

May 28, 1996

Advisory Opinion 1996 - No. 9

QUESTION

Would an international trip by a legislator, paid by non-legislative funds, violate the State Ethics Act under the following circumstances (summarized from the opinion request):

A legislator is invited to participate in a medical mission to Russia. The purpose of the trip is to improve spinal care in Russia with a team of chiropractors and other health care professionals. The sponsor is North Pacific Corporation, a large fishing company which hopes to eventually establish a Spinal Center at the University of Vladivostok. The company has no interest in legislation before the Washington legislature.

The opinion request includes the following statements about this trip: The representative "is a rehabilitation nurse who . . . will be performing primarily hands on medical work in an effort to improve spinal care in Russia." The representative "intends to participate in this trip, not as a legislator, but as a health care professional."

OPINION

Given the facts as stated, this trip would not be a violation of the State Ethics Act.

The State Ethics Act excludes from the definition of gift "items related to the outside business of the recipient that are customary and not related to the recipient's performance of official duties" (RCW 42.52.010(9)(b)).

Given the facts as stated in this opinion request, the trip is related to the legislator's outside business and is not related to the performance of official legislative duties. The legislator has been invited on this trip as a health care professional and participation is not conditioned on status as a legislator. The facts as stated in the request appear to satisfy the statute.