



M U L T I S T A T E

'All people is upside down:' Lobbyists flooded with calls from corporate clients worried about coronavirus

A number of the strongest lobbyists in Washington mentioned Thursday that corporate leaders are rising more and more involved that the Trump administration and Congress haven't got a deal with on the widening coronavirus disaster.

Lobbyists interviewed by # mentioned executives flooded their workplaces with calls Thursday, after President Donald Trump's Wednesday evening tackle to the nation about coronavirus didn't calm markets, resulting in the worst day for U.S. inventory markets since 1987's "Black Monday" market crash.

These enterprise leaders are on the lookout for solutions about what Capitol Hill and the White Home are going to do to help the financial system and fight the unfold of the coronavirus, referred to as COVID-19.

No less than 38 deaths and 1,300 infections have been reported within the U.S. Trump and Congress have come below hearth for the dearth of an environment friendly response to the coronavirus. States are calling for extra check kits and funding for a greater response.

Home Democrats, Republicans and the White Home on Thursday had been engaged on one other invoice to answer the virus.

A lobbyist near President Donald Trump, who declined be named as conversations with clients are deemed personal, instructed # that clients had been dealing with many coronavirus points. This lobbyist famous that firms within the pharmaceutical trade are asking about any potential value gouging laws as officers akin to New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo name for companies to cease elevating costs on merchandise akin to Purell hand sanitizer.

Scott Mason, a senior coverage advisor at lobbying store Holland & Knight, instructed # that his clients, which have included Google guardian Alphabet, Nestle and Peabody Power, have

struggled to carry conferences in Congress as a result of many lawmakers have determined to usually maintain discussions over the cellphone as a substitute of in individual. Mason was as soon as a member of Trump's marketing campaign and transition groups.

"Clients and corporations are definitely impacted by journey restrictions," Mason mentioned. "Hill entry and markets with a number of adjusting daily on the fly," he mentioned, describing the issues of clients.

One other lobbyist shut with Home Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who declined to be named as a result of the conversations had been deemed personal, mentioned clients are consistently calling about what to do subsequent.

"All people is upside down. All of the clients are upside down," this individual mentioned. The lobbyist additionally famous that airways have referred to as their workplaces to debate upcoming cancellations and the partial journey ban from Europe that Trump introduced Wednesday throughout his speech.

Steve Elmendorf, who was a senior advisor to former Home Democratic chief Dick Gephardt for 12 years, initially solely responded in a textual content with the phrase "every part" on Thursday when requested what his clients are involved about with regards to the virus. He declined to remark additional on the time as a result of he was so busy taking calls from companies who had been in a panic. Elmendorf's clients have included Goldman Sachs, Visa, Amazon, Bloomberg Philanthropies and Blackstone Group, amongst many others.

Later within the day, he defined to # that clients are informing him that they do not consider the federal government has a deal with on the general public well being menace with an absence of testing and therapy wants. The opposite criticism that Elmendorf has heard from main companies is that the financial injury from the coronavirus is going to be "deeper than coverage makers might notice and important stimulus is going to be wanted to stabilize the financial system and the markets," he mentioned.

Nonetheless, these worries have been introduced on to congressional leaders and White Home officers and Elmendorf senses the federal government is surprised with what they're seeing from the virus because it spreads all through the nation.

"It is like 9/11. Persons are shell-shocked," he mentioned.

[Council of Canadian Innovators execs found not to have violated federal lobbying rules](#)

Canada's Lobbying Commissioner Nancy Belanger has found that Benjamin Bergen and Dana O'Born, executives with the Council of Canadian Innovators (CCI), did not violate Canadian lobbying rules following [complaints](#) that were filed against the two in 2017.

In 2017, an investigation commenced against the two, who work and are in-house lobbyists for the CCI, a lobby group for the Canadian innovation and tech sector. In [reports filed](#) last Thursday, Belanger concluded that neither Bergen nor O'Born had violated the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct.

The code states that lobbyists shall not lobby a public-office holder with whom they have a relationship that could reasonably be seen to create a sense of obligation; and must refrain for five years from lobbying people for whom they have engaged in political activities that could create a sense of obligation.

