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## Editorials

# Help Think Bring Ethics

Imagine a political process where lobbyists, governmental contractors and those seeking taxpayer subsidies don't determine who is elected. Think New Mexico is thinking about such a nirvana.

The non-profit group is preparing to tackle one of its toughest issues yet, campaign finance reform. And that's saying something. Think has gone after pre-kindergarten expansion, repealing the food tax and reforming title insurance among other issues. The group is known for not giving up on a fight it starts. It may take more than one session to meet its goal but Think stays with it.

But campaign finance reform?

The biggest problem facing any group trying to change finance reform is that both of the major political parties are guilty of taking money from companies, organizations and entire business sectors. Then, after elected or re-elected, the group that gave the money mysteriously, at arms length, and for the most part perfectly legally, gets a juicy contract or favorable treatment on some legislation or in a situation or gets a license or permit that was impossible for a competitor to get.

Politicians, pundits, lobbyists and even journalists like to dance around what to label such actions. Pay to play is the favorite term. But it's bribery, clearly. It's normally not the neat package, bow tied on top, where one person hands another person money and gets something immediately in return but there is a clear paper trail of quid pro quo throughout many local, state and U.S. political campaigns. It's an epidemic in all levels of government and not restricted to Española, Rio Arriba or the state.

Gov. Bill Richardson stole the campaign payola spotlight at a most inopportune time when he was federally investigated last winter for pay-to-play practices regarding his relationship with CDR Financial Products. It cost him the secretary of transportation post. Nothing has come of the investigation but it took the media pressure off former New Mexico Treasurer Robert Vigil, Michael Montoya and former senate pro tem Manny Aragon. There's a long list of New Mexico convicted felons who

steal, cheat and work the system to their personal advantage. Most don't get caught or aren't prosecuted.

What about all of those who operate just above the legal line? CDR Financial got a huge contract to invest state money. A month later they gave Bill Richardson a \$100,000 campaign contribution. Perfectly legal. Not indictable by a federal grand jury. But is it right, ethical? There's clearly an appearance of impropriety.

So how does Think want to get all these multiparty offenders off the payola teat?

From Think's web site, "To combat pay to play corruption in New Mexico, Think New Mexico recommends that the Legislature and Governor Richardson enact legislation prohibiting government contractors, special interests seeking major government subsidies or tax breaks, and registered lobbyists from making political contributions to state or local elected officials. In addition to prohibiting these special interests from donating directly, Think New Mexico recommends barring them from bundling political contributions from other donors and delivering them to candidates."

That's a tall order for the group and they'll have representatives, senators, lobbyists and special interest groups lined up to fight them. That's why Think needs the public on their side. It goes against the spirit of the constitution that we need to support a non-profit group that is trying to force those we elect to craft and pass stronger ethics legislation that will disallow our elected officials from essentially being bought off.

Once upon a time we just voted crooks out of office. Now, big money and big government contracts are against the informed voting population. We need to take the election process back and Think is giving us a way to do that.

Please go to their web site for details. Donate some money to help them operate. Call your legislators and tell them to support Think New Mexico's bill when it's introduced in January. Call them now and call them in January.

Make your legislators answer to you, not campaign contributors.