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Weekly Lobbying Articles

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University of Missouri Calls Off Search for Staff Lobbyist

<http://kbia.org/post/university-missouri-calls-search-staff-lobbyist#stream/0>

The University of Missouri has called off its search for a staff lobbyist to replace employees it laid off in June.

After laying off employees in the University Relations office following system-wide budget cuts, the university started to search for a lobbyist to replace those employees, but they've canceled that search.

This means the university is now relying on third party lobbying firms like Clark Hill and Statehouse Strategies.

Jake Haselswerdt is a political science professor at MU and was formerly a lobbyist for universities in Washington D.C. He said lobbyists are an important asset for universities.

"Any university is going to have many issues involving government," Haselswerdt said. "There's just a lot of reasons why a University would want to have a voice at the federal level. Then obviously at the state level for public universities a huge portion of their funding comes as a state appropriation."

He says that public relations issues at MU have played a part in recent state funding cuts, and lobbyists can help protect that funding.

"And as a lobbyist can you prevent all that from happening? No, but sort of like government relations, or public relations I should say, you can try to do some damage control and maybe try to get out ahead of some of that stuff with the legislature to minimize the impact it might have on your funding in the future," Haselswerdt said.

MU spokesperson Christian Basi said after interviewing multiple candidates University President Mun Choi decided to cancel the search and take more time to decide how to move forward.

"We want to take a look at the current resources that we have, and take a closer look at what the needs are for the campus and the system," Basi said. "And then take some time to develop a longer term vision for the future of our governmental relations at the university."

Basi says maintaining close relationships with lawmakers in Jefferson City is a priority.

Why some campaign contributions get returned

<https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2017/10/returned-contributions/>

It's been a big week for politicians refunding tainted campaign donations.

First, Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. returned a \$32,000 contribution from Donald Trump's personal attorney Marc Kasowitz, who made the donation in 2013 after Vance decided not to pursue a fraud investigation against Ivanka Trump and Donald Trump Jr.

Now, at least a dozen Democrats have refunded or donated to charity contributions from media mogul Harvey Weinstein following a New York Times story alleging decades of sexual harassment.

Refunds of campaign contributions are not rare, and most are not particularly scandalous. Losing campaigns often give back their leftover funds, although they are not legally obligated to. Some campaigns offer to refund supporters who have a change of heart, as former Sen. Arlen Specter (D-Pa.) did for his irate Republican backers when he switched parties in 2009, but that's not required, either.

Campaigns regularly issue refunds of contributions they can't legally accept, such as donations from people who have already given the legal limit, an issue that plagued Marco Rubio's presidential campaign. Some entities, such as federal contractors, are not permitted to make any contributions, which is why the pro-Hillary Clinton super PAC Priorities USA had to refund \$200,000 to a construction company last June. Campaigns with millions of individual donors, such as Barack Obama's or Bernie Sanders', have to work hard to stay top of these issues and are in a constant state of back-and-forth with the Federal Election Commission.

Occasionally, legally dubious contributions are not simply innocent mistakes by donors but concerted efforts to hide the source. Last year, the OpenSecrets Blog partnered with The Boston Globe's Spotlight team to uncover a scheme by a Boston law firm to reimburse partners for their political donations, primarily to Democrats. Thornton Law Firm claimed that the arrangement was legal, but Massachusetts regulators disagreed. At least 30 candidates, including Hillary Clinton, subsequently either refunded the donations or forwarded them to the U.S. Treasury.

The juiciest campaign finance scandals involve contributions from foreign nationals. In 1997, The Washington Post's Bob Woodward and Brian Duffy revealed that the Justice Department was investigating an effort by the People's Republic of China to funnel contributions to President Bill Clinton's reelection effort. Clinton had to return \$640,000 (from his legal defense fund) that traced back to the head of a weapons company owned by the Chinese military, and the Democratic National Committee refunded \$100,000 to a Chinese-American fundraiser who confessed to receiving the money from a lieutenant colonel in the People's Liberation Army. Last year, the FEC prodded Donald Trump's campaign to return several contributions from foreigners.

Contributions from fraudsters are another headache for campaigns and a major source of refunds.

