



Weekly Assignment

Ethics and Social Responsibility

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The First Test for Albany's Ethicists

More than a year ago, Gov. Andrew Cuomo and New York's State Legislature passed a long-overdue ethics law to clean up Albany. The law contained one grave flaw, a supposedly independent Joint Commission on Public Ethics that is made up entirely of political appointees. The tangled controversy surrounding Assemblyman Vito Lopez has presented the commission with its first big test.

Mr. Lopez, a longtime power in Brooklyn Democratic Party politics, has been accused of sexually harassing women on his staff. Complicating the commission's task, the Lopez scandal has engulfed Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, who helped negotiate a deal to use \$103,000 in public money to help settle claims by two of the women, as well as the offices of Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, who appear to have signed off on the deal. The commission's assignment is to see whether this payment constitutes a flagrant abuse of public trust.

The commission is an unwieldy vehicle for such a task. Even though the 14-member commission can theoretically investigate anybody involved in state business — from legislators to state workers, lobbyists and the governor himself — the panel's membership and convoluted voting rules raise questions about its effectiveness and, indeed, its impartiality. Six of the members are appointed by the governor, eight by legislative leaders, including three by Mr. Silver himself.

The commission voted last Monday to investigate the behavior of Mr. Lopez and the \$103,000 payment, and Mr. Silver has said that he welcomed an inquiry. The panel refused to give details, and it remains to be seen how vigorous and how broad its inquiry will be.

Governor Cuomo, who helped create this commission and has provided some of its top staff members, asked the public to be patient and "take a deep breath" before criticizing it. But he threatened to create his own investigative panel if the ethics commission "did not work."

He should keep that option on the table. The Legislature has never been able to investigate itself. Without state and federal prosecutors, Albany would never have been called to account for the long list of indictments, arrests and convictions that have occurred in recent years. The question now is whether the new state ethics commission can do better.

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My Opinion:

This news describes a political problem in Albany. And it is focus on how to take charge of public ethics. The passage used the assemblyman Lopez scandal as an example, to show the grave flaw of the ethics law.

The main problem of the ethics law is that the public ethics is made up entirely of political appointees, which then lead to The Legislature never unable to investigate itself. That is not a good sign for people. On the other hand, it will abet people to do the immoral things.

In my opinion, when the immoral things happened, the government should make the investigation hyaline, that could lead people supervise the investigation. And it is also good for the public trust.

When people do the immoral things, no matter how important they are, they should receive the punishment of the law. No one could partial to the unethical things, especially the government.

At last, hope that the new commission could do better in the future, and give back white lights to public.