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State regulators to Alaska lobbyist: Stop helping candidates raise money

Alaska lobbyists have been breaking an anti-corruption law by promoting fundraising events on behalf of political candidates, according to a preliminary opinion from the state's campaign finance watchdog.

Lobbyist Ashley Reed [asked for the formal opinion from the Alaska Public Offices Commission](#). He wanted to know whether state law allows for lobbyists to email copies of invitations to fundraisers for political candidates.

The Legislature banned lobbyists from engaging in fundraising activity more than two decades ago. Proponents of the ban said candidates who get help from lobbyists on their campaigns could, once elected, have a harder time refusing lobbyists' requests for action on legislation.

But in spite of the ban, [as Alaska Public Media reported last week](#), Reed and another lobbyist, Jerry Mackie, have been sending copies of fundraiser invitations to their clients and friends.

Reed and Mackie are among the state's most influential lobbyists, and each earns more than \$700,000 representing businesses in health care, oil development, mining and other industries.

On Monday, [the commission's staff issued a three-page draft opinion](#). It addresses Reed's question about whether he can send invitations to fundraisers.

The short answer: No, because that's engaging in fundraising activity, which the law bars lobbyists from doing.

The opinion is still a draft — it has to be approved by the commission's politically-appointed leaders at their next meeting, in January.

Reed, reached by phone Wednesday, wouldn't discuss the draft opinion.

"I don't want to fight in the media," he said. "I want the commission to decide."

Among the candidates who benefited from the emails from Reed and Mackie are Gov. Bill Walker and House Speaker Bryce Edgmon.

In earlier interviews, the lobbyists cited a section of the law that allows lobbyists to personally advocate on behalf of a candidate. The lobbyists also said they had informal approval to send the emails after talking with an employee of the public offices commission.

Gubernatorial Campaigns Trying To Take High Road On Ethics Reform

Both major campaigns for Maryland governor are trying to take the high road on the issue of ethics reform.

Democratic nominee Ben Jealous took aim at both Gov. Larry Hogan and state insurance Commissioner Al Redmer, who is a candidate for Baltimore County executive.

Jealous outlined on Wednesday measures he will pursue to tighten ethics regulations. His plan includes ambitious legislative actions he would take as governor to strengthen ethics regulations, prevent conflicts of interest and end pay-to-play politics at the State House.

"You cannot be a, of, by and for the people when we have a few wealthy special interests trolling our state capitol," Jealous said.

Jealous has divested himself from 24 of the 26 businesses in which he's involved. He's proposing legislation to require future governors with business interests to enter the businesses into a blind trust. He'll push a bill to require future statewide and presidential candidates to release three years of their tax returns. He pledges to refuse all meetings with lobbyists convicted of fraud or corruption crimes. And he vows to dismiss cabinet secretaries who run for elected office.

Democrats accuse Redmer of accepting more than \$57,000 in campaign contributions from the insurance industry during his bid to become Baltimore County executive.

"We need someone who is going to move us beyond the cynicism that too many people feel about their government," said state Sen. Rich Madaleno, D-Montgomery County.

The Redmer campaign issued a statement refuting that claim, stating, in part, "Al Redmer has made it explicitly clear that he has not and will not accept contributions from individuals or businesses regulated by the Maryland Insurance Administration and has actually forgone tens of thousands of dollars in potential contributions from this self-imposed rule."

The Jealous campaign criticized Hogan for not putting his real estate business into a blind trust and questioned whether he has used the power of his office for his personal benefit.

"When it comes to public service, integrity is absolutely at the core of what that means," said Delegate Robbyn Lewis, D-Baltimore City.

"Unlike Larry Hogan, who has met and raised money with convicted lobbyists, I won't take a meeting with any registered lobbyist with a criminal history related to fraud, corruption or any other lobby-related crime," Jealous said.

As Jealous made that pledge Wednesday, the Hogan campaign circulated a voicemail that Jealous left with lobbyist Gerard Evans, who was convicted of mail fraud years ago. The Hogan campaign contends the voicemail contradicts Jealous' own ethics proposal. But Jealous did offer an explanation of what happened and why.

Jealous is heard saying on the voicemail: "Gerry, Ben Jealous calling. I hope you are well. I'm calling you checking in with you about this campaign for governor."

When Jealous said he didn't recall the message he left, he listened to the voicemail, responding that, at the time, he didn't realize it was lobbyist Evans. He knows several other people by the same name.

"That call was made in error. We have a vetting process. If any check came in from him, we would have returned it," Jealous said. "We've shown that we've been willing to return checks that don't pass our vet. Gov. Hogan has not returned money from the National Rifle Association. He has not returned money from the pharmaceutical lobby. And he has certainly has not returned money from the lobbyist in question, far from it."

