

16A Where to write

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Opinion

They said it

■ "As long as the sun continues to rise in the east and set in the west while I am acting governor, this executive order will remain in place."

Senate President Richard Codey, D-West Orange, on Gov. James E. McGreevey's executive order on 'pay to play'

'Any individual or business holding any contract at any level of government should be prohibited from making any political contributions anywhere or anytime.'

George E. Norcross III, South Jersey Democratic political boss

Nothing must stop real ethics reform

With one quick signature, Gov. James E. McGreevey on Wednesday did what state legislators have spent years telling angry residents was impossible — he put a significant and meaningful dent into pay to play.

Almost as surprising as McGreevey's executive order, however, was the statement from George E. Norcross III, the man who drives the South Jersey Democratic political machine. He said McGreevey hadn't gone far enough.

"The prohibitions should apply to all levels of government, including state, county, municipal and boards of education," Norcross said. "There can be no exceptions."

With McGreevey's executive order and Norcross' words — along with recent halting steps toward meaningful reform at the state level, in Burlington County and elsewhere — it finally seems as though New Jersey might get a government answerable to the people.

A door is opening to save residents untold amounts of money that has, for years, disappeared because of what U.S. Rep. Rob Andrews, D-Haddon Heights, calls a "corruption tax."

Follow the leader

In order for that door to stay open, however, legislators must work together to keep McGreevey's executive order in place and then to strengthen it. That's where Norcross comes in.

If anyone in South Jersey can ensure that our legislators stay in line, it's the man widely known as one of the most powerful people in New Jersey politics. Few important decisions are made without Norcross' input — or, at the very least, the input of elected officials beholden to him. He influences thousands of publicly financed government jobs and millions of political dollars and has helped the Democrats climb to a position of unprecedented power in Camden County.

His extremely rare public statement on the need for changes beyond those set forth by McGreevey — a statement that directly contradicts earlier comments by politicians who owe allegiance to Norcross — needs to serve as a rallying cry for real reform.

Both McGreevey and Norcross deserve credit for getting the ball rolling. We hope both of them, along with Senate President Richard Codey, D-West Orange, who soon will take over as governor, maintain the necessary pressure on legislators. It's also important, however, for Jersey residents to live up to their responsibilities in this situation.

Residents' role

If anybody is likely to gain from meaningful reform, it's the people of New Jersey. If anybody is likely to lose, it's the legislators in power who have mastered the way the game currently is played.

If residents fail to maintain considerable pressure on their elected representatives through phone calls, e-mails, faxes, regular mail and personal visits, there is consid-

Where do they stand?

Gov. James E. McGreevey's executive order on pay-to-play is an excellent start, and South Jersey political boss George Norcross' response gives even more reason for optimism. Now it's up to legislators to give the order the force of law and then strengthen it. We asked South Jersey legislators where they stood on Norcross' response. Their answers are below.

QUESTION: Should pay-to-play contributions be banned?

LEGISLATOR	John Adler (D) Cherry Hill Senate	Diane Allen (D) Edgewater Park Senate	Martha Bark (R) Medford Senate	Francis L. Bodine (R) Moorestown Assembly	Wayne Bryant (D) Lawnside Senate	John Burzichelli (D) Paulsboro Assembly	Larry Chatzidakis (R) Mt. Laurel Senate	Herbert Conaway Jr. (D) Burlington City Assembly	Jack Connors (D) Pennsauken Assembly
YES/NO/ UNDECIDED	YES	YES	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	YES	YES
COMMENT	"If it's squeezing money out of politics, I'm for that."	"We need to eliminate huge PACs. We need to eliminate wheeling."	Couldn't be reached	Couldn't be reached	Couldn't be reached	Couldn't be reached	Couldn't be reached	"It needs to be applied across the board."	"When the day comes when we don't rely on this it will be better for everyone."
LEGISLATOR	Nilsa Cruz-Perez (D) Camden Assembly	Douglas Fisher (D) Bridgeton Assembly	Louis Greenwald (D) Voorhees Assembly	Fred Madden (D) Wash. Twp. Senate	Mary Previte (D) Haddonfield Assembly	Joe Roberts (D) Camden Assembly	Robert J. Smith (D) Wash. Twp. Assembly	Stephen Sweeney (D) W. Deptford Senate	David Mayer (D) Glo. Twp. Assembly
YES/NO/ UNDECIDED	N/A	YES	N/A	YES	YES	YES	YES	N/A	YES
COMMENT	Couldn't be reached	"This will change the perception that you have to pay to do business in New Jersey."	Couldn't be reached	"They should take all the money out of it."	"Banning pay-to-play shows we're not for sale."	"The goal ought to be to remove the corrosive influence of money in politics at every level."	"...The Legislature must go further to assure any and all loopholes are closed...."	Couldn't be reached	"The closer we can get to clean elections in New Jersey, the better."

