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New Laws Ban Dual Elective Office, Stiffen Penalties Fiscal Misfeasance

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Gov. Jon Corzine signed a package of bills on Monday aimed at fostering more responsible state government and fighting public corruption.

The bills will prohibit dual office holding, increase financial penalties for taking bribes or misusing public money and require individual legislators' voting records to be posted on the Internet.

The dual-office-holding bill, *A-4326* (Michael Panter, D-Monmouth; Linda Greenstein, D-Middlesex), has drawn criticism from Republicans because of a grandfather clause that allows any current legislator to hold onto additional elective posts until they lose or retire. Nineteen legislators hold more than one elective office at present.

Senate Minority Leader Leonard Lance, R-Hunterdon, said in a statement that Corzine should have conditionally vetoed the bill to remove the grandfather clause.

Sen. Thomas Kean Jr., R-Union, said the clause "presents a clear an unambiguous conflict of interest."

"Sadly, the measure signed into law by the governor today is a cynical and superficial imitation of the reforms that need to be put into practice," Kean said in a separate statement.

The penalties bill, *S-1192* (Ellen Karcher, D-Monmouth; John Adler, D-Camden), sets degrees for the crime of acceptance of bribes or misuse of public money: first degree for an amount of \$500,000 or more; second degree for \$75,000 to \$500,000 and third degree for less than \$75,000. First-degree crimes carry prison terms of 10 to 20 years; second-degree, five to 10 years; and third-degree, three to five years.

Another bill, *S-1318* (Karcher, Fred Madden, D-Gloucester), titled the "Public Corruption Profiteering Penalty Act," allows judges in corruption cases to impose enhanced monetary penalties, based on the degree of the crime. First-degree crimes would carry an enhanced penalty of \$500,000; second-degree, \$250,000; and third-degree, \$75,000.

The enhanced penalties would be in addition to any order requiring reimbursement of stolen or improperly obtained money. The act does not allow for the enhanced penalties to be revoked or reduced, but it would allow judges to permit payments to be made over time.

Lastly, *S-1662* (Robert Martin, R-Morris; Loretta Weinberg, D-Bergen) requires the nonpartisan Office of Legislative Services to post, on its Web site, the complete voting record on all bills and, as soon as the Office of Legislative Services deems feasible, individual lawmakers' voting records.

Corzine signed the four bills at the public library in Marlboro, which is part of Karcher's legislative district, Karcher is locked in a tight re-election race with first-term GOP Assemblywoman Jennifer Beck, whose legislative office is located in Marlboro.