The Hogan campaign released a statement on the voicemail, saying, in part, "As this newly uncovered voicemail shows, Ben Jealous has been repeatedly violating his own ethics proposal and it proves he cannot be trusted to run an ethical administration."

"As far as my calls, I didn't know it was the Gerry Evans that I was talking to, and if a check came in and it was this Gerry Evans, we would have returned it," Jealous said.

The voicemail is an example of how intense the race has become. Before Jealous even detailed his ethics proposal, the Hogan campaign released a reaction statement to the proposal that included the voicemail.

Clean Missouri proponents tout proposal's benefits

Standing before a stack of boxes in the Capitol Rotunda, representing lobbyists' gifts to lawmakers, supporters of the proposed Clean Missouri amendment to the state Constitution urged people to support it when they vote next month.

"Currently, there are no limits of any kind on the free stuff that paid lobbyists can give to our state legislators," Christine Doerr, a U.S. Navy veteran from Columbia, said during the brief ceremony late Friday morning. "Since 2004, lobbyists with business before the state have given legislators nearly \$900,000 a year in liquor, steak dinners and overseas trips.

"And it gets worse — they hide the recipients of nearly 70 percent of the gifts through a loophole that allows them to report gifts as going to groups, instead of naming the individual legislators who took the gifts."

The proposed amendment is on the Nov. 6 ballot as Amendment 1.

If voters approve it, the Clean Missouri proposal includes a provision prohibiting lobbyists from giving any gift to lawmakers or their employees worth more than \$5.

Other provisions include lowering the current campaign contribution limits for state legislative candidates, requiring lawmakers' records and committee meetings to be open to the public, and prohibiting lawmakers and their staff members from becoming lobbyists until at least two years after they have left the Legislature.

Both the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Missouri Republican Party have announced opposition to the proposal.

Dan Mehan, the chamber's president and CEO, told the News Tribune on Friday the proposal is a "wolf in sheep's clothing" and a bad idea that Missourians shouldn't embrace.

Mehan pointed to a comment he made last month, after the Missouri Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal of his case trying to keep the amendment off the ballot, when he said:

"Amendment 1 isn't designed to clean Missouri — it will fleece us."

Under current law, lobbyists have to report their gifts to lawmakers.

But, Benjamin Singer, of St. Louis, Clean Missouri's spokesman, told reporters at the Capitol the gifts leave "at least an appearance of corruption" for many Missourians.

"We believe that legislators and their staff should be working for taxpayers and Missourians and voters — not for lobbyists," he explained. "It's critical to ensure that we have that (proper) accountability."

One of the chamber's and Missouri GOP's biggest complaints is the proposed amendment's plan to draw new legislative districts in a different way.

"Under the guise of ethics reform, Clean Missouri, or Amendment 1, is an attempt to radically redistrict Missouri using a ridiculous fairness rule that would solely benefit Democrats," Chris Nuelle, the Missouri GOP's spokesman said.

Currently, when legislative districts need to be redrawn every 10 years, to reflect changes in Missouri's population, the governor names two commissions comprised of residents recommended by the congressional district committees of the two largest political parties — and those commissions redraw the district boundaries based on population data and statutory requirements.

Singer said: "Right now, the maps are drawn by insiders behind closed doors, to protect powerful politicians of both parties.

"The opposition is trying to keep a corrupt situation in place."

The amendment adds a state demographer, chosen by the state auditor with approval from the Senate's majority and minority party leaders, who will draw the new district lines based on clear criteria including compactness, natural and political boundaries, keeping communities' interests, fairness and political competitiveness.

"Not every district has to be competitive," Singer said. "Amendment 1 does not require every district to be 50/50. It requires more fairness and more competitiveness for the map as a whole."

Both Nuelle and Mehan argue Clean Missouri really isn't a grassroots plan.

"Clean Missouri's name is ironic, considering it's propped up by George Soros, liberal groups like Planned Parenthood and millions in dark money," Nuelle said Friday.

Mehan added: "Missourians must now decide whether we should allow out-of-state activists to rewrite our constitution, meddle with the balance of power in our Legislature and open the door to higher taxes and more regulation.

But Doerr and Singer said the proposed amendment is "a bipartisan issue" backed by leaders in both major parties who want change in the current process, as well as by many "average" Missourians.

"We encourage (people) to take a look at the policy and at the people who are supporting it," Singer said. "We've got folks who are politically endorsing it or are financial supporting it from all across the political spectrum.

