

The Almanac

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Menlo Park woman among 'oughta be a law' winners



Veronica Weber/The Almanac

Lisa Conrad, pictured in her Menlo Park home office, is headed to Sacramento on April 7 to present her idea for a state law to address deceptive sweepstakes practices.

Lisa Conrad of Menlo Park is one of three winners of state Sen. Joe Simitian's "There Oughta Be a Law" contest.

Ms. Conrad, one of 429 who submitted ideas for new state legislation, proposed a law addressing deceptive sweepstakes practices, particularly those aimed at the elderly, Sen. Simitian, D-Palo Alto, said March 26 in a press release.

"Scamming the elderly to take part in these sweepstakes is a frighteningly common problem out there," Ms. Conrad told The Almanac. "The people behind these things are preying on people."

The other two winners are a Sunnyvale couple who propose revising a law that forced them to cut off the tops of redwood tree in their back yard because they shaded a neighbor's solar panels; and a Los Altos Hills physician who would require state agencies to develop outreach programs for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with traumatic brain injuries.

The three winners will have their ideas introduced as legislation, have the opportunity to testify at a legislative hearing on their bill, have lunch with Sen. Simitian in the state Capitol, and will receive a California state flag that has flown over the Capitol, the senator said.

During the past six years, 11 winning entries have been signed into law, he said.

Ms. Conrad said her idea was prompted by her concern about

friends and family members who were victims of deceptive sweepstakes practices.

She said her sister is a consumer rights attorney in Oregon, where laws are tougher on deceptive sweepstakes, prompting her to pro-

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LISA CONRAD

pose changes to California's stance on the issue.

The bill, SB 1400, seeks to strengthen consumer protections and prohibit sweepstakes sponsors from selling or sharing customer names and personal information.

"Folks are told they're 'specially selected' or have 'already won' when that's just not the case," said Sen. Simitian. "Gimmicks like so-called 'official' documents abound; and sweepstakes pitches too often skirt the 'no purchase required' provisions of state law."

Ms. Conrad said representatives from the New York-based Direct Marketing Association have already contacted Sen. Simitian's office with concerns about her proposed law.

Other winners

Sunnyvale residents Richard Treanor and Carolyn Bissett did not

propose a new law but a revision of a 1978 law governing solar panel installations in homes. They were recently forced to cut off the tops of redwood trees in their backyard because they shaded a neighbor's solar panels in violation of the law

even though the trees were planted before the neighbor installed the solar panels.

"Right now a new neighbor can move in next to your home, install a solar energy system and then, under threat of criminal prosecution, force you to take an ax to your trees if and when they grow," Sen. Simitian said.

He has introduced a bill that would provide an exemption from the law for existing trees. "Our state ought to be able to strike a sensible balance between trees and solar energy," he said.

Los Altos Hills physician Jerome Blum is concerned that California veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are not being properly treated for traumatic brain injury. His winning proposal would require the California Department of Veterans Affairs and the California National Guard to develop and implement outreach programs for those types of injury.

"It's the least we can do. It's about making sure these vets get the treatment they need and are entitled to," Sen. Simitian said.

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