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[Irvine City Council Strengthens Lobbyist Policy](#)

The Irvine City Council unanimously strengthened its conflict of interest policy by adding a provision to its contracts which says if a City Council member or employee lobbied on behalf of a city contractor, the contract can be voided with cause and the city will get reimbursed.

While there was a similar contract provision preventing employment of a city official by a city contractor, it didn't address lobbying services — paid or unpaid.

Councilwoman Christina Shea said she brought the item forward after she learned former Councilman Jeff Lalloway helped Architecture, Engineering, Consulting, Operations and Maintenance (AECOM), a Los Angeles-based firm with an office in Irvine, try to get a contract for the Anaheim streetcar project, Shea told Voice of OC after the meeting. For years, Shea and Lalloway were opponents on the Council. AECOM didn't get the contract and Lalloway didn't seek re-election last year.

"It was egregious what Jeff Lalloway did," Shea said, accusing Lalloway of lobbying for AECOM in its unsuccessful bid for a streetcar contract with Orange County Transportation Authority.

"It was one of the most egregious things I ever saw a Council member do," Shea said.

But Lalloway, in a phone interview Wednesday, said he didn't get paid and was helping a local Irvine business.

"Well, number one, I didn't lobby for anyone. I helped a local Irvine business, without any compensation. So, in order to lobby you got to receive money. I tried to help a local Irvine resident and a local Irvine business," Lalloway said.

"I think it's our job as council members to help local Irvine residents and businesses to get work," Lalloway said.

"No we don't, that's absolutely not true," Shea said in a Wednesday phone interview. "Who works six months for a company and doesn't get paid?"

Lalloway wasn't named in Shea's agenda letter or by any Council member during Tuesday's meeting.

In 2015, [Shea was criticized for emailing and texting city staff to expedite plans and permits for KIA Motors](#), a former client for her lobbying business. Shea lost the KIA lobbying job in 2016 and the automobile manufacturer doesn't appear in her latest conflict of interest forms. She was also investigated by the state's Fair Political Practices Commission over the KIA issue.

"Number two: Christina Shea is trying to deflect from her problem when she was representing KIA," Lalloway said. "When she was lobbying and pressuring city employees to approve things to KIA."

Shea called the KIA issue a “political ploy” and said Lalloway “brings up KIA — KIA did not have a contract with the city of Irvine and all I did was ask several questions of staff to call up KIA.”

“I had a letter from our city attorney (Jeff Melching) and the FPPC (Fair Political Practices Commission) said I did nothing wrong. It has no comparison whatsoever,” Shea said.

“I wonder if she put a provision in the ethics code to prevent her from doing the things she’s done before,” Lalloway said.

Irvine’s city code already [bars council members from lobbying for any business](#) in Orange County, which stems from a measure passed by Irvine voters in 2008.

Councilwoman Melissa Fox, an attorney, told Voice of OC the law is probably unconstitutional because it’s overreaching and affects income.

“But as council members, we’re not going to sue over it,” Fox said.

Fox and Shea said Irvine has a contract with AECOM for work in the Great Park that’s supposed to end in June, but it will now be terminated in February.

During the meeting, questions about enforcement of the lobbying regulations came up.

“Irvine should establish consequences for violations of this provision,” resident Susan Sayre said during public comment.

Councilman Anthony Kuo asked city attorney Jeff Melching what the enforcement of the lobbying regulations are.

Melching said the ordinance regulating lobbying activities “says that a violation of the ordinance is to be referred to the city attorney for evaluation, or under certain circumstances the city manager ... and that information is supposed to be relayed back to the violator.” He added the Council could beef up the regulation if it wants to.

Kuo said the enforcement mechanism doesn’t seem to do much.

“You’ve got the city attorney basically having a meeting with them saying don’t do that ... it just seems like Mrs. Sayre and others’ points are quite well taken. That the city attorney who serves at the pleasure of the council is going to slap us on the wrist? That seems a little backwards,” Kuo said.

