

Government & Politics

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The Potluck

## Push to ban private, members-only club for lobbyists, legislators gains bipartisan support

By: Ricardo Lopez - April 12, 2022 1:48 pm

Sen. Mary Kiffmeyer, R-Big Lake. Photo by Tony Webster/Minnesota Reformer.

The push to ban the creation of a private, dues-based club for legislators and lobbyists has gained bipartisan support.

A budget bill advancing in the GOP-led Senate includes a provision that would bar lobbyists and other political groups from making contributions for a membership to a private club during the legislative session to meet with lawmakers. Sen. Mary Kiffmeyer, R-Big Lake, is author of the state government budget bill.

A House DFL lawmaker has also authored legislation to ban such a club, overcoming some GOP opposition. Republicans worried it would ensnare lawmakers meeting with constituents.

The legislation, however, makes clear such meetings would not be affected.

The Senate Victory Fund last year sought an advisory opinion from the Minnesota Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board on the legality of private club for lobbyists. In October, the board said a club would be okay as long as contributions are received before or after the legislative session.

After the Reformer reported that it was the Senate GOP campaign arm that sought the opinion, Senate Majority Leader Jeremy Miller, R-Winona, said his caucus had no plans to create such a club.

The arrangement outlined in the opinion came under criticism by government transparency advocates who said it would give high-powered and moneyed interests undue influence with lawmakers during the legislative session.

Lawmakers are currently on a 10-day break and will return with just a few weeks before they adjourn the 2022 legislative session.

It's unclear if the divided Legislature will be able to compromise on their budget bills, in part because they are under no legal obligation to amend the state budget after approving a new, two-year budget last year.