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Legislators' self-promotion is target of bill

By Howard Fischer

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PHOENIX — A House panel voted Tuesday to block elected officials from using tax dollars to put their names and photographs on all sorts of materials — but first, the lawmakers created a giant loophole.

Senate Bill 1237 would bar the use of public funds in printed documents, TV and radio spots and even on the Internet if the items refer specifically to the elected official who spent the tax dollars or to any of that official's staff.

Sen. Jim Waring, R-Phoenix, said he has become alarmed about the increasing use of tax dollars for what he believes is little more than self-promotion.

Unable to get approval from the House Committee on Counties, Municipalities and Military Affairs, Waring agreed to exempt communications "on matters of public concern."

But Waring said after the meeting that he will attempt to have that language stripped — or at least severely restricted.

Waring said the issue is not partisan.

He showed committee members brochures distributed by Democrat Barbara LaWall, the current Pima County attorney, as well as Republican Rick Romley, the former Maricopa County attorney. And he noted that elected officials from Gov. Janet Napolitano to current Maricopa County Attorney Andrew Thomas, a Republican put their names or faces on billboards.

"There's plenty of blame to go around," he said.

Todd Madeksza, lobbyist for the County Supervisors Association, complained that such a measure is too broad. He said it bars not just public officials but also their employees from making public service announcements, such as advisories about not driving into flooded washes.

Waring said he wants to block high-level personal aides to elected officials from doing what would be illegal for their bosses to do. Anyway, he said, there is no reason that some anonymous person could not deliver the same message.

Rep. Tom Prezelski, D-Tucson, said he was "appalled" when he saw a 56-page full-color brochure crafted by LaWall's office with her photo on the front.

Prezelski suggested it was a thinly veiled bit of electioneering, saying the brochure, the first since LaWall became county attorney, was published when there was a chance she would face a foe in a primary election. That opposition did not materialize, he said, and "we haven't seen any literature like that since."

Amelia Craig Cramer, LaWall's chief deputy, said the brochure was designed to provide a 10-year report to supervisors, government agencies, law enforcement and non-profit groups about the activities of the office, as well as to help recruit law school graduates. She said the 5,000 copies cost less than \$15,000 to produce.

As to the timing, Cramer called it coincidental, saying preparation started nearly a year before.

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