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The public has only limited means to constrain state lawmakers in the conduct of their business. Legislators are not even covered by most of the conflicts-of-interest provisions of the state ethics code, for example. And this session, efforts to pass a law reducing the potential for political corruption are going nowhere.

Perhaps the only recourse is to prod legislators to make what good-government improvements are still possible, and shame them about their inaction where it's not.

The record is mixed where it concerns keeping lawmakers more accountable to their constituents than to their financial and fundraising interests.

Starting with the bad news, tonight a group of seven legislators will be holding a fundraiser in which the suggested donation amount is \$50. This is only one of a slew of events benefiting campaign war chests that are being held in the middle of the 60-day state lawmaking session.

The appearance of influence-peddling is undeniable: These events provide an opportunity for an individual or interest group hoping to steer legislation one way or another to wave some dollars in front of lawmakers whose vote might help them.

Two virtually identical bills to ban fundraisers during session — House Bill 1246 and Senate Bill 843 — were introduced, respectively, by Republican state Rep. Cynthia Thielen and Democratic state Sen. Les Ihara. Neither measure moved an inch and are now dead for the year.

There is still hope for two other bills, championed in particular by Common Cause Hawaii, that now seem headed for House-Senate conference committees. They should be passed into law.

HB 1147 would require noncandidate committees, also known as political action committees, to identify certain top contributors in their advertisements, making the source of the funding more transparent.

The other is HB 1132, which seeks to move up the deadline for lawmakers to file public financial disclosure statements. Now the deadline is May 31; enactment of the bill would make them due Jan. 31. That's soon after the Legislature convenes, shedding more light on the politicians' financial interests.

Despite the movement of these latter two bills, it's especially distressing that the bills targeting campaign fundraising events were essentially ignored.

Old habits die hard, apparently. Legislators have a long tradition of holding benefits during session. Some

make the argument that it's an opportune time to hold them, when public interest in the Legislature is riding high, when representatives and senators from all islands are all on Oahu and can coordinate functions.

All of that is irrelevant. The public trust in government has withered so significantly that legislators ought to be concerned about the appearance of impropriety. Yes, lobbyists can approach legislators at any time, promising campaign support, but seeing names from multiple interest groups on an RSVP list, along with actual checks in payment, sends a more potent message: You'd better vote the way we expect.

Don't forget, the legislative session is a fluid process, with bills morphing or growing unrelated appendages all along the way. Take, for instance, the sudden pairing of a bill about the Native Hawaiian Roll Commission with one beneficial to geothermal development — the latter bill never having had a hearing.

In short, there are ample opportunities for lobbyists to press their cases all throughout the session, and giving them the entry point of a fundraiser is asking for trouble. The ethical record down at the state Capitol is tarnished enough as it is.

Lawmakers have limited time for doing the people's business: 60 days. That's where their focus should be, rather than on the balance of their campaign fund bank account.

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