When victims of financier Robert Allen Stanford's Ponzi scheme tried to recover \$1.6 million of his campaign contributions, they had to take five party committees to court to get them to cough it up. The refunds included about \$1 million from the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and about \$260,000 from the National Republican Congressional Committee. However, many of Stanford's contributions were too small to be worth suing over, including \$4,600 given to Barack Obama, who never returned the money. Recipients of donations from an even more notorious source — Bernie Madoff — were quicker to donate to a victims' fund. And in 2004, New Jersey Democrats gave to charity

a fraction of the contributions they had received from real estate developer Charles Kushner, who had donated money in the names of his partnerships without authorization. Kushner subsequently served 14 months in prison but was a free man by 2015, when he and his wife made a \$100,000 contribution to a super PAC supporting Donald Trump ... the father-in-law of Kushner's son Jared.

Campaigns that purport to uphold a higher standard end up needing to return more contributions than most. Barack Obama's campaign, for example, made it a point of pride not to accept contributions from registered lobbyists; consequently, it had to issue refunds to five lobbyist donors following an OpenSecrets Blog investigation.

Finally, there are contributions, such as Weinstein's, which are legal but politically toxic.

If a controversial donation comes to light, politicians have to weigh their need for money against the bad press they would suffer by keeping it. In 2015, for example, three Republican presidential candidates returned contributions from the president of a white supremacist organization that was cited in the manifesto of the perpetrator of the Charleston church shooting. In contrast, Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens (R) not only kept \$1 million from a venture capitalist accused of sexual abuse but even gave him a seat on stage at his inauguration. The presidential campaign and super PAC of Ohio Gov. John Kasich (R), on the other hand, returned \$250,000 to the same donor.

Sometimes the focus is on questionable contributions from committees rather than individuals. Whenever a member of congress is under investigation — for example, Robert Menendez (DN.J.) — candidates who have received donations from the member's leadership PAC face calls to return them. Companies involved in major scandal, such as Enron in 2001, also tend to see a flurry of contributions returned to their political action committees or forwarded to charity.

Last cycle, candidates returned over \$100 million in precious individual contributions, and this cycle is shaping up the same way. While the \$1.4 million that Weinstein's family has donated since 1990 is sizable by any standard, he wasn't among last cycle's top 500 donors. The next time a scandal hits one of the true mega-donors, however, watch how willing politicians are to let go of the tainted cash.

Politico
October 10, 2017

Puerto Rico turns to K Street for help

<http://www.politico.com/tipsheets/politico-influence/2017/10/10/puerto-rico-turns-to-k-street-for-help-222726>

PUERTO RICO TURNS TO K STREET FOR HELP: The Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico, the federal board created last year to help Puerto Rico get its finances under control, has hired **Williams & Jensen** to lobby the federal government for help after a pair of hurricanes devastated the island. **J. Steven Hart**, the firm's chairman, and seven other Williams & Jensen lobbyists will represent the island on "disaster relief and recovery efforts; Puerto Rico Medicaid funding; tax reform; economic development; transportation, energy and electricity; financial services; budget and appropriations," according to a disclosure filing.

— The oversight board isn't the only entity in Puerto Rico turning to Washington lobbyists for help. **The Puerto Rico Telephone Company** has hired **Wiley Rein's Scott Weaver** to lobby on disaster relief funding, according to a disclosure filing. Weaver previously lobbied for the company on other issues

before the registration lapsed last year. A Puerto Rican medical school and a nonprofit based on the island have also hired lobbyists in the wake of the hurricanes, as PI noted on Friday.

— **Another interesting filing: The Normandy Group** has signed the **Coalition for Fair Gaming**, which is in a dispute with the **National Indian Gaming Commission** over technical standards for gambling machines. Former Rep. **Henry Bonilla** (R-Texas) is among the lobbyists representing the coalition.

CASSIDY & ASSOCIATES SIGNS VERIZON: **Cassidy & Associates** has signed six new clients, including Verizon. The telecommunications giant's phalanx of Washington lobbying firms also includes **Capitol Hill Consulting Group; Capitol Hill Strategies; Capitol Impact; Capitol Tax Partners; CGCN Group; Cove Strategies; Crossroads Strategies; D&D Strategies; DCI Group; Empire Consulting Group; Forbes Tate; Glover Park Group; Jones Group International; the Livingston Group; Mayer Brown; McGuireWoods Consulting; Mercury Strategies; Ogilvy Government Relations; Parry, Romani, DeConcini & Symms; Polaris Government Relations; Sextons Creek; Subject Matter; Twenty-First Century Group; and Wiley Rein**. Cassidy's other new clients are **American Rheinmetall Munitions, CKP Insurance, Marnell AK, Oakland Gateway Ventures and the University of Alabama at Birmingham**.

BOEING ADDS TAX LOBBYIST: Boeing is bringing on a new in-house tax lobbyist as the looming battle over tax reform gets closer. **Curt Beaulieu** will be Boeing's senior director for tax policy. He was previously senior counsel at **Bracewell** and before that served as tax counsel to the Senate Finance Committee.

