Bribe Issue Not Answered

Editor, The New Mexican:

When is a bribe not a bribe? This is the question the Legislature has faced since it has been considering bills to repeal the misnamed, fair-trade, liquor laws. Under standards of highest integrity, which the people of New Mexico are entitled to expect of their representatives, any gift or gratuity to a legislator from any association or individual interested in pending legislation is a bribe; and there are no two ways about it. Sen. Fabian Chavez admitted in the past of presents of liquor from the liquor interests. This was improper behavior, but he has at least demonstrated that it did not influence his judgment recently. One cannot help wondering, however, whether his vote was influenced formerly by these gifts. How many times have he and his colleagues been bought by these gifts. How many times have he and his colleagues been bought by the liquor associations as Mr. Padilla, probably correctly though tactlessly, stated? There is a wide-spread belief that the Legislature is corrupt and can be—and has been—bought many times by the liquor interests. The distribution of free liquor to the Legislature is an accepted commonplace allegation.

The only way the Legislature can exonerate itself is by rewriting the liquor laws and by enacting legislation to control lobbies. New liquor laws should take exorbitant, guaranteed profits away from the liquor dealers and transfer them to the state in the form of taxation. Lobby laws should make bribery criminal. Legislators need have no difficulty in obtaining the opinions of groups interested in legislation. They have their committee hearings for this purpose; and it should not be necessary to rely on the hot breath of the lobbyist down their necks on the floor of the Legislature.

The sanctimonious invocation of morality on the liquor question by some senators is sickening. Morality is there all right, but not as they imply. Morality is involved in allowing their votes to be influenced by gratuities and personal interest.

Yours sincerely,
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