"(We have received) over 27,000 donations averaging less than \$100, from both sides of the aisle. This is about putting Missourians before political parties (and) lobbyists."

Singer added: "We have an opposition that is looking to protect a corrupt system — and they're willing to lie and mislead voters however they can."

Nuelle countered: "Missourians shouldn't be fooled by Clean Missouri's misleading name and marketing."

[Saudi Lobbyists in D.C. Caught in Pompeo Pickle](#)

Washington lobbyists still on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's payroll amid fallout from the presumed death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi are awaiting the outcome of Secretary of State [Mike Pompeo](#)'s trip to the region this week before making any further moves.

Pompeo met Tuesday in Riyadh with Saudi officials, including Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the brash young second-in-command of the royal government, and planned to head Wednesday to Turkey where Khashoggi was last seen.

Already, three of the Saudi government's most prominent lobbying firms in Washington — Glover Park Group, Harbour Group and BGR Group — have severed ties with the lucrative foreign client, which last year spent more than \$17 million on U.S. influence campaigns, according to the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics.

The remaining members of the kingdom's lobbying team are waiting to see what comes of Pompeo's trip, said people familiar with the matter. Should relations between the two countries break down, the K Street shops would be under additional pressure, including from their existing clients and contacts on Capitol Hill, to drop the Saudis as a client.

But dropping one of the globe's biggest K Street power players would have an obvious financial downside, especially given the damage control needed now.

"This is a country that spends big on lobbying," said Sheila Krumholz, executive director of the Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks foreign and domestic lobbying. "Presumably the numbers we see this year will go up and likely more than they would have without this recent event."

In Washington, when clients are in trouble, that's when they need lobbyists the most and tend to spend the most money.

"Their millions spent on lobbying is the tip of the iceberg in terms of their investment in the United States," Krumholz said.

Former Minnesota Republican Sen. [Norm Coleman](#) leads a team from his law and lobbying firm, Hogan Lovells, in representing the Saudi government, which is under contract to pay the firm \$1.5 million for 2018, according to disclosures filed with the Justice Department under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

Coleman did not respond to a request for comment about the status of his work for the kingdom, and a representative of the firm declined to comment. An official with the Saudi embassy in Washington also did not respond to a request seeking comment about which firms represent the country in the United States.

The Saudi government has been a pivotal Middle East ally of the United States, but the disappearance and alleged killing of Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul has sent the longstanding rapport into a potential crisis.

Some of D.C.'s biggest lobbying shops appear to continue to represent the kingdom including Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, which has a contract valued at \$125,000 a month, according to disclosures filed with the Justice Department. A lobbyist for Brownstein said, "We are continuing our representation."

Representatives for MSL Qorvis, a longtime lobbying firm for the Saudi government, did not respond to a request for comment, nor did officials with the CGCN Group or the Hohlt Group. The Harbour Group did not respond to a request for comment, and a lobbyist with the Glover Park Group declined comment. Jeffrey Birnbaum, a spokesman for the BGR Group, said the firm was "no longer working for Saudi Arabia," but did not elaborate.

Sources familiar with the situation said the shops that stopped working for the Saudi government did so after Turkish officials alleged that Saudi officials interrogated and then killed Khashoggi, disposing of his remains in pieces.

Khashoggi, a Saudi citizen, was a contributing columnist for the Washington Post.

The incident has sparked the ire of some in Congress.

Democratic Sen. [Christopher S. Murphy](#) of Connecticut wrote an op-ed Monday in The Washington Post saying the situation should force the United States to revisit its relationship with the Saudis.

“When I came to Congress a little more than 10 years ago, support for Saudi Arabia was broad and bipartisan. But now, as the new crown prince engages in increasingly reckless behavior, more and more of us are wondering whether our ally’s actions are in our own best interests,” wrote Murphy, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations panel. “Here’s the bottom line: The Saudis are not telling us the truth.”

As for Sen. [Lindsey Graham](#), he plans to “sanction the hell out of Saudi Arabia” in the aftermath of the disappearance of Khashoggi.

“You know, we deal with bad people all the time, but this is in our face. I feel personally offended. They have nothing but contempt for us,” the South Carolina Republican said Tuesday morning. “Why would you put a guy like me and the president in this box?”

President Donald Trump tweeted Tuesday afternoon that he had taken a call with Crown Prince Salman, during Pompeo’s visit, and that the prince told Trump “that he has already started, and will rapidly expand, a full and complete investigation into this matter. Answers will be forthcoming shortly.”

Salman has been praised as a modernizer but criticized for his intolerance of dissent and for his unilateral actions in the Middle East.