NEW DIGS FOR PRISM GROUP: The **Prism Group** has moved into new office space near the intersection of H Street and New York Avenue. The firm was previously located south of Dupont Circle, near the corner of 20th Street and M Street. "As we continue to expand our public affairs offerings, we're at the center of activity in Washington — two blocks from City Center and four blocks from The White House," **Garrett Marquis**, the firm's founder and managing partner, said in a statement. It's the latest lobbying firm on the move: **Van Scoyoc Associates** moved into new offices on the Southwest Waterfront last month, and **Cornerstone Government Affairs** is moving into the same development next year.

TRUMP LIFTS SANCTIONS ON SUDAN, GIVING SQUIRE PATTON BOGGS A VICTORY: From **The Hill's Megan Wilson**: "The Trump administration has decided to permanently lift some of the economic sanctions on Sudan, handing a victory to the country and its lobbyists. ... Sudan had previously been on President Trump's list of countries whose citizens were banned from flying to the United States. When the White House unveiled a revised ban last month, Sudan was no longer on the list — the only country to be removed." Sudan's government hired **Squire Patton Boggs** in May "for \$40,000 per month to work on the sanctions issue and on an effort to 'improve Sudan's investment climate.'"

EQUIFAX RIVAL HIRES CGCN GROUP TO LOBBY ON CYBERSECURITY: TransUnion has hired **CGCN Group**, the plugged-in GOP lobbying firm, to lobby on cybersecurity as **Equifax**, one of its rival credit-reporting agencies, has been savaged by Democrats and Republicans alike for botching its response to a massive data breach. A spokesman for TransUnion told **Recode's Tony Romm** over the weekend that the company had "engaged additional lobbyists to help us monitor and respond to legislative and regulatory reaction to the Equifax breach announcement."

IF YOU MISSED IT THIS WEEKEND: "The first big move of **Leah Vukmir's** Senate campaign wasn't a traditional kick-off speech or a catchy web video, but a private audience with an influential billionaire," **POLITICO's Maggie Severns** and **Kevin Robillard** report. "Vukmir, a nurse and longtime Republican state legislator in Wisconsin, was only vaguely familiar with roofing magnate **Diane Hendricks**. But shortly before launching her Senate bid, Vukmir met with the megadonor and other businesspeople at a wood-paneled country club owned by Hendricks. After two hours hearing from Vukmir about her political beliefs and preliminary campaign plans, Hendricks stood up and told the soon-to-be candidate she had

her support. Just like that, Vukmir had acquired this year's must-have Senate campaign accessory: a billionaire backer."

— **Speaking of donors:** "Longtime Republican donor **Foster S. Friess** said Monday that he is exploring a 2018 bid for U.S. Senate in Wyoming, making him the latest conservative figure to consider challenging Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), a low-key member of the leadership," **The Washington Post's Robert Costa** reports.

FIVE MINUTES WITH HEALY BAUMGARDNER: POLITICO's Daniel Lippman interviewed **Healy Baumgardner**, a former **Donald Trump** campaign staffer turned lobbyist, for Playbook's "Birthday of the Day" feature.

JOBS REPORT:

— Rep. **Kay Granger** (R-Texas) has hired **Kevin Boland** as her communications director. He was previously a senior associate at the **Glover Park Group**.

— The **National Defense Industrial Association** has added **Wesley Hallman**, a retired Air Force colonel, as senior vice president for policy. He was previously the Air Force's chief legislative liaison to the House of Representatives.

— **Cassie Williams** starts this week as a communications associate at **Nahigian Strategies**. She was previously press secretary at the **Federation for American Immigration Reform** and is also a **Republican National Committee** alum.

NEW JOINT FUNDRAISERS:

None

NEW PACs:

Cumberland Health And Wellness PAC (PAC)

Democratic Conservation Alliance PAC (PAC)

Foreign Policy For America Action Fund (PAC)

HarveyRSpecter PAC (PAC)

The Debt Me Out Initiative (PAC)

NEW LOBBYING REGISTRATIONS:

BGR Government Affairs: Dickinson College

Government Affairs: Energy Innovation Reform Project

BGR Government Affairs: Wine Institute

CapitalEdge Advocacy Inc. (formerly CapitalEdge Advocacy, LLC): Soquel Creek Water District CGCN Group, LLC (formerly known as Clark Geduldig Cranford & Nielsen, LLC): TransUnion, LLC

Holland & Knight LLP: Delta Star, Inc.

