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[Gillum dismisses ‘made-up FBI controversies’ while leaving questions unanswered](#)

Beset by new questions about relationships with lobbyists and FBI agents, Andrew Gillum has been short on answers.

The Democratic nominee for governor was quick to claim vindication and political persecution after a former confidant released hundreds of emails and text messages last week detailing Gillum’s travel and campaign activity in 2016. He’s dismissed an imbroglio about whether he failed to disclose gifts from developers who turned out to be undercover federal agents as “made-up FBI controversies.”

But Tallahassee’s mayor has been either unable or unwilling to answer some of the questions posed about his trips around the globe. And while his campaign denies new allegations that a federal investigator paid \$4,300 to cater a kickoff fundraiser for the political committee funding his gubernatorial run, it can’t explain why finance reports contain no mention of any expenses surrounding the event.

“I’ve said frankly everything that I know to say on this,” Gillum said Saturday in Tampa during an interview on his campaign bus. “Now folks are asking me to answer for which caterer does what? I’ve done more events than I could count. I couldn’t tell you anything about a food venue or quite frankly whether somebody cooked it or somebody catered it. But that apparently is the new expectation.”

If Gillum sounds a little exasperated, it might be because he’s been answering questions about the FBI for about 20 months now. It was June of 2017 when prosecutors hit City Hall and a Tallahassee redevelopment agency with subpoenas for documents related to development deals and a handful of lobbyists and entrepreneurs, including Gillum’s close friend and former campaign treasurer, Adam Corey.

Gillum, already a candidate for governor at the time, quickly acknowledged that he’d met with federal investigators but said he’d been explicitly told that he’s not a subject of any FBI probe. A few months later, he told the Tallahassee Democrat that he’d severed ties with Corey, a lobbyist who in 2016 set up a meeting at his restaurant and an evening in Manhattan between Gillum and undercover FBI agents posing as developers and business investors.

Plenty of people thought the FBI probe — which spun off several ethics complaints and ensuing state investigations around the mayor’s travel — would tank Gillum’s primary campaign. It didn’t. Nor have predictions of impending indictments come true: No one has been charged with any crimes, and the state’s Commission on Ethics hasn’t deemed Gillum to have violated any Florida laws.

But the cloud hasn’t dissipated, and Republican Ron DeSantis didn’t make it past his first post-primary win interview before tearing into Gillum and suggesting the Tallahassee mayor was

corrupt. Over time, the race has taken on a tenor eerily similar to the 2016 presidential campaign, with shouts of “Lock him up!” reportedly peppering DeSantis events Sunday.

Gillum has spent just about his entire general election campaign fending off questions about his travels and contact with a mysterious businessman named “Mike Miller.” After the Tallahassee Democrat reported on a trip to Costa Rica with friends who’d received \$2.1 million in public funds for a Tallahassee restaurant in 2013, Gillum voluntarily disclosed airfare and bank statements. In September, he showed a \$400 withdrawal to support his story that he paid for his own plane tickets and took out cash to pay for his \$941.95 share of a luxury villa that Corey’s lobbying firm had rented in Costa Rica. And he provided a New York hotel invoice made out to the Open Society Foundation to support his story that he first traveled to New York on private business for his job with People for the American Way.

Gillum said that he learned after the New York trip that his younger brother, who’d made the trip to New York with Corey, paid for his pass to the popular musical “Hamilton” by swapping a Jay Z concert ticket with Corey. He’d previously told The Democrat that either “Mike Miller” or “Mike Sweets,” businessmen now believed to have been undercover FBI agents, told him a boat they took to the Statue of Liberty was a friend’s, so he assumed it was cost-free.

Then this week, only days away from an election that could make Gillum one of the biggest stars in U.S. politics, Corey began releasing scores of text messages and emails detailing efforts to arrange trips around the world with Gillum and their time spent together in Manhattan and abroad. Though much of what was in the documents has already been reported by The Democrat, the emails and texts contained revelations, including texts that proved that Miller, the undercover FBI agent, did indeed purchase Gillum’s “Hamilton” ticket and the hotel room where he stayed afterward (even if it didn’t touch on whether Gillum or his brother reimbursed anyone).

