

Dear Fellow LSTA Members,

As you likely know, a core group of retired members have recently criticized the LSTA and its Board of Directors for the long standing practice of making political contributions. [REDACTED], in particular, have been two of the most vocal critics. Both recently appeared before the Board and demanded budgets, copies of checks, minutes, and tax information for the past five years. Had either of those individuals been actively involved with the affairs of the LSTA prior to their visit to the Board, the need for their demand may have been moot. Had they opted to remain active in the Association over the last few years, not only could the two have voiced opposition to the practice, but they could also have reviewed budget documents that are routinely made available to members. They missed out on both counts through no fault of the Board. Indeed, any member has had more than a decade to object to the use of Association funds for political contributions. The practice was never a secret and to suggest otherwise suggests that those who have complained were either not present at general business meetings or were present but not paying attention. Nevertheless, under normal circumstances such a request as these two recently made would not have been that unusual, but they saw fit to make the request to the Board only after electing to publicly condemn it and cast allegations of misconduct and other abuses.

Let's put their conduct into proper context. [REDACTED] and others appeared at the January State Police Commission asking for an investigation into political activity by classified employees of the State Police service. They could have accomplished the same goal by drafting a letter and submitting it together with specific evidence supporting their allegations and forwarding it to the Commission. That however did not "fit" their template. Nor would it have given them the profile they desired. Knowing that an appearance in a public forum was more in line with their desire to subject the Association and Board to public scorn and embarrassment, they availed themselves of a public meeting. Not wanting to waste a good photo op, they apparently ensured that the media was notified of their forthcoming appearance. One bona fide journalist and one blogger attended the meeting. No one discounts the public's right to know or the legitimacy of members of the media covering public meetings. However, media attendance at State Police Commission meetings is uncommon, and we must question whether this was orchestrated by those who were filing the complaint. So too must we wonder about the true motivation of those involved.

[REDACTED] and his faction should have known that the Commission had no jurisdiction over the Association or the Executive Director. The Commission confirmed this to be true. So then, who would [REDACTED] have punished by the Commission? LSTA officers? The Board? How about all who attended the business meeting this summer? To be fundamentally fair, one could argue that the entire membership (the complainants included) should be held accountable. It would seem, based on conduct and actions, that [REDACTED] is less interested in understanding how this practice began (and making recommended changes) than he is in making this a public forum where his group can pretend that they are on an honorable mission.

Since this couple's crusade began two or so months ago, they seem to have warmed up nicely to their new found notoriety. They have made themselves readily available for radio, print and internet blogger interviews. It's worthy to note that they reached out to whoever would listen to

their complaints, but they never reached out to the Board of Directors. (More on that later.) [REDACTED] internet blogger seems to be a particularly interesting choice for a means of communicating his discomfort over the Association's business affairs. Where else could they find a person who is willing to take uncorroborated information at face value, never question the motivation of the source and offer it for public consumption without ever seeking to determine its truthfulness? They chose a person who has demonstrated an abysmal lack of journalistic ethics, one whose agenda became clearer when he suggested that State Police administrators were remiss in providing appropriate training to Trooper Steven Vincent before Vincent was shot and killed in the line of duty. The posting was harsh validation that the blogger wasn't really concerned with the family of State Police as he claims. This was just another improperly sourced (and erroneous) fable he sought to weave in his efforts to attack public entities—in this case, the LSP. The hostility of the blogger for State Police command apparently knows no bounds. For [REDACTED] that disdain apparently extends to the Association as well.

[REDACTED] and the others would have us believe that any political discourse between Association members and elected officials should be forbidden. That shows either incredible naiveté or outright ignorance of 80 years of State Police history. Troopers depend on legislation for better pay and benefits, tougher DWI laws and a myriad of other issues. Let's not forget that we depend on legislators to protect our retirement. Indeed, the beginnings of the Association can be traced to internal discontent with what was perceived as a lack of leadership and poor employment conditions within State Police in the latter years of the 1960's. Troopers had individually sought changes during that era but found they had far less voice than what a collective effort could provide. More than two decades later the Board of Directors recognized the importance of further insulating troopers from direct legislative lobbying by hiring an Executive Director. At all times the Board moved cautiously in the management of its political affairs through the Executive Director and always with the advice of counsel. No attorney ever retained by the Association found or suggested that the conduct of the officers, the Board or the membership was in violation of any law, regulation, or ethics code.

We fully respect the right of [REDACTED] and other members to question LSTA policies and practices. In keeping with membership wishes, some of these LSTA practices have already been improved. What we do not respect is how they have gone about voicing their concerns. Nothing prevented [REDACTED] and others from reaching out to the Board in an effort to improve and strengthen our organization. That call never came. It was representatives of the Board who took the initiative to reach out to [REDACTED] in a sincere effort to meet and promote a more positive dialogue. The two agreed to attend the meeting, and while the discussion was mostly civil, it quickly became obvious that their presence wasn't really about trying to better understand the LSTA's activities. It was about demanding documents. [REDACTED] essentially threatened the LSTA. At a time when the Board has made budget cuts to protect your interests, [REDACTED] advised that the Board should be ready to "get out the checkbook" because the complaint to the LSP Commission would not be the end. The assertion being that more complaints would be coming from different directions, and the LSTA could expect to pay hefty legal fees as a result. The Board clearly understood the context of his comment and voted unanimously not to provide any further information to [REDACTED]. Our pay is frozen and legislation that could damage our retirement will be considered this year. Is weakening the LSTA in our best interests?

These men should take ownership in unnecessarily tarnishing the very thing they claim they want to protect. They have and will continue to bring discredit to the LSTA and the members that comprise its ranks. Rather than working on solutions to their perceived problems, they want to shoot first and ask questions later. That's not how we operate, and we will not be bullied by a small group of non-active members. We owe you more than that.

We all know and appreciate the value of the LSTA. The LSTA's legal participation in political discourse through the Executive Director represents a very small, but extremely important, part of our mission and operation. More often than not we are granting wishes to terminally ill children, bringing smiles to faces during dark times, and providing meals and presents to families who thought they wouldn't have a Christmas or Thanksgiving. We've helped troopers with cancer, troopers who have lost their homes, and troopers who have lost their children. And we've helped families who have lost their TROOPERS. We have accomplished great things and we must continue to work together to accomplish more.

We have not seen a groundswell of support from our membership for [REDACTED] and his associates. Ultimately, it is the larger membership who will determine our path forward. We understand that what we do today affects our tomorrows, and we pledge that the Board will continue to be transparent in representing members' interests and reporting all important decisions back to the membership-at-large.

If you have concerns or questions, we urge you to bring them forward so they can be addressed.

Respectfully,

The LSTA Board of Directors