

Ethics Commission decisions available



Actions on complaints noted on website

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There are many state agencies and entities that maintain significant closed records pursuant to special dispensation, but one of the most interesting ones is the Missouri Ethics Commission.

The workings of that commission generally are closed to the public, despite the fact that it investigates matters related to one of the most basic civic obligations we have — that of voting. But a development in the commission in the heat of the Carnahan-Talent campaign has changed the status of that policy.

The commission is composed of six members appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate, chosen from a list provided by the congressional district committee of the political parties having the two highest number of votes cast for their candidate for governor at the last gubernatorial election. Members serve four-year terms.

The commission receives and reviews complaints alleging violation of the campaign finance and advertising laws, among many other things. Among their duties is the obligation to develop systems to index campaign finance reports and statements to provide public access to such information. The commission on occasion gives advisory opinions which are public records.

The commission, through its executive director, reviews reports and statements filed with the commission. Any investigations of alleged violations are strictly confidential except that the commission and the complainant or the person under investigation are notified. The complainant is advised of any action the director plans to take on the complaint, or that no action is planned.

The executive director then advises a detailed report on the audit or investigation to the commission. However, previously, no information on the complaints has been made public. If a candidate claimed an opposing candidate violated some campaign law, as was the case in one complaint filed by Carnahan interests during the last election, and the commission determined no law had been violated, then the entire matter was closed and no public statement on the matter was ever made public.

In this case, the Talent camp wanted information made public. And after further consideration, the commission has decided to make a slight change in its rules.

Now, when it makes a determination This is a significant move in terms of giving the public closure on matters in which often a great announcement is made regarding the initial filing of the complaint, but no information is available as to its outcome. By tracking the commission's actions, the public will now be able to determine this outcome, even if it is not provided by the party making the original complaint.

It is always a good thing when information such as this is made available to the public.