



M U L T I S T A T E

[Bill that could end practice of public officials appearing in public service announcements during election years faces critical deadline](#)

A bill that's already passed the Mississippi Senate unanimously would prevent public officials from appearing in taxpayer-funded public service announcements during an election year.

[Senate Bill 2053](#) is sponsored by state Sen. Angela Hill, R-Picayune would also prevent taxpayer funds from being used for any conference or convention organized by a lobbyist or one of their clients.

Hill told the Northside Sun that these ads are tantamount to taxpayer-funded campaign ads.

“If you're doing these public service announcements in any election year, you're basically getting free advertisement that other people aren't getting,” Hill said.

What the bill wouldn't prevent if it became law is the practice of agencies paying for association dues or registration fees for employees.

The bill passed the Senate unanimously on March 11 and is now being considered by the House Accountability, Efficiency, Transparency Committee. The [deadline](#) for the committee to report on the bill is today.

Hill said she's seen some private events and conventions sponsored by state agencies, such as Mississippi Association of Supervisors events. She also said she's seen the Department of Marine Resources and the Department of Environmental Quality as primary sponsors for fundraising galas for non-profits.

“I don't think taxpayer money should be used to fund private conventions unless it's in statute and we're going to be able to put some sunshine on it,” Hill said. “There are certain circumstances when that might be legitimate, but when you can't track the money down,

agencies are sponsoring whatever they think they might need to sponsor and the Legislature gets a black eye because they're funneling money to a special interest."

SB 2053 wouldn't end the practice of paying private, contract lobbyists by state agencies with taxpayer funds, but would curtail some of the cozy relationships between state agencies, occupational licensing boards and contract lobbyists.

Licensing boards, such as the Board of Medical Licensure and the Board of Nursing, hire contract lobbyists. Stephen and Beth Clay [represent](#) the Board of Medical Licensure this session, while Denise DeRossette [does so](#) for the Board of Nursing.

Most state agencies have an employee, usually known as government affairs position, that register as lobbyists. Sometimes, these agencies have sought outside assistance in lobbying the Legislature to bolster their budgets or get legislation passed.

The Department of Revenue had a consulting [contract](#) with lobbyist [Sidney Michael Albritton](#) to provide "state government relation services" for \$72,000 annually. For lobbying alone, Albritton charged taxpayers [\\$25,000](#) in 2013, [\\$35,000](#) in 2014, [\\$35,000](#) in 2015 and [\\$27,000](#) in 2016. The DOR later cancelled the contract in September 2016.

A [bill](#) that would've ended this practice specifically died in the House on the calendar (never received a floor vote) after being passed in the Senate in 2017.