Mayor Don Wagner said the contract provision should be enough to address any conflict of interest from arising in the future.

“The idea, of course, is that this completely disincentivizes the client to ever seek that sort of counsel. Which is why I think it goes on the vendor side is quite appropriate,” Wagner said.

Fox said if the Council beefs up lobbying regulation enforcement, it could be used as a political weapon.

“It might be wielded more as a sword against an errant council member ... by a council member in the majority, with an appointed city attorney, one could really think about the problems that would arise the future,” Fox said.

Fox echoed Wagner’s comments and said the burden should fall to the contractor because the city can nix the contract and get reimbursed should the lobbying stipulation be violated.

“So I think the way to do it to make sure there is no conflict of interest is indeed to put the onus on the contractor and put their contract in jeopardy, because that would be for cause,” Fox said.

[Delgado signs onto ethics, campaign finance reform bill](#)

U.S. Rep. Antonio Delgado, D-19, signed onto his first piece of legislation this week for comprehensive ethics and campaign finance reform on Capitol Hill.

Delgado signed onto the For the People Act on Monday — his first order of business since taking office Jan. 4.

The bill is a comprehensive package of ethics reforms addressing voting rights, campaign finance and ethics issues.

“Corporate power is commanding way too much attention in Washington,” Delgado said. “It is time that our government be responsive to the will of the people rather than the interests of a wealthy few and big corporations. This historic bill will help strengthen everyday Americans’ power in our democracy and raise the bar for ethics in Washington.”

The bill was introduced in the House of Representatives by the new Democratic leadership Jan. 3 and is supported by a number of Democrats, but lacks signatures from the minority Republican conference.

Democrats took control of the House in the Nov. 6 elections, winning key seats such the state’s 19th Congressional District, which was previously held by Republican John Faso, of Kinderhook. Delgado won the seat with just over 50 percent of the vote.

Throughout much of his campaign, Delgado called for chasing big money out of politics in Washington and suggested he did not take money from large corporate Political Action Committees.

Over the course of his two-year campaign, Delgado raised about \$9.2 million. Roughly \$3 million came from 68 separate donations of \$2,000 or more, according to data from the Federal Election Commission. The freshman congressman’s campaign raised about \$1.8 million in 6,303 donations of \$200 or less.

“There is no question that these reforms are needed,” Columbia County Democratic Committee Chairman Keith Kanaga said. “This is Delgado doing what he said on the campaign trail and keeping his promises.”

Columbia County Republican Committee Chairman Greg Fingar opposes the legislation, he said. “These ‘reforms’ actually give more power to Washington,” Fingar explained. “Mr. Delgado doesn’t seem to know that corporations have been barred since 1907 from donating to federal candidates. Voting is not difficult in the United States, as witnessed by a surge in participation both in 2016 and 2018.”

The bill would:

- Create automatic voter registration across the country and restore voting rights to individuals who have completed felony sentences as well as expand voting by mail and early voting.
- Reinstigate key parts of the Voting Rights Act — which the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated in 2013 — and aims to end partisan gerrymandering of voting districts.
- Require any organization involved in political activity to disclose its large donors.
- Create a multiple matching system for small donations and reaffirm Congress’ authority to regulate money in politics.

- Designate cops on the campaign finance beat who will enforce laws on the books, tighten rules on super PACs and restructure the Federal Election Commission to break the gridlock and enhance its enforcement mechanisms.
- Expand conflict of interest laws and divestment requirements by preventing members of Congress from serving on corporate boards and requiring presidential candidates to disclose their tax returns.
- Overhaul the Office of Government Ethics, close registration loopholes for lobbyists and foreign agents, provide resources to watchdogs and create a code of ethics for the Supreme Court.

“Having federal taxpayers pay for campaigns isn’t a good idea — most taxpayers don’t want their tax dollars to pay for campaign mail and negative ads,” Fingar said. “This legislation is a series of talking points clearly not intended as a serious legislative proposal.”

