

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Monday, March 30, 2009

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Government Accountability Board Endorses Strengthening State Ethics, Lobbying & Campaign Finance Laws

MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Government Accountability Board (G.A.B.) on Monday approved a legislative agenda for the 2009-10 legislative session that would substantially strengthen ethics, lobbying and campaign finance requirements for the state.

“These changes will put more teeth into Wisconsin’s clean government laws,” said Kevin Kennedy, G.A.B. Director. “They will also close loopholes in our current statutes which may sometimes allow an end-run around the intent of those statutes.”

Suggested changes to state statutes include:

- Adding to state statute the Legislature’s current rules that regulate campaign activity by legislative employees
- Barring executive branch employees – such as department secretaries, deputies, executive assistants and administrators – from soliciting campaign contributions and sponsoring campaign fundraisers
- Prohibiting lobbyists from indirectly giving anything of value to a state official or candidate through intermediaries
- Prohibiting political action committees controlled by lobbying principals from making campaign contributions to state officials during specific periods
- Prohibiting legislative campaign committees from receiving campaign contributions from lobbyists until after the Legislature session has adjourned
- Eliminating provisions that civil and criminal actions be brought in the county where the defendant resides, rather than where a violation occurred

“This legislative agenda is an ambitious attempt by the Government Accountability Board to further insulate the legislative budget process from the influence of campaign

contributions, strengthen the Board's investigative powers, and provide greater transparency of the Board's activities to the public," said Ethics and Accountability Division Administrator Jonathan Becker.

Other substantive changes would be:

- Eliminating the requirement that the G.A.B. inform the subject of an investigation of who the Board is deposing for that investigation
- Extending the statute of limitations for Board investigations from 3 to 6 years
- Enhancing the Board's authority to make public the findings of investigations
- Eliminating the requirement that the G.A.B. notify public officials of requests to view their statutorily required Statements of Economic Interest
- Providing that public officials who accept food, drink, lodging or travel from private organizations must seek the approval of a superior

"I am pleased by the Board's endorsement of this agenda," Kennedy said. "It's an important proposal that will make clear Wisconsin's commitment to fair, clean and transparent government."

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The Government Accountability Board (G.A.B.) is responsible for administration and enforcement of campaign finance, elections, ethics and lobbying laws in Wisconsin. The G.A.B. is made up of six non-partisan, former judges and is supported by an agency of non-partisan staff members. Additional information about the mission of the G.A.B. may be obtained by telephone at **1-608-266-8005**, by electronic mail at **gab@wi.gov**, or through the Internet at **<http://gab.wi.gov>**.