given the Ethics Board, the Board investigated to determine whether a Senator violated the Ethics Code by accepting \$10,000 awarded by a non-profit organization for the Senator's role in enacting legislation related to improving the justice system. The Board found that the Senator returned the money and concluded that no further action was warranted. [91-SC-04].

During this period, the Ethics Board initiated 3 investigations pertaining to the filing of late or incomplete Statements of Economic Interest. In one instance, the Board determined that an individual need not file a Statement. In the second instance, the investigation was concluded when the official filed a Statement and paid a forfeiture for lateness. In the third instance, the investigation was concluded when the filer amended her Statement to make it complete.