Holland & Knight LLP: International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials

The Ingram Group LLC: Blynscy, Inc.

The McKeon Group, Inc.: CAST

The Normandy Group, LLC: American Association of State Colleges and Universities

The Normandy Group, LLC: The Coalition for Fair Gaming

Williams and Jensen, PLLC: Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico

NEW LOBBYING TERMINATIONS:

Carliner Strategies LLC: Lockheed Martin Corporation

CarterMcClean LLC: Maritime Applied Physics Corporation

Fidelis Government Relations: General Dynamics

Fidelis Government Relations: Ngai Nguyen

Health and Medicine Counsel of Washington: Crohn's & Colitis Foundation (Formerly Crohn's & Colitis Foundation Of America)

Health and Medicine Counsel of Washington: The National Pancreas Foundation

Holland & Knight LLP: Bissell Homecare, Inc.

Holland & Knight LLP: DOF Subsea USA, Inc.

Holland & Knight LLP: Solmetex, LLC

James Edwards: U.S. Business & Industry Council

Lincoln Park Group L.L.C.: Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America, Inc.

Markley and Company: City Of Hoonah Alaska

Packard Government Affairs: Vista Irrigation District Parry, Romani, Deconcini & Symms: Sanofi US Services Inc (Formerly Known As Sanofi-Aventis U S Inc)

Parry, Romani, Deconcini & Symms: Sicpa Securink Corp

Robison International, Inc.: Custom Manufacturing & Engineering

Ryberg and Smith, L.L.C.: Altantic Coffee Solutions [sic]

Smith Dawson & Andrews: City Of Hesperia

Stanton Park Group: Insignia Health

Trimpa Group, LLC: Novartis Vaccines and Diagnostics, Inc

The Washington Post

October 10, 2017

Why Chicago's soda tax fizzed after two months – and what it means for the anti-soda movement

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/10/10/why-chicagos-soda-tax-fizzled-after-two-months-and-what-it-means-for-the-anti-soda-movement/?utm_term=.be9c9665f738

A sign sponsored by opponents of the new Cook County tax on sweetened beverages is posted in the soda aisle of Tischler Finer Foods in Brookfield, Ill. (Sara Burnett/AP)

About two months after the country's largest soda tax went into effect, embattled lawmakers in Cook County, Ill. — the home of Chicago — have decided to repeal it.

The tax has been plagued, in its very short life, by legal challenges, implementation glitches and a screeching, multimillion-dollar media battle between the soda industry and public health groups. On Tuesday, in recognition of growing public pressure, the Cook County Board of Commissioners voted 15-1 to roll back the tax, effective as soon as Dec. 1.

It's a major victory for Big Soda, which has spent millions on ad buys, lobbyists and political contributions in the county. It's also the second blow this year to the soda tax movement, which suffered a defeat in Santa Fe, N.M., in early May.

Advocates of that movement — which include a number of top public health groups and former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg — have advanced the taxes as a means to fight obesity while also raising revenue for local jurisdictions.

But critics say the collapse of the Cook County tax is proof the national soda tax movement is losing its momentum.

“It doesn’t matter if you tax tea or sugar,” said Commissioner Richard Boykin, who represents the West Side of Chicago, referencing the run-up to the Revolutionary War. “Eventually people say ‘enough is enough.’”

Unlike other cities and counties that have passed soda taxes in recent years, Cook County was arguably cursed from the start.

The county of 5.2 million people was already contending with budgetary woes and widespread voter frustration with state and local government when the board voted in November 2016 to levy a 1-cent-per-ounce tax on soda and other sugary drinks.

The measure was pitched largely as a means to plug a \$1.8 billion budget gap, and secondarily as a means to improve public health by discouraging the consumption of beverages linked to obesity and other conditions.

In an Oct. 5 budget address, Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle, the most stalwart defender of the soda tax, argued that county services — including hospitals, clinics and community intervention programs — would suffer without the tax.

“A vote to repeal is a vote to reduce vital community investments,” she said. A spokesman for her office declined to comment on the likely repeal of the tax. But there were early signs that the soda tax might not raise the revenue advocates hoped, and certainly not on the intended schedule. The policy’s rollout was dogged by implementation errors and legal challenges.

An early version of the tax, for instance, was aimed at distributors, who would then pass the cost on to consumers. But the county was forced to revise that plan when it realized that it would make the soda tax subject to an additional sales tax, which is illegal in Illinois.