SHELDON L. SNEED / Courier-Post

Where we stand: The people of New Jersey find themselves joined by the governor, the soon-to-be governor and one of the state's most powerful political power brokers on the side of reform. Now it's time to turn up the pressure on legislators.

erable risk that those in power will look out for themselves first.

In the past year, New Jersey residents saw what the Legislature will do without proper pressure.

Last October, the *Courier-Post* and other Gannett New Jersey newspapers ran a series called "Profiting from Public Service" detailing numerous costly failures in Trenton. Lawmakers responded by dragging their feet for months before enacting weakened legislation unlikely to improve the situation.

Nonetheless, Democratic legislators and the still-under-their-thumb governor proudly touted the reforms as the answer to New Jersey's problems.

"These reforms will collectively ensure that the public's voice is the pre-eminent factor in all government decision-making matters," Assembly Majority Leader Joe Roberts, D-Camden, one of the driving forces behind the reform plan, said when it was signed in June.

McGreevey's executive order

proves he feels previous reforms didn't do enough, and the people of New Jersey can do better.

The order makes it illegal for the state to award contracts of more than \$17,500 to businesses or contractors who have contributed to candidates for governor or to state or county political parties in the previous 18 months. That practice is known as pay to play.

The order is far from perfect. Most notably, it leaves open a loophole through which donors may contribute freely to municipal political committees and watch those funds get transferred to county or state committees before being awarded a generous state contract. Nonetheless, the order is a tremendous step forward that significantly weakens higher-level political committees and brings real power one step closer to the people of New Jersey.

At least, it does for now.

Next step

As an executive order, the pay-to-play ban only remains in force until a future governor does away with it. Codey says he won't dismantle it, but it's likely there will be a new governor in 14 months, and who knows what he or she will do?

For that reason, the first order of business must be for the Legislature to pass McGreevey's order as law. Once that has been accomplished, legislators should follow Norcross' lead — and that of the people of New

Jersey who have long been clamoring for just these types of reform — and strengthen the order.

It would be impossible to completely cleanse the system. Norcross' suggestion of modeling a law after the Casino Control Act has considerable merit.

New Jersey's Casino Control Act has been immensely successful in maintaining a safe, legal, above-the-board image for an industry that often is associated with drugs, prostitution and a mob influence. It's about time Jersey government got the same treatment.

Forming a government control board with full powers to investigate and levy hefty penalties similar to the Casino Control Commission would finally put New Jersey ahead of the pack on government ethics.

In signing the executive order, McGreevey called pay to play an addiction.

He's right; it is. And like any addiction, it can never truly be cured so much as treated carefully.

Creating a watchdog organization like the Casino Control Commission, with staggered terms, safeguards from political intervention and assurances that the board fully represent both major political parties, is a sound treatment plan.

Now, we urge you to call your legislators.

Check back for answers from leaders

Legislators have a duty to represent the people. As such, they have a responsibility to let the people know where they stand on important issues of the day.

In order to determine where South Jersey legislators stand on the vitally important issue of pay-to-play reform, *Courier-Post* reporters attempted to reach them all Thursday trying to ask the following questions:

■ Do you agree with George Norcross' statement that all pay to play should be banned?

