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## Editorial | Our View

# Strengthen government ethics rules

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It's been a common thread in stories of late: Lobbyists sway government officials. Government officials approve funding for high-stakes projects. Taxpayers foot the hefty bill.

The troubling scenarios shine a light on the seedier side of politics, and they underscore the necessity of ethics and campaign spending laws — and an even greater need to strengthen them.

Take, for instance, the state's lawsuit filed recently against Ciber Inc., an IT firm that was paid more than \$8 million in fees before its contract to implement a new accounting system for the state Department of Transportation was canceled this year. It never produced a workable system and now the state is seeking to recover those costs, plus damages.

The lawsuit alleges that Ciber used heavy-duty lobbyists to influence the executive branch — in this case, former Gov. Neil Abercrombie's administration. When the DOT threatened to stop payments, Ciber called on John Radcliffe, Abercrombie's longtime friend and president of Capitol Consultants of Hawaii, the lawsuit says.

Lo and behold, a DOT official questioning Ciber's work was transferred to a different department. An appointee from the governor's office then handles all dealings with Ciber. Still, the system didn't work. Even so, the money flowed to Ciber. All alarming claims, as outlined in the lawsuit, of "inappropriate political influence."

When the Abercrombie administration ended, his chief of staff, Bruce Coppa, began working for Capitol Consultants.

Ciber maintains the lawsuit is full of untruths, and the case will make its way through the court system, where definitive details should emerge. Nonetheless, there is opportunity outside the courtroom to ensure this type of influence peddling does not occur with impunity at the state Capitol's fifth floor.

The state's existing lobbyist laws focus on the influence lobbyists have on legislators, but stop short of department administrators and the executive branch. The 2016 Legislature should pursue changes to close the loopholes.

At the city level, the \$6 billion rail project also is a target of a lawsuit, filed by Campbell Estate heiress Abigail Kawananakoa. The lawsuit in Circuit Court seeks to invalidate 11 key votes cast by the Honolulu City Council for the project.

Former Councilmen Romy Cachola and Nestor Garcia agreed to pay fines to the city Ethics Commission to settle charges that they failed to disclose receiving free golf and meals from lobbyists and others who benefited from the votes the Council had taken.

City ethics laws require Council members who have a direct or indirect interest in pending legislation to disclose such interests publicly before voting on them. But there is something lacking in the city ethics laws if slap-on-the-hand fines are paid and there are no further repercussions.

Council Chairman Ernie Martin told the Star-Advertiser he would ask his eight colleagues whether to revote the 11 measures, but it's unclear when a decision will be made. And, some of those Council members are still being investigated by the commission.

Meanwhile, the Hawaii Campaign Spending Commission on Wednesday approved a total of about \$8,000 in fines for 13 political candidates and noncandidate committees for filing late campaign spending reports. Good on the commission for keeping things transparent and above board, but what is more encouraging is that commission staffers have turned to the state Attorney General's Office for help in enforcement, and are contemplating criminal prosecution in some cases.

The public should not accept sloppy — or worse, dark — politics as the norm. We should insist on strengthening good-government laws, and actively enforcing them, to shed as much light as possible on our money trails.