Georgia ethics director suspended during computer probe

The Georgia Ethics Commission has suspended its director with pay while they investigate allegations that he misused state computers.

The commission voted Tuesday to suspend Stefan Ritter for what chairman Jake Evans said were "allegations of improper workplace conduct." Ritter told reporters Monday the allegations against him were untrue, saying he had not seen the specific complaints.

Evans will oversee the investigation and hire outside counsel to look into the complaints. Evans did not say how long the investigation might last.

The agency collects campaign finance, vendor gift and lobbying expenditure reports and registers lobbyists, issues advisory opinions and imposes penalties for violations.

Ritter has been executive director of the agency since 2015. He had been with the Georgia Attorney General's Office for 18 years before joining the ethics panel.

Whitmer choice raises questions about state's conflicts of interest laws

The official who Gov. Gretchen Whitmer named to head one of the largest and most far-reaching state government departments is married to an owner of one of Lansing's biggest lobbying firms — raising concerns about potential conflicts of interest related to industries such as marijuana, where both spouses have responsibilities or client interests.

Whitmer, a Democrat who took office Jan. 1, named Orlene Hawks director of the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) — a \$518-million agency with responsibilities ranging from oversight of Michigan's lucrative new marijuana industry to liquor licensing, regulation of utilities, and licensing of doctors, hospitals and physical therapy providers.

Hawks, of Okemos, is married to Michael Hawks, an owner and principal of Government Consultant Services, Inc. (GCSI). The firm's clients include marijuana interests such as the Michigan Cannabis Development Association, CannArbor Inc., MedFarm of Michigan LLC, and PSI Labs, state records show.

GCSI also represents many other clients affected by the policies and rulings of LARA and its sub-agencies, such as the Liquor Control Commission, which handles liquor licensing, and the Public Service Commission, which regulates utilities. While state records don't show which GCSI accounts are specifically handled by Michael Hawks, those clients include the Michigan Beer

and Wine Wholesalers Association, Consumers Energy Co., the Michigan Physical Therapy Association, and Blue Cross, Blue Shield of Michigan, to name a few.

It's not the first time in recent years that similar concerns have been raised. Marriages with lobbyists involving a former governor's chief of staff and a former state senator have also been questioned.

While not questioning the integrity of Hawks or her husband, a state government ethics expert said the potential conflicts raised by the situation underline a need for stronger financial disclosure and conflict-of-interest laws in Michigan. A state senator who has the power to hold hearings on Orlene Hawks' appointment said it raises questions about how she will handle conflicts with her husband's firm, if they arise.

"On its face, it is concerning," said Craig Mauger, executive director of the Michigan Campaign Finance Network and an expert on ethics and disclosure rules for state officials.

"LARA is a very important department that has its hands in a lot of different industries," and "lobbyists work with all types of industries to try to advance their interests," Mauger said.

"If you were someone who wants something from LARA, do you think you would be more likely to go to the lobbying firm that is connected to the director of LARA?"

More: [Whitmer to talk Michigan issues at Free Press 'Breakfast Club' event](#)

More: [Whitmer bans use of private email accounts for state business](#)

Sen. Peter Lucido, R-Shelby Township, chairman of the Senate Advice and Consent Committee, which can hold confirmation hearings on Whitmer's cabinet selections but is not required to do so, said Monday that areas of potential conflict and how they would be handled would be examined if his committee convenes a hearing on Hawk's confirmation.

"These are things that you've got to look at," Lucido said.

"If there's an appearance of impropriety or a conflict of interest, then I think she has a duty to make it known."

Lucido said one of the issues he wants to explore is "how does a potential conflict get resolved in an administrative agency" such as LARA.

Orlene Hawks, who will be paid \$165,000 a year in her new role, formerly served as director of the Office of Children's Ombudsman, which deals with the state's child welfare system, and before that worked for the state health department. She holds a bachelor's degree from Michigan State University.

