

Calif. Senate undergoes ethics training

By Laurel Rosenhall, Fresno Bee

Imagine this: A state senator is carrying a package of bills for a major corporation. The same company backs a foundation that plans to give the senator its national legislative achievement award. The award comes with \$25,000 cash.

What ethical or legal issues does the scenario raise?

That question was among several that California senators discussed Wednesday during special ethics training prompted by the unusual spate of problems to hit the Capitol in recent months.

Two senators have been charged with corruption in separate FBI investigations and a third has been convicted of perjury for lying about where he lived when he ran for office. A fourth is fighting a judge's recommended order that he pay a fine for campaign money-laundering, and two high-profile Sacramento lobbying firms have paid record-setting fines for violating state lobbying laws.

"Money has a corrosive effect on politics and on legislatures and congresses throughout the land," Senate leader Darrell Steinberg said after the training. "But these are the rules."

The rules forbid a direct exchange of money for policy, as described in the example above and as alleged by federal authorities who claim that Democratic Senators Ron Calderon of Montebello and Leland Yee of San Francisco took bribes from undercover FBI agents seeking official actions from them in the Capitol. Calderon and Yee have pleaded not guilty.

Read the whole story