Shortly after that, the county proposed making the tax a line item at the point of sale, much like sales taxes are assessed currently. But local governments are not allowed to tax transactions that are paid for using federal nutrition benefits, which meant the county had to exempt more than 870,000 people from paying the tax — a last-minute change that dented revenue expectations.

When the tax finally did go into effect on Aug. 2, following a lawsuit by the Illinois Retail Merchants Association, it was met with staunch public opposition: Consumers have organized highly visible boycotts, driving to nearby Indiana for groceries, and flooded their representatives with complaints.

Several Cook County commissioners who switched their votes in favor of repeal have cited that outrage.

“I have heard from the people of my district, overwhelmingly,” said Commissioner John Daley during the Tuesday hearing, which stretched on for hours as proponents and opponents of the tax testified to the board’s finance committee.

The question now — for soda tax critics and supporters alike — is whether Cook County’s failed soda tax is a sign of things to come in other jurisdictions. While the battle was ostensibly fought by state and country groups, it’s well-acknowledged on both sides that local soda tax skirmishes are essentially proxy wars between the national soda industry and well-monied public health groups.

In Cook County, the Can the Tax Coalition, an anti-tax group funded by the American Beverage Association, has spent more than \$3.2 million on TV and radio ads. Repeal advocates have paid constituents of target districts \$11 per hour to circulate anti-tax petitions.

They have also targeted and lobbied individual commissioners, all of whom are up for election next year. Coca-Cola and Pepsi have already donated to some pro-repeal commissioners via a political action committee, said Sarah Brune, the executive director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform.

“[The donations] are unusual for this time of year, this far from the election,” said Brune.

Michael Bloomberg, meanwhile -- the former New York City mayor who has made the soda tax battle his own -- is said to have spent more than \$10 million on radio and ad campaigns, and an unknown amount on lobbyists and mailers. Bloomberg has verbally committed to backing commissioners who supported their cause in next year’s elections.

The billionaire was also involved, with the American Heart Association and the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, in the wave of local soda taxes that swept through six locations in 2016. That established new sugary drink policies in Boulder, Colo., San Francisco and Cook County.

But where that movement once seemed unstoppable, cracks have begun to show. In May, Bloomberg and others backed a failed soda tax referendum in Santa Fe, which voters rejected by a wide margin.

Philadelphia’s soda tax, in effect since January, has also failed to generate the revenue that backers initially expected. Ongoing litigation with the soda industry has limited the reach of the pre-K program the tax was set to fund, and has empowered some of the policy’s critics.

“The results have been shifting as local municipalities, residents and businesses learn more about the devastating impact these taxes have on working families and businesses, and how they aren’t good budget solutions,” said David Goldenberg, a spokesman for the industry-funded Can the Tax Coalition.

But it’s probably too early for Big Soda to gloat, experts caution. An analysis of the political and demographic climates in cities that successfully passed soda taxes, published in the journal *Food Policy* this year, concluded that as many as 40 percent of Americans live in cities with the right conditions to pass their own taxes. Those include external financial support and Democratic Party dominance.

Seattle’s City Council passed a tax in June. Massachusetts and Tennessee have also expressed interest, said Jim O’Hara, the director for health promotion policy at the nonprofit Center for Science in the Public Interest.

Bloomberg, for one, promised through a spokesman to continue the fight, regardless of the outcome in Cook County. “We don’t expect to win everywhere,” said spokesman Howard Wolfson. “We want to win most places and we are winning most places. We’ll continue to go forward and fight the soda industry in jurisdictions that want to protect the health of their citizens.”

Newsday
October 10, 2017

Spending, fear of 'dark money' rise in constitution debate

<http://www.newsday.com/news/region-state/spending-fear-of-dark-money-rise-in-constitution-debate-1.14405837>

Public worker unions, politicians and others opposed to a state constitutional convention that could overhaul state government have heavily outspent convention backers, with the most intense TV ad blitzes expected over the next four weeks, according to records and interviews.

In 1997, the last time New Yorkers voted on a constitutional convention referendum, opponents poured more than \$750,000 into an advertising and direct mail campaign in the two weeks before voters went to the polls. Opponents blanketed the state with scenes of pinstriped fat cats lighting cigars with \$100 bills and the message that Albany was planning a party, and taxpayers weren't invited.

Voters rejected a convention by 62-37 percent.

New Yorkers Against Corruption, a nonprofit advocacy group that opposes a convention, had \$616,893 in its campaign account as of last Friday, after spending \$431,292 since July, according to state campaign finance records. That brings the group's total spending this year to \$743,102, from nearly \$1.36 million in contributions.