"Throughout my entire career in state government, I have served the people of Michigan with the utmost honesty and integrity, and will continue to do so as LARA director," Hawks said in a statement emailed to the Free Press by an aide on Monday.

Hawks did not respond in detail to an emailed question about how specifically she would respond to a conflict with her husband's firm, but said: "I will rely on all civil service rules and protocols to ensure that the laws under my department's oversight are administered fairly, efficiently, consistently and transparently."

Michael Hawks has been voted among the top two lobbyists in the state by Capitol insiders, according to his biography on the website of Eastern Michigan University. Snyder appointed Hawks to the EMU board in 2011. Before joining GCSI around 1990, Hawks worked for

Democratic leaders in the state House. Hawks, who did not return a phone message Monday, holds a bachelor's degree from EMU and a master's degree from MSU.

Whitmer spokeswoman Tiffany Brown said the governor is confident Orlene Hawks and the other cabinet members she selected "will be ethically conscious, serve with integrity and are committed to putting Michigan residents first."

Brown said Whitmer's expectations of her cabinet are clear, pointing to an executive directive Whitmer signed Thursday that points to state law governing conflicts of interest, none of which would prohibit the LARA director from being married to a lobbyist with interests before LARA, and adds other directives, such as that officials "not engage in outside employment or activities conflicting with their official government duties."

Whitmer "has set a high bar and has full faith in her cabinet," Brown said.

Mauger said Michigan is one of only two states that doesn't require some form of personal financial disclosure for top state officials, and the situation with the Hawks demonstrates the need for laws requiring such disclosure.

"This one is kind of obvious, but there could be many more of these situations that we don't know about," he said.

Lucido noted that potential conflicts involving top state officials and lobbyists are not new in Lansing, [citing the example of Dennis Muchmore](#), who was chief of staff to former Republican Gov. Rick Snyder while his spouse, Deb Muchmore, worked as a Lansing lobbyist. She had served as a spokeswoman for Nestle, the company that obtained a controversial state permit to increase its pumping of Michigan groundwater, obtained at a nominal fee, after Dennis Muchmore left Snyder's employ.

State Sen. Joe Hune, R-Fowlerville, who left the Senate at the end of 2018 because of term limits, is married to Lansing lobbyist Marcia Hune. That relationship became an issue in [a federal lawsuit involving electric car manufacturer Tesla](#), because Joe Hune introduced legislative language that Tesla alleges banned the insurgent company's sales model in Michigan, while the firm Marcia Hune worked for counted the established Michigan auto dealers among its clients.

Chuck Perricone, a former Republican House speaker who has worked as a lobbyist in the cannabis industry since 2011, said it's valuable to raise questions and concerns about such relationships because the approval process for various types of marijuana licensing "is just so subjective."

"I appreciate the scrutiny," Perricone said. However, "in my personal experience over the years and in this space, Mike Hawks is a straight shooter and I have no reason to believe that the new director won't operate the same way."

[**Aldermen, mayoral candidates trip over themselves to propose ethic reform**](#)

Mayoral candidates and re-election-seeking aldermen elbowed each other out of the way Monday in a rush to get on the right side of the federal corruption scandal that threatens to bring down Ald. Edward Burke (14th).

The second floor lobby at City Hall was like the supermarket deli counter on a Saturday morning. Take a number and wait your turn to step up and propose ethics reforms.

First came Ald. Joe Moore (49th), who traded his once-outspoken political independence for a committee chairmanship doled out by Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

Moore proposed: banning outside employment by aldermen; empowering Inspector General Joe Ferguson to investigate City Council committees and their programs and independently enforce his own subpoenas; public financing of aldermanic and citywide campaigns and live-streaming of City Council committee meetings.

Moore was asked why it almost always takes a scandal for aldermen to grow a spine and approve ethics reforms.

“Two-word answer: human nature,” he said.

