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## Commission wants ethics teeth and campaign caps

Politics » Governor willing to look at new enforcement panel.

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In its final work session, the Governor's Commission on Strengthening Democracy wrapped up almost a year's worth of deliberations with a few bold recommendations to advance to Gov. Gary Herbert, including one to put some teeth in existing campaign and lobbying laws.

Panel members unanimously recommended the formation of an enforcement commission made up of three retired judges that would be activated when an elections or lobbyist complaint is filed with the state.

That volunteer panel -- with no more than one member registered with any political party -- would function within the Lieutenant Governor's office. It would investigate complaints and have authority to impose fines or sanctions. Legal violations would be forwarded to the Attorney General for prosecution.

"This was an attempt to give the elections office some authority but to insulate the lieutenant governor from accusations that he was playing favorites," said Randy Dryer, who drafted the proposal with fellow commission member Bruce Hough.

During the Republican primary for the state Treasurer's race in May 2008, one candidate lodged an elections-code complaint against another. The allegation turned into a political hot potato that passed through several agencies and took months to resolve -- long after the election was over.

The commission on Thursday also advanced a recommendation for the state's first campaign finance limits. The agreed-upon caps were less restrictive than some endorsed earlier, but gained unanimous support among the commissioners.

Rep. Craig Frank, a commission member and chairman of the House Government Operations Committee, said he has opened a bill file to push the campaign limit proposal.

Still, a cap on contributions is far from a decided issue.

Herbert, who inherited the commission from his predecessor, Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr., has publicly opposed campaign donation limits. In his annual fundraising gala last week, he raised just under \$1 million with the help of donations of up to \$50,000 apiece.

But the governor may be more willing to accept the commission's enforcement proposal.

As lieutenant governor, Herbert and officials in his office had complained about their lack of authority or staff to take action against campaign and lobbyist transgressions.

Spokeswoman Angie Welling on Thursday said Herbert had not seen the proposal and could not comment on whether he would favor it.

But, she added, "the governor has said he thinks some reform is needed. So he'd be anxious to take a look at it and see if it's something he could support."

In addition to campaign contribution limits and beefing up enforcement, the commission recommended automatic updates of voter registration whenever a resident changed addresses, as well as allowing online voter registration and Election Day voter registration.

Commissioners rejected a proposal to allocate Utah's five electoral votes according to the breakdown of the popular vote rather than winner-take-all. They also side-stepped, without a vote, a plan to establish an official code of conduct and professional organization for paid lobbyists in the state.

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#### Ethics recommendations

- » Creating Elections & Lobbying Enforcement Commission within the Lt. Governor's Office
  - » It would be made up of three retired judges appointed by the governor and would have the power to launch an investigation, dismiss a complaint, issue an admonishment or impose a fine or sanction.
  - » Limiting campaign contributions. Donations would be limited to \$10,000 every two years for statewide races and \$5,000 every two years for legislative races. The limits would apply to individuals, corporations, unions and political action committees.

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