Group members include major unions such as New York State United Teachers, the state Conservative Party and abortion rights lobbyists.

Much of it has been spent on polling, websites, focus groups, phone banks and "Vote No"! lawn signs statewide warning that public pension protections and workplace rights could be lost, according to state Board of Elections filings.

"Our members are working hard, phone-banking other NYSUT members and going door to door to educate their colleagues . . . in just about every district in the state," Carl Korn of NYSUT said.

The pro-convention NY People's Convention had \$257 left in its account as of Friday, and has spent \$351,132 this year. Another convention backer, The Committee for a Constitutional Convention, had \$12,404 on hand as of Friday, and has spent \$82,249 this year.

"We're outgunned financially," said Gerald Benjamin, a political science professor at SUNY New Paltz and a Republican who supports a convention. "Neighbors say, 'Where are our lawn signs?' We don't have lawn signs. We don't have the resources."

Voters will decide Nov. 7 whether to hold a constitutional convention, which voters have rejected twice since the last convention was held in 1967. If the convention is approved, delegates would be elected in 2018. The convention would meet, and present its proposed constitutional changes to voters in another referendum in 2019.

Those who support a convention say dramatic action is required to address corruption charges that have forced more than 30 officials out of office in a decade as well as issues such as New York's high taxes, unequal funding of schools, and the influence of big-money donors in campaigns.

Opponents say the potential benefit is outweighed by the danger that big-money conservative or liberal special interests could alter the constitution on hot-button issues such as abortion and gun control, environmental protection and the guarantee of state pensions to unionized public workers and teachers.

Big-money donors who could influence a convention are a concern for each side and include the Robert Mercer family from Long Island. Two members of the billionaire's family are top officers in the four-year-old government advocacy group Reclaim New York.

Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, who opposes a convention, and Bill Samuels of the NY People's Convention, who supports one, are among those who warn that the Mercer family poses a threat to influence the convention with ultraconservative, pro-business measures.

But Reclaim New York, an organization created in 2015 focused on taxes and government transparency, said it's staying out of direct involvement in the fray over whether to hold a convention. The Mercer family supports a tea party-inspired national constitutional convention of states.

"We will look at this in November, afterward," said Doug Kellogg, communications director for Reclaim New York with a staff of 12. "It's something we definitely have an eye on . . . That's where we would be more of a presence."

FlaglerLive.com
October 9, 2017

Palm Coast Drops Lobbyist of 17 Years To Hire Southern Strategy, Mayor's Former Employer

<https://flaglerlive.com/113227/lobbying-palm-coast/>

Mayor Milissa Holland, right, and Council member Nick Klufas were among those voting to hire Southern Strategy Group as Palm Coast's next lobbying firm. They were joined by Bob Cuff. Council member Heidi Shipley, left, voted against, as did Steven Nobile. (© FlaglerLive)

For as long as it's existed, Palm Coast government has employed the same lobbying firm: Pennington, Moore, Wilkinson, Bell & Dunbar, which has had numerous clients in the region. That reign is over. The Palm Coast City Council last week voted 3-2 to replace it with Southern Strategy Group for \$45,000. The lobbying firm is one of Tallahassee's most powerful.

Southern Strategy is Mayor Milissa Holland's former employer, though that never entered into the 10-minute discussion preceding the vote last week, the culmination of discussions through meetings going back to September, when the council sifted through four firms and heard presentations from three of them, including Southern Strategy.

Holland worked for Southern Strategy as a lobbyist after her 2012 bid for a State House seat (working there less than two years, from mid-2013 to 2015) and has maintained "many" contacts there that she says should "absolutely" help the new relationship with the city, and the city's goals. In an interview today she said there was no mention of her former ties to the firm "because I've not had any financial involvement with them for a few years," and that "when I was running for mayor I had no working relationship with them whatsoever." There was no requirement for her to recuse herself from the vote since there is no relationship between her and the company.

"I'm obviously very familiar with the entity, they bid on government contracts all the time, this was no different," Holland said. "I don't know if I flat out said that I was with them or not but I do know that I

stipulated that the kind of firm we needed at this time was one that had offices situated throughout Florida.”

Another key reason to drop the old firm: partisanship matters. Doug Bell, the former lobbyist, has long ties to Democrats in the state at a time when Democrats’ influence has waned to the point of near-irrelevance. Southern Strategy is oriented more toward the Republican ascendancy. “The partisanship plays a role, as far as conversations that go on with legislators,” Holland said. “I felt Doug and his father had a long history of strong Democratic presence in Tallahassee and were very effective under those administrations. I just felt that, him being with a smaller boutique firm, there were some challenges as far as bringing home appropriations for us as well as policy discussions.”

