

Fall Forum 2012 Legislator Ethics Scenarios

- 1. Do I follow loyalty or my personal beliefs?** I am a new legislator who has been befriended by my speaker. The speaker has acted as a mentor, shown me the ropes and given me committee assignments that fit my district and personal experience. He has asked me to vote for a bill that would freeze the hiring of state employees for a three-month period. I oppose the bill, but the speaker has indicated that he views it as a critical short-term response and that his credibility is on the line in getting this passed, plus my vote will be vital. Which way do I vote?
- 2. Do I vote my conscience or my constituency?** I believe that we can't build our way out of prison overcrowding and need to fundamentally revise the criminal sentencing system. The governor's budget includes the plans for building a new medium security prison in my district. My constituent contacts are running 10 to one in favor of the new prison and the prison's importance to economic development in my relatively poor district seems clear. How do I vote?
- 3. Do I represent my district or the state?** There is a major education finance bill in front of the legislature. It makes a lot of fundamental improvements in school funding in the state and should ultimately improve educational opportunities statewide. However, the bill will result in a huge cut in state funding to the schools in my district at a time when voters have shown a reluctance to approve any local school funding measures. There is no time to work a compromise as it is the end of the session, so which way do I vote?
- 4. Do I turn in my friend?** My best friend in the legislature and a person for whom I have the greatest respect has come under criminal investigation. I come to his office unexpectedly one day and I accidentally overhear him agree to take an unlawful payment from a lobbyist. What if anything do I do?
- 5. Do I follow my head or my heart?** As a new legislator and as a person, I've never had to take a stand on the abortion issue. On the side of feelings, I feel that life starts at conception and remember hearing my daughter's heart beat before she was born. I felt I would do anything to protect her every bit as much as I would once she was born. On the thinking side, I believe that the choice ultimately belongs to the pregnant mother and that women should not be forced to continue a pregnancy that they did not want. My first abortion vote is on funding for abortions for poor women and I further think that these kind of fundamental choices shouldn't be driven exclusively by a person's economic circumstances. How do I vote?
- 6. Do I use a trick to get a good thing?** I have been working on a bill to get funding for the developmentally disabled, a group that has been receiving less funding in recent years. At the end of budget negotiations, my leader comes to me and says that he will put the funding in the budget bill, but I have to agree not to mention to anyone that it is in the bill and that the leaders are not going to tell anyone that it is in the bill either. The plan is to just be silent and kind of sneak it in the bill, then claim later that there were so many last minute decisions that it was just an oversight to explain that the DD funding was in the bill. If I don't agree, they will strip out the DD funding. I desperately want the funding to be included but the "failure to disclose" approach just seems wrong to me. What do I do?