

California lawmakers have no problem saying yes to gifts

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

Finally some good news for California lawmakers who have seen their pay and approval rating fall in recent years: Special-interest perks are up.

Lawmakers and constitutional officers accepted more than \$750,000 in food, travel or other gifts last year, shattering the roughly \$520,000 received the prior year, according to financial disclosures Friday to the Fair Political Practices Commission.

Gifts ranged from overseas trips and golf rounds to tickets to Disneyland or Sacramento Kings games, with givers consisting of Indian tribes, energy firms, law enforcement groups and many other powerful Capitol players.

The rise in handouts follows several years of belt-tightening imposed by California's independent salary-setting commission, which has cut lawmakers' pay from \$116,208 to \$95,291, eliminated their cars and reduced per diem payments.

Phillip Ung of California Common Cause said the rise in gifts suggests that lawmakers feel no stigma about taking from interests that often seek their votes on legislation.

"It's disappointing," Ung said. "Voters send public officials to Sacramento to solve the issues in front of the state, not to cash in perks that special interests hand them. And they seem to be cashing in quite a bit."

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