Ironically, Steven Nobile, whose Republican credentials are more pronounced than others’ on the council (which has no Democrats), was in favor of keeping the previous firm because of its familiarity with Palm Coast and city staff. “All three of them are very competent and companies that are going to serve us probably well,” he said, explaining why he’d stick with the existing one.

The city council chose to take a more hands-on approach this time in hiring its next lobbyists, likely an indication of Holland’s style and hope for a change. City Manager Jim Landon claimed it was “unusual,” as he put it to the council—a word he’s used when describing something done differently than the way he’s preferred it done over the years—“because usually the staff is the selection committee and then they bring that forth to you, but with your direction you felt like this was a firm that was tied directly into your relationship with our representatives and senators and it would be a good idea for you to be part of that selection process.” (He was speaking before the vote so had no way to know what “firm” would be chosen.)

At one point Holland referred to one bid for \$25,000, to which she said, “I would rather pay nothing for that service because that is really going to be the end result.” (An earlier version of this story incorrectly referred to the current contract as costing \$25,000. The city has been paying \$45,00 for its lobbyist for several years.) The appropriations system has changed, requiring legislators to put their requests in the form of individual bills that must go through the approval process, from committee to floor, rather than through the more veiled earmarks of the past, thus putting more of a premium on lobbying legislators bill by bill. For the process to work to a local government’s advantage, Holland argued that a big lobbying firm was necessary. She stressed that the city is already “behind the eight ball” since legislative committees had already started (they’re in full swing today, for instance), with fewer than 15 percent of bills filed passing by session’s end. She got no disagreement on that score.

Among the priorities for the city: getting state dollars for its utilities capital projects—which it has repeatedly failed to do in recent years, though Flagler Beach has been more successful on that score—getting money to widen the northern portion of Old Kings Road, a project that’s been lingering since before the housing bust a decade ago, and preserving home rule. (The Legislature has been encroaching on home rule, or local autonomy in governing, by “preempting” various areas of government, which means forbidding local government from regulating certain sectors if the state already regulates them, such as gun regulation and medical marijuana.)

The city had issued a request for proposal and short-listed four firms, which the council cut down to three: Southern Strategy Group, Gray Robinson, and Metz, Husband & Daughton, P.A. The three presented to the council at a workshop in late September. But as is usually the case with lobbyists, prognostications of a successful session tend more toward crystal-balling than promise-making. It comes down to relationships, who has whose ear, who in the leadership has had closer ties to which firm, a measure of luck, and so on. Lobbying is closer to gambling than science, its expenses often outrunning its benefits. And no matter how successful a lobbying effort—if that’s what helped land an

appropriation: legislators prefer to think it's their work, not that of lobbyists, that sealed the deal—there's always the threat of a veto, as has been the case for Palm Coast.

Metz, Husband and Daughton drew poor marks for being entirely based in Tallahassee and conceding a “down side”: that the firm is not always geographically close to its clients, but that its lobbyists travel extensively (and have worked with Sen. Travis Hutson and Rep. Paul Renner, Flagler's representatives.)

Gray Robinson's firm includes Dean Cannon, who was Speaker of the Florida House from 2010 to 2012, though Chris Carmody, who would have represented Palm Coast, presented to the council. Cannon was not there, but Carmody used the Canon card to get leverage with the council. His firm also represents Volusia County, which may have concerned some council members in terms of competing for next-door dollars.

Southern Strategy Group presented last, and drew questions from Council member Heidi Shipley, who'd been silent until then: she was concerned about the size of the firm and whether it could pay attention to a smaller client such as Palm Coast, though Matt Brockelman assured her (without evidence) that clients are treated equally.

Shipley had been concerned about the way Southern Strategy had stamped the Palm Coast logo on its response to the request for proposal, lending the impression that it somehow had Palm Coast's endorsement. (Holland in today's interview said it's common practice in government contracting, and that other lobbying firms did likewise. The RFP documents were not available for public examination on the city's website, alongside other agenda items related to the lobbying issue.) Brockelman noted that one of the firm's lobbyists worked on Renner's campaign, and that Hutson is “a friend.” But answers to Holland's questions about securing some of the \$30 million needed to widen Old Kings Road or protecting home rule were no less general or non-committal than those of previous firms.

“I believe strongly we need to send to them a very strong advocacy group that will give us the ability to have our voices heard,” Holland said before the vote last week.