“When you have something as monumental as the most powerful member of the City Council facing a very serious criminal indictment, that will give people the courage to change.”

Next up was the Progressive Caucus, whose persistent calls for ethics reforms have run into a wall of resistance erected by Burke and others.

They want to strictly enforce Rule 36 of council rules, which empowers aldermen to choose their own committee chairmen.

They don't want Ald. Pat O'Connor (40th), the Finance Committee vice-chair who also happens to be Emanuel's floor leader, to assume the chairmanship that Burke relinquished last week.

They want the job to go to Progressive Caucus chairman Scott Waguespack (32nd).

“We want to make sure we have somebody in that seat who can move the City Council business forward without any conflicts, either known or unknown,” Waguespack said, referring to conflicts posed by the fact that O'Connor's wife has worked as a real estate agent on projects where her husband approved the zoning.

Ald. Carlos Ramirez-Rosa (35th) facetiously referred to, what he called the “go-along-to-get-along” or “rubber stamp” caucus.

“To think that one of the leaders of that caucus, Pat O'Connor, at this moment has the moral authority, has the leadership, has the ability, has the track record to reform the Chicago City Council...at this moment of crisis is utterly ridiculous,” Ramirez-Rosa said.

Like Moore, the Progressive Caucus wants to expand Ferguson's subpoena and investigative powers and strengthen Rule 14 to require a written explanation of aldermanic conflicts.

Aldermen who recuse themselves from voting would have to be “physically absent from all debates, hearings and votes,” even if they are committee chairs, under the change.

“We are not a jump-on- the bandwagon, all of the sudden having these epiphanies wanting to change things when the same alderman that stands behind the microphone and says he is now for these ideas last month and the month before pushed us away and didn't want to be any part of it,” said Ald. Susan Sadlowski-Garza (10th).

Mayoral candidate Willie Wilson was preceded by his political adviser, flamboyant former alderman and state senator Rickey “Hollywood” Hendon.

When Hendon likened allowing aldermen to choose their own committee chairman to “opening the door of your house to a burglar,” he and Ald. John Arena (45th) nearly got into a shouting match.

“That’s insulting,” Arena said, pointing to Rule 36 that empowers the City Council to reorganize itself.

Hendon countered, “I did not interrupt you, alderman. If you want to interrupt me, I can meet you outside and you can say anything you want.”

Wilson then demanded that Toni Preckwinkle drop out of the race for mayor because of the \$10,000 campaign contribution <https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/chicago-mayoral-candidate-toni-preckwinkle-admits-10k-contribution-burke-shakedown/> that Burke allegedly muscled from a Burger King franchise owner.

“Toni Preckwinkle took money from Ed Burke. She’s just now paying it back. Susana Mendoza — you shouldn’t be getting married at a man’s home and now returning his funds,” Wilson said.

“Preckwinkle should resign. The rest should get out of the way...They’re bought....Everyone of them has...gotten money from somebody else who owns them....I’m the only candidate in this race who has put up millions of dollars of my own money. I’m not bought.”

Paul Vallas was last, but brought a broom to signify the clean sweep he hopes to usher in if he’s elected mayor.

“Ald. Burke helped the careers of Susana Mendoza and Gery Chico who, along with Toni Preckwinkle, solicited and coveted Burke’s powerful support and money. They’re part of the corrupt political machine,” Vallas said, demanding that Burke’s minions drop out.

“Now, they desperately try to distance themselves from Burke. Let’s not forget that, for decades, they benefited from the preferred status of being Burke’s candidate or lobbyists. All the while, they adhered to the political code of silence. If this silence is not indictable, it surely is disqualifying.”

Vallas couldn’t resist ridiculing Bill Daley for proposing that the City Council be reduced from 50 aldermen to 15.

“After the horses have left the barn, he’s now shutting the door? Maybe he can say something about ethics reform when it comes to the investment of pension funds,” Vallas said, referring to the money-losing deals that involved Daley’s nephew.