The Thursday reports related specifically to concerns that Bergen and O'Born had lobbied current Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland (then Foreign Affairs Minister) or members of her ministerial staff after undertaking political activities on her behalf. Bergen and O'Born were both previously part of Freeland's election campaigns, including co-campaign managing her re-election in 2015.

The Lobbying Commissioner's reports found no evidence that O'Born or Bergen ever lobbied Freeland specifically.

Other concerns that had been raised in 2017 led to calls for the federal ethics and lobbying commissioners to investigate whether the CCI had also broken lobbying rules after offering access to federal government staff in exchange for a \$10,000 yearly fee.

At the time, the reports found that the CCI had promised monthly meetings with then-environment minister Catherine McKenna's chief of staff, Marlo Reynolds.

A December 2019 [letter](#) from the Commissioner of Lobbying shared recently by the CCI, stated that based on evidence collected the office would no longer be pursuing the investigation concerning McKenna's office.

"The information collected to date undercuts the basis for investigating whether a reasonable observer...could reasonably conclude...that Mr. Reynolds could be seen to have extended preferential treatment to CCI member companies as compared to other organizations," the report stated.

The CCI was formed in November 2015, shortly after the Liberal government took office and promised heavy spending on innovation and growth in the technology sector. Including Bergen and O’Born, at least three of CCI’s full-time staff are former Liberal aides at federal or provincial levels. Patrick Searle, CCI’s director of communications, was a spokesman for Ontario Liberal cabinet ministers between 2012 and January 2017.

Today, the council is composed of more than 100 CEOs of Canadian tech companies in areas that include health and clean technology, fintech, cybersecurity, and information and communication technology. The CCI is chaired by Jim Balsillie, former chairman and co-CEO of BlackBerry, and John Ruffolo, founder of OMERS Ventures.

In a release from the CCI regarding the Lobbying Commissioner’s recent reports, both O’Born and Bergen made statements on the decision.

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“CCI always has and always will abide by all federal and provincial lobbying rules and codes of conduct when engaging in its advocacy work on behalf of Canadian innovators,” said Bergen. “I would like to thank the Commissioner for her thorough investigation and welcome her findings that found we acted in complete compliance with the Lobbyist Code of Conduct.”

“I am happy the Commissioner’s office did a thorough and professional investigation and found no grounds for the maligning allegations lodged against myself and our advocacy efforts at CCI,”

added O’Born. “I have always worked with great integrity to support the growth of Canada’s innovation sector, and now with these allegations behind us, I am squarely focused on the work ahead of us to support all innovators in their pursuits to scale-up globally.”

While Belanger cleared the two CCI executives of any wrongdoing concerning Freeland, the commissioner noted in her report the need to update Rule 6 (Conflict of Interest) and Rule 9 (Political Activities) of the Lobbyists’ Code of Conduct, which Bergen and O’Born had been investigated for.

“Although I determined that Rule 6 had not been contravened in the factual circumstances at issue in this investigation, I observed that the analysis required by Rule 6 raises concerns about the manner in which this provision is currently drafted,” Belanger wrote.

She also noted that Rule 9 did not sufficiently cover the term “staff” in a minister’s office. In interacting with Freeland’s office, the CCI executives had worked with David Lametti, in his former capacity as parliamentary secretary for the minister. Bergen noted in her report that Rule 9 does not qualify parliamentary secretaries as staff, “however, parliamentary secretaries share the same political commitments as the minister they are appointed to assist.”

The federal lobbyist registry shows the CCI has had 364 meetings with federal officials since it was formed, including 89 with Global Affairs Canada, which Freeland was a part of until she became deputy prime minister following the most recent election. The CCI is currently registered to lobby a number of federal agencies, including the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), where Freeland is currently serving.

The CCI has been instrumental in working for the interests of its tech CEO members, successfully lobbying the federal government on projects including [Global Talent Stream](#). CCI chair Balsillie has also worked with the Government of Ontario leading its efforts on [intellectual property](#).