

TESTIMONY
HB 602
ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
March 14, 2007

The League of Women Voters of Texas, a nonpartisan organization, supports Rep. Donna Howard's bill, **HB 602** that would restrict a former legislator from becoming a paid lobbyist before the second anniversary the legislator's term of office has ended. This issue is usually referred to as the "revolving door." **HB 602** also provides for penalties for former legislators who have an interest in a contract with a department, commission, or board, or any other agency within the legislative, judicial, or executive branch if the contract was authorized, money appropriated to pay the contract before the second anniversary of the legislator's last term. This would obviate any conflict of interest in such contracts.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 28 states have restrictions of either one to two years before a public official, state legislator, state government officials, elected officials or agency head may be employed as a paid lobbyist. In addition, at the present time, the Conference reports that five states, not including Texas, that currently do not have revolving door legislation have bills before their legislatures addressing this issue. Some have several bills that have been filed. These vary in scope, but all would accomplish the same purpose, that is, to prevent undue influence from former members on issues before the legislature. Examples to consider: two of the states are our next door neighbors, Oklahoma and Arkansas. Two other neighbors, Mississippi and New Mexico, already have such restrictions, as does Arizona.

Legislation to prohibit the revolving door is not new to the Texas Legislature. In 1995 Rep. Mike Krusee introduced **HB 3094** that had some of the same provisions as Rep. Howard's bill. It never was heard in committee. In 1997, Rep Krusee filed **HB 97**, with a companion bill **SB 104** by Senator Nelson that included only legislators. These, too, did not get heard in their respective committees. Currently, in addition to Rep. Howard, two other members of the House and two members of the Senate have filed bills related to lobby restrictions. It would appear that lawmakers are expressing concerns about potential abuse in the current system as well as concern about public perception that there is too much influence on elected officials that may not be in the public interest.

The League of Women Voters in its long 88 year history is committed to good government and the rights of citizens to expect trust in the legislative process. Closing the revolving door will help achieve that goal. The League urges you to pass favorably **HB 602**. Thank you.