And in his proposed bill, the consequences for positive screening are pretty harsh, ranging from outright removal from office

By IKE MGBATOGU

Contributing Writer

COLUMBUS – An age old expression tells us that 'What's good for the goose is good for the gander.' In general, and often, it calls for parity in how things and people are viewed or treated.

But in Ohio politics, it has come in pretty handy for a lawmaker who is arguing that any proposal requiring welfare recipients to be tested for drugs and alcohol is OK, as long as the same policy is applied to state elected officials, Supreme Court Justices and members of JobsOhio board.

It's only fair, said State Representative Robert F. Hagan.

The Democrat from Youngstown said last week that he plans to introduce a legislation that would require all highly placed state functionaries to test for illegal substances. His planned legislation is a response to the proposal recently sponsored by Republican State Senator Tim Grendell targeting welfare recipients for mandatory drug and alcohol testing as a condition for receiving public assistance.

"The premise of this bill is pretty straight forward," said Hagan. "You have individuals entrusted by the public to perform legal functions on behalf of the citizens who pay us with tax dollars. I don't buy the assertion by Republican lawmakers that we need to test welfare recipients for drug and alcohol use, but that elected officials, who receive much more in annual tax dollar salary than those on public assistance, simply are exempt from any such testing."

The argument by Grendell is that welfare moochers should not be allowed to bankroll their destructive illegal drug habits on public dime.

"Hard working taxpayers of the state of Ohio should not have to pay for the drug habits of illegal drug users," said Grendell.

But it is the same point being made by Hagan who expressed the view that political elite tax dollar spongers should be held to the same height of scrutiny.

“It is hypocritical to demand that the average Ohioan and working poor should be held to a higher standard than the political elite in this state,” he said.

Hagan’s words: “Substance abuse is substance abuse and receiving tax dollars is receiving tax dollars. It shouldn’t matter who you are.”

And in his proposed bill, the consequences for positive screening are pretty harsh, ranging from outright removal from office for members of JobsOhio board to impeachment or recall for elected officials, including mandatory treatment for all who flunked the test.

As for whether the idea of mandatory drug and alcohol testing for welfare recipients is unhinged, irrational and draconian, some would say it is all of that. But at the same time, it is one that is gaining traction is several states where politicians postured to please their electorates are increasingly peddling the idea.

A similar law was recently passed in Florida. Ohio’s attempt at this is modeled after the Sunshine state law, where as in Florida, recipients would have to pay for the test, only to be reimbursed if they passed it.

Missouri is on its way to passing a law like that, too.

Mgbatogu is a freelance writer and editor of Onumba.com based in Columbus. He can be reached by email at Onumbamedia@yahoo.com