

Amendment 41's intent is to put ethics back in government

***Guest Commentary By Jared Polis & Pete Maysmith
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Last year, lobbyists spent \$1.6 million on gifts, entertainment and other expenses to influence policymakers, including \$200,000 in gifts and trips to state legislators and Gov. Bill Owens. This culture of gift-giving further erodes citizens' confidence in government.

Coloradans are fed up with the corrupting influence of all the freebies and cozy relationships, and question whether public officials are fighting for their interests or for special interests.

We believe that Colorado should join the 26 states that ban or restrict lobbyist gifts, the 27 states that require a cooling-off period before former public officials can lobby their colleagues, and the 39 states with an ethics commission, by passing Amendment 41, which:

«Bans lobbyist gifts to public officials.

«Establishes reasonable restrictions on gift-giving from nonlobbyists.

«Prevents state legislators and statewide elected officials from becoming paid lobbyists for two years after leaving office.

«Creates an independent ethics commission.

Not surprisingly, a group of special-interest lobbyists are opposing the Ethics in Government Initiative, using scare tactics: phony concerns, bogus examples and quoting initiative language out of context.

Amendment 41 has a very clear purpose: Public officials must "avoid conduct that is in violation of their public trust; any effort to realize personal financial gain through public service ... is a violation of that trust."

Plain and simple, this ethics initiative does not restrict anything provided to a government employee or member of his or her family that does not have a reasonable connection to influencing a public decision. On the other hand, gifts from a restaurateur to a public health inspector examining his kitchen or a phony "scholarship" arranged by a pharmaceutical industry lobbyist exclusively for the child of an elected official in order to gain influence, would be restricted.

Amendment 41 purposefully does not define gifts and various terms, allowing the legislature to eliminate any misinterpretations through enabling legislation. And the built-in checks and balances of the commission's makeup will ensure that rules are fair and sensible.

Voters cannot be fooled. This November, Coloradans will take an important step toward restoring faith in government.

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