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August 4, 2013

Ethics Panel Refuses Document Request in Ethics Probe

Times Union

RESTORING THE PUBLIC TRUST

From Assemblyman
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120th District



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Time for an Independent Ethics Commission

Albany needs to reform the way it handles ethics complaints. There have been too many instances of corruption, scandal, and public deception for us to ignore any longer. Such complaints need to be handled promptly and independently.

Currently, the Speaker and his staff unilaterally decide how complaints are handled. Sometimes they refer cases to the Assembly Ethics committee, other times they do not. Worse, the Assembly Ethics committee is far from independent.

That is why I introduced legislation establishing an independent ethics committee for the Assembly. This committee would consist of eight members—four from the Majority and four from the Minority. All ethics complaints made against an Assembly member or a staff member would be referred to the committee. The new committee will have the power to investigate the claim or defer the complaint to another appropriate investigative entity. The committee will also be able to impose various penalties or, in certain cases, recommend penalties be imposed by vote of the full Assembly.

NO PENSIONS FOR CONVICTED LAWMAKERS

This is only a start. I am also proposing legislation that calls for the automatic forfeiture of state pensions for lawmakers who are convicted of a felony while in office. This is a common-sense reform. It is outrageous that those convicted of corruption are allowed to keep this taxpayer-funded benefit. We need to remedy this loophole in the law.

Lastly, let's reform member items, which have caused much of the recent corruption. I propose we prohibit any appropriation where a conflict of interest exists—including appropriations to an organization from which the member benefits.

We can no longer have a system that allows the Speaker of the Assembly to have power over ethics complaints. My legislation will protect the public's interest, not the political bosses. Now is the time to act. We deserve better.

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Call or write my office to show your support for real ethics reform in Albany. With your help, we can ensure our public servants serve us, not their own selfish interests.

