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Jan 25, 2011

### Did Scott Newman tread on senate ethics rules with his reverse pay-to-play email?

Yesterday, I posted my reaction to an email sent to the Minnesota Nurses Association by my state senator's legislative assistant, saying that Scott Newman wouldn't be meeting with representatives of the MNA because the union's PAC had "donated" to Newman's opponent's campaign in 2010. The text of the email:



-----Original Message-----

From: Kim Kelley [email address redacted by Bluestem]

Sent: Thursday, January 20, 2011 2:00 PM

To: Eileen Gavin

Subject: [Eileen Gavin] Meeting

Kim Kelley sent a message using the contact form at [redacted]

Hi Eileen-

Unfortunately, Senator Newman will not see any organizations that donated to/supported his opponent Hal Kimball. After some careful checking, I discovered that the MNA had donated to Kimball's campaign. Your association will be unable to schedule an appointment with Senator Newman.

Kim Kelley

Legislative Assistant

A sharp-eyed reader emailed to suggest that it's possible that this could be serious stuff:

This is more serious than you might suspect.

Researching donation records on Senate time could be considered campaign activity and is forbidden.

Responding that a meeting is dependent on donations (for or against) may be an ethics violation.

The reader suggested that I ask for copies of all email records of refused meetings and communications that reference endorsements, donations and any other preferences to an opponent. The senate ethics rule that applies to employees of the senate not engaging in campaign work while at work is found on page 2 of a pdf of the "Ethics and Conduct" published by the Senate in 2007.

Would having a staff look up information about political contributions--and denying access to constituents on the basis of that information--be a violaion of this policy? I don't know the answer to that question, but I will look.

It's possible Newman's behavior, and the use of staff time to look up PAC contributions could be fine--or not--under the rules the Senate adopted for itself. Whatever the case, Newman has refused to met with an MNA

member who lives in Senate District 18. That in itself is very troubling.

If there's no rule broken--and there may not be as I am not a lawyer or politician to know such things off the top of my head--will this unusual behavior become the norm in the Senate? That makes me wish Republican State Senator Steve Dille was still in office.

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AP: Senator Newman won't be interviewed about email to MNA

UPDATED: Email to MNA: Sen. Scott Newman won't meet with groups that endorsed Hal Kimball

Posted by Sally Jo Sorensen on Jan 25, 2011 at 02:21 AM in Civic engagement, Minnesota legislature, State Legislature | Permalink   ShareThis

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