■ If yes, what steps will you take as a legislator to help see that it is banned?

■ If no, why not? Why do you think the system shouldn't be changed? What ramifications do you expect by going against Norcross' wishes?

Above, you'll see how we did in getting these taxpayer-financed public officials to answer these important questions.

In coming days, we'll continue asking these questions until we get answers from every tri-county legislator and we'll continue to update our readers on this page.

Let officials know what you think about 'pay to play'

The people listed below are public servants. They work for you. You have every right to let them know what's on your mind. We urge you to act on that right.

If you're not certain which district you're in, go online to www.njleg.state.nj.us/districts/municipalities.asp for help or call the Office of Public Information at (800) 792-8630.

Statewide officials

Gov. James E. McGreevey (D): PO Box 001, Trenton, 08625, (609) 292-6000, www.state.nj.us/governor or mcgreevey@njleg.org
 Senate President Richard Codey (D): 448 Mount Pleasant Ave., West Orange, 07092, (973) 731-6770, www.njleg.state.nj.us/members/codey.asp or e-mail: codey@njleg.org

District 3

Sen. Stephen M. Sweeney (D): Kingsway Commons, Suite 400, 935 Kings Highway, Thorofare, 08068, (856) 251-9801, sen.sweeney@njleg.org
 Assemblyman John J. Burzichelli (D): 196 E. Broadway Unit A, Salem, 08079, (856) 339-0808, sen.burzichelli@njleg.org
 Assemblyman Douglas H. Fisher (D): 14 E. Commerce St. Bridgeton 08302, (856) 455-1011, sen.fisher@njleg.org

District 4

Sen. Fred H. Madden (D): Camden County office is 18 Somerdale Road, Blackwood, (856) 227-5900, sen.madden@njleg.org; Gloucester County office is Holly Oak Park, 129 Johnson Road, Turnersville, (856) 232-6700, sen.madden@njleg.org
 Assemblyman David R. Mayer (D): same as above, asm.mayer@njleg.org

Assemblyman Robert J. Smith (D): same as above, asm.smith@njleg.org

District 5

Sen. Wayne R. Bryant (D): 501 Cooper St., Camden 08102, (856) 757-0552, sen.bryant@njleg.org
 Assemblyman Joseph J. Roberts (D): Brooklawn Shopping Plaza, Route 130 South & Browning Road, Brooklawn 08030, (856) 742-7600, asm.roberts@njleg.org
 Assemblywoman Nilsa Cruz-Perez (D): 514 Cooper St., Camden 08102, (856) 541-1251, asm.cruz-perez@njleg.org

District 6

Sen. John H. Adler (D): 1916 Route 70 East, Suite 3, Cherry Hill 08003, (856) 489-3442, sen.adler@njleg.org
 Assemblyman Louis D. Greenwald (D): 10 Foster Ave., Suite B3, Gibbsboro 08026, (856) 783-0444, asm.greenwald@njleg.org
 Assemblywoman Mary T. Previte (D): 320 N. Haddon Ave., Suite 4, Haddonfield 08033, (856) 857-0777, asm.previte@njleg.org

District 7

Sen. Diane B. Allen (R): 2313 Burlington-Mount Holly Road, Burlington 08016, (609) 239-2800, sen.allen@njleg.org
 Assemblyman Herb Conaway (D): Delran Professional Center, Suite 125, 8008 Route 130 North, Delran 08075, (856) 461-3997, asm.conaway@njleg.org
 Assemblyman Jack Connors (D): Delran Professional Center, Suite 125, 8008 Route 130 North, Delran 08075, (856) 461-3997, asm.connors@njleg.org

District 8

Sen. Martha W. Bark (R): 3000 Midantic Drive, Suite 103, Mount Laurel 08054, (856) 234-8080, sen.bark@njleg.org
 Assemblyman Francis L. Bodine (R): same as above, asm.bodine@njleg.org
 Assemblyman Larry Chatzidakis (R): same as above, asm.chatzidakis@njleg.org

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