The Joplin Globe
October 6, 2017

Lawmaker asks ethics commission to fine Joplin businessman

http://www.joplinglobe.com/news/local_news/lawmaker-asks-ethics-commission-to-fine-joplin-businessman/article_616eac43-83eb-5dff-adc7-38a254fbeb14.html

A Kansas City lawmaker filed a complaint this week with the Missouri Ethics Commission against Joplin businessman David Humphreys, saying he should be fined for “knowingly” employing an unregistered lobbyist for the last two legislative sessions.

A provision of Missouri law, listed in the complaint, states, “No person shall knowingly employ any person who is required to register as a registered lobbyist but is not registered pursuant to this section.” The law goes on to say that those who “knowingly” violate the law “shall” be subject to a civil penalty of no more than \$10,000.

State Rep. Mark Ellebracht, D-Kansas City, filed the complaint Oct. 2 after the Missouri Ethics Commission ordered Paul Mouton, a Webb City political operative, pay a \$200 fine for not registering as a lobbyist. In the consent order, Mouton said he was employed by Humphreys, president of TAMKO Building Products Inc. in Joplin, for the 2016 and 2017 legislative session to lobby for pro-business legislation.

Ellebracht said that since Humphreys had given millions in donations to candidates over the years and was “politically sophisticated,” he would be aware of the Missouri Ethics Commission filing rules.

“He broke the law,” Ellebracht alleged of Humphreys in an interview. “Everybody should operate under the same rules.”

Because Mouton didn’t register as a lobbyist, Ellebracht said that there wouldn’t have been timely reports on whether he gave lawmakers gifts during that time period. In the consent order, Mouton said he did not spend on lawmakers.

Ellebracht said he wasn’t against lobbying, as long as there is transparency.

“We can’t have that if people are lobbying in the shadows,” Ellebracht said.

According to Ellebracht’s complaint, a parking spot for Mouton was reserved 32 times in the last two years, putting him at the Capitol 32 times. Therefore, Ellebracht asked the Missouri Ethics Commission to pursue a fine of \$320,000.

Maria Jeffreys, a spokeswoman for Humphreys, said that Humphreys did not have any “specific” comment as to whether he knew if Mouton was not a registered lobbyist.

“David Humphreys has chosen to support causes and policies that he strongly believes in,” Jeffreys wrote in an emailed statement. “Unfortunately, those who disagree with him have decided to engage in personal attacks to further their own political agenda.”

Humphreys donated \$137,500 to Ellebracht’s opponent during the 2016 election. Ellebracht said any implication that the complaint was lodged for personal reasons was “odious.”

“It’s personal for me in that it’s personal for all of us in the state of Missouri to see the law upheld,” Ellebracht said. “It’s not personal in regards to vendetta or partisan politics.”

**WFTS- Tampa Bay
October 5, 2017**

St. Pete votes to get big money out of local politics

<http://www.abcactionnews.com/news/region-south-pinellas/st-petersburg/st-pete-votes-to-get-big-money-out-of-local-politics>

St Pete paved the way for a big change Thursday to get big money out of local politics.

ity Council leaders made the critical decision to ban super pacs and limit campaign contributions to \$5,000. The decision could create a ripple effect around the nation!

Winnie Foster has been fighting big campaign contributions for longer than most of us have been alive. “Since I was teenager. I’m 90 now,” she said with a smile. That’s 77 years of rallies, sign waiving and protests.

“The local governments are now on the front line for the protection and practice of democracy,” she added.

More than 100 St Pete residents flooded city council chambers Thursday dressed in red and demanding change.

Koiffe Hunt was one of those residents. “The average american feels like they don’t have a voice in their own government. That really bothers me”

The ordinance that passed on Thursday is monumental. It bans highly controversial super PACs and limits campaign contributions to \$5,000. Here’s why that’s so important to you: Let’s say a big construction company gives \$100,000 to a mayoral candidate and months later, they bid on a big city project and get it. “People need to have faith that their leaders are acting for them and representing them their voters as opposed to their donors and lobbyists who are funding these campaigns at increasingly alarming rates,” explained Brian Remler.

The Rick Kriseman, Rick Baker for mayor face off is a huge example. The candidates have raised more than \$2 million combined!

But some St Pete leaders worry this decision will land them in a courtroom. The change comes with a huge risk. St Pete taxpayers could be legally liable for up to 2 million dollars.

Foster says it’ll be money well spent. Her next focus is on state leaders. After all, she still has another decade of fighting to go. “I’m determined to live to be 100 because there is still so much work to be done,” she said.