

No vote on transparency bill lets lobbyists in Nevada keep paying tab

By Ed Vogel, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – Tonight if you see your state senator and a lobbyist dining on Châteaubriand and drinking red wine in a fine Las Vegas restaurant, it's a safe bet they aren't going Dutch treat. The lobbyist will pick up the tab and no one ever will know he did.

With much fanfare in April, legislative leaders called for approval of a plan to make government more transparent to Nevadans. A few weeks later, the Senate unanimously passed a bill to require lobbyists to report their year-round expenditures on legislators.

But the Legislature adjourned without taking final action on that transparency bill. An Assembly committee let it die without a vote. Not taking a vote on a bill is an old technique to keep the voters in the dark when their legislators oppose bills popular with the public.

The nondecision kept in effect the current open season for lobbying. Lobbyists can hunt legislators without any outside interference through the 2012 election cycle – when all Assembly members and half the state senators will be elected – and until the beginning of the next session on Feb. 4, 2013. State law requires them only to report what they spend on legislators during the four months the Legislature is in session every other year.

“Once the session ends, there are no rules,” said state Sen. Sheila Leslie, D-Reno. “Some legislators like it that way, legislators of both parties. I am not impugning anyone's

integrity. All I am saying is these expenditures should be disclosed.”

Leslie vows to introduce her Senate Bill 206 again in 2013, but doubts it will pass then, or anytime in the near future. Too many legislators of both parties like the status quo where they can be treated like royalty in between sessions by lobbyists without anyone knowing, she said.

“Until there is more of a public uproar, this bill is not going to pass,” Leslie said. “Public distrust of government is at all-time high. This would help win back the public trust.”

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