

# B'ham scene of Senate panel debate on political ethics

By TIM RICHARD  
STAFF WRITER

## POLITICS

A bill banning legislators from taking gifts should be extended to local officials, too, a citizen told a state Senate panel Monday.

"You might as well fight for local officials as well," said Kathy Scruggs of St. Clair Shores. "The potential for wrongdoing is immense."

Sen. Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham, agreed. "We should expand it than on gifts, trips and meals) to all elective officials. They (local officials) have the opportunity to steer contracts," said Bouchard, a former Beverly Hills village official.

But the author of a 12-bill ethics package, Sen. Phil Arthurs, said that is not in his bill. "It will have the opposition of the Michigan Municipal League and Michigan Township Association. I encourage you to introduce a bill to apply to local officials," he told Bouchard.

Thus did four-term Arthurs, R-Whitehall, teach freshmen Bouchard a lesson in practical politics: If you make a bill too broad, you develop too many enemies, and they gang up to sink it.

Arthurs wants a narrowly focused bill to improve his chance of

passage. Arthurs chairs the Senate Government Operations Committee, which held a public hearing in the Birmingham school board office. Bouchard is a member. **Stiff enforcement**

Scruggs liked the bill calling for bigger fines for failure to file campaign expense reports. But she asked for more follow-up work to enforce the law.

"What recourse do we have if the attorney general and local prosecutors do nothing?" she asked.

Arthurs said the attorney general's office sends a threatening letter to non-filing candidates within hours after notification from the

secretary of state, "but the practice is to do nothing afterward. I expect them (Attorney General Frank Kelley's staff) to announce a revised procedure at our Muskegon hearing," scheduled for today.

Bouchard and Sen. Gil DiNello, D-Clinton Township, also want to expand Arthurs' bill prohibiting state elective officers from becoming lobbyists for two years following their departure from office.

"We should expand it to all state employees," said Bouchard.

DiNello said assistant attorneys general may prosecute cases against utility companies one day and then go to work for utilities the next.

Arthurs said such a ban

would be similar to one being considered whereby a state insurance commissioner would be barred from working for an insurance company for two years after leaving office.

But again he told Bouchard and DiNello: "Draft a companion bill."

Other bills in the package would bar legislators from sending out state-paid bulk mailings prior to an election; halt receipt of honoraria for speeches; eliminate officeholder expense funds; require reporting of all campaign contributions, even those below \$20; and require reporting of income-producing assets.

### New ethics board

The panel gave much of its time to a bill setting up a Legislative

Ethics Commission. The bipartisan, bicameral LEC would answer questions and hear complaints about ethical practices.

"The LEC would parallel the Attorney General's Commission," said Arthurs, calling on Phil Thomas, administrator of the AGC, which investigates complaints against lawyers.

"Confidentiality is extremely important," Thomas said — at least until the LEC is ready to make a formal complaint.

"Confidentiality protects the complainant," said Thomas, citing legal secretaries who have accused their bosses of ripping off clients.

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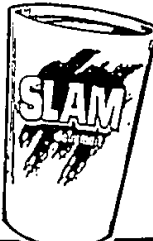
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