

## **Group wants political gifts banned**

Amendment would limit what lobbyists, others can give public officials

*By John Fryar  
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DENVER — Gov. Bill Owens and state legislators received more than \$200,000 last year in trips, tickets, speaking fees and other gifts from lobbyists and their clients, according to backers of a ballot measure that would end that practice.

During the first half of this year, state lawmakers and the governor reported accepting gifts totaling nearly \$94,000, said Coloradans for Clean Government.

Lobbyists, businesses and other organizations don't pay the costs of such gifts "out of the goodness of their hearts," Jared Polis, co-chairman of Coloradans for Clean Government, said Friday. "They give because they expect something in return."

Amendment 41 on November's state election ballot proposes banning professional lobbyists from giving anything of value to public officials or to members of officials' immediate families.

Amendment 41's prohibition would apply to many of the kinds of gifts lobbyists now can legally make to elected state and local government office-holders, appointed officials and employees.

If approved by voters, the measure would also set a \$50 annual limit on any gifts a state or local public official can receive from a non-lobbyist.

Polis, a Boulder County entrepreneur who is vice chairman of the State Board of Education, said Amendment 41's gift restrictions could "help restore the trust citizens should have in their government."

Coloradans for Clean Government said this past week that Colorado is one of 24 states that do not limit lobbyists' gifts in any form. Lobbyists are supposed to report such spending themselves, and lawmakers and other elected state officials are required to file periodic "gifts and honoraria" reports.

Polis' group, whose other members include current and former officials of Colorado Common Cause and the Colorado Public Interest Research Group, found that 2005 and first-half 2006 reports from Owens and state lawmakers included such gifts as: handheld computers; helicopter rides; whitewater rafting trips; ski jackets; river tours; fly-fishing lessons; golf trips; ski lift tickets and lodging; trips to events and conferences in Colorado and elsewhere in the nation and the world; and tickets to the rodeo, the circus, and sporting and entertainment events.

"Expensive gifts and free international trips from lobbyists further erode citizens' trust in their elected representatives and the integrity of our democratic process," Polis said, adding that Coloradans learning about such gifts "question whether public officials are fighting for their interests or the special interests."

Jenny Flanagan, executive director of Colorado Common Cause, said Friday that no organized opposition to Amendment 41 has formally surfaced yet.

Not all legislators get or accept gifts, according to their individual reports. And Coloradans for Clean Government's summaries did not itemize who got — or who gave — what.

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