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Burdick's legal fund nets \$5,000 in donations

by Dave Hogan, The Oregonian
 Wednesday October 15, 2008, 7:47 PM

A new legal fund for Sen. Ginny Burdick has taken in \$5,000 in contributions to help the Portland Democrat pay her legal expenses in connection with election law violations. The fund was created under a 2007 law passed by the Oregon Legislature.

Portland attorney Mark Cushing, trustee for the fund, asked lobbyists to contribute this year, noting that Burdick had more than \$15,000 in attorney fees from a recent campaign-finance violation case.

Donations in the past three months included \$1,000 each from the Oregon Medical Association and RPD Co. Inc. of Salem, and \$750 from the Oregon State Firefighters Council.

Other donations were \$500 each from lobbyist Dave Barrows, venture capitalist Debi Coleman, and the Oregon Business Association and the Oregon Optometric Public Affairs Council; and \$250 from lobbyist Mark Nelson.

Burdick, who is running for re-election, agreed earlier this year to pay \$3,092 in civil penalties for 11 violations of laws prohibiting the converting of campaign money to personal use.

In 2005, Burdick's campaign paid for her vehicle expenses such as gas and insurance at the same time it was reimbursing her for mileage. After The Oregonian reported the double payment in 2006, state election officials said campaigns cannot reimburse candidates both for mileage and for other vehicle expenses because costs such as fuel are included in the Internal Revenue Service mileage rate.

The Legislature added legal expense trust funds to state law last year at the request of Portland attorney and lobbyist John DiLorenzo. The legal funds are separate from campaign funds and can be used to defray legal expenses incurred by a public official "in any civil, criminal or other legal proceeding or investigation that relates to or arises from the course and scope of duties of the person as a public official." The legislation also prohibited the use of campaign funds for paying such legal costs.

-- Dave Hogan; davehogan@news.oregonian.com

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