The documents also included details of a trip to Qatar, where Gillum invited Corey after agreeing to appear at a University of California, Los Angeles conference in the capital city of Doha. Gillum and Corey also made a stop in Dubai, and the mayor was copied and mentioned on emails about meet-ups between Corey and Richard Smotkin, the Comcast lobbyist who drew media attention earlier this year after it emerged he had helped organize a \$100,000 trip to Morocco for former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt. Gillum and Smotkin appeared on the same panel in Doha.

The documents also reflected efforts to organize an April 2016 fundraiser at Corey’s Tallahassee apartment to benefit Forward Florida, a newly created political committee that has since raised \$32 million toward Gillum’s gubernatorial run. Corey invoiced Miller \$4,300 for a catering bill afterward.

In the fallout, Gillum has stuck by his explanations about how he paid for his New York trip and what he knew — or didn’t know — about the FBI’s involvement at the time. His campaign says the attorney releasing Corey’s communications to the public is a Republican operative disguised as a defense attorney.

But they haven’t given responses to some unanswered questions, including:

— Why Gillum’s campaign has no record of any expenses for the April 11, 2016, Forward Florida fundraiser at Corey’s house, and why Gillum would write a “personal note” to Miller if he paid for nothing.

- Whether Smotkin purchased anything for Gillum during his stay in Doha or Dubai.
- Why Gillum has said he felt like Corey manipulated him into meeting with undercover agents digging for dirt, when records showed he relied on the lobbyist to arrange meetings and at times asked him to make connections.

Gillum's campaign has declined over the past week and again over the weekend to clarify these issues, which were placed in writing and emailed to his campaign. In lieu of answers, his campaign issued a statement blasting Corey's attorney, Chris Kise, for trying to "smear and distort Mayor Gillum's record in the closing days of this race." They complained that voters are hearing about "Republican-led attacks" instead of policy-driven discussions around health care, guns and education.

Gillum, however, did agree to a quick interview on his tour bus, during which he insisted he'd turned over every record he could find related to his travels and referred to articles about these issues as "sensational." He said Floridians "could care less where I traveled, who I traveled with and what I said and what picture I took."

"What I want them to have certainty around are my ethics," he said. "There has yet to be a finding of ethical violation of me and certainly nothing criminal. And I've asked people to measure me off of what my 15 years of service have been."

To some extent, Gillum may be stuck in a he-said-they-said with Corey and Kise. He says he paid cash for the Costa Rica trip and several others arranged by Corey, but Kise says that's not true. Gillum's campaign says Miller didn't pay for his April fundraiser, and the released emails don't include any documentation of payment (even though Corey emailed the committee's finance consultant after the event about Miller "co-sponsoring the food.")

Gillum, in a taped interview with NBC Miami's Jackie Nespral that ran Sunday, said he claimed vindication after the documents were released because they proved his explanations that he was in New York on work, met up with Corey in the evening and got his "Hamilton" ticket from his brother.

"While those text messages may seem new to everybody, I've given my testimony to the ethics commission. I've known about all of these all along. My story hasn't changed one time," he said. "When you tell the truth you don't have to change your testimony."

Still, Gillum has had to continue to field questions about his trips with Corey and his interactions with Miller in part because there remain unanswered questions. And while he's never changed his story, he has slowly released details over time, leading to a dribble of news that has stuck with him throughout the campaign.

(EDITORS: STORY CAN END HERE)

The controversy is sure to hang with Gillum until Election Day and beyond, whether he wins or loses. What's unclear is whether more will come from Corey, and whether voters will see the whole fiasco as an indictment on Gillum's character or a non-story about cocktails and show tickets.

"What I get from people is they say, 'I'm so sick of these people crapping on you over nothing.' For so many people, this is not about a Broadway show, it's about a sideshow," he said Saturday on his tour bus. "It's just an interesting way in which people are reporting on this that has

caused, quite frankly, a lot of people in our base to push back strongly by going to the ballot box.”

Amendment 12 would make Florida's lobbying laws the strictest in the nation

Amendment 12, which is on the ballot next month, would make Florida’s lobbying law the toughest in the nation, banning politicians from lobbying the government for six years after leaving office.

The amendment takes aim at some former top politicians have come under scrutiny for cashing in on their connections and making big money as lobbyists when they leave the Legislature, but experts say it can’t work miracles or completely put an end to the so-called revolving door of Florida politics.

U.S. Senator Marco Rubio is one of those politicians who some say may have benefited from the revolving door system, landing a new job in a big statewide law firm.

Rubio’s salary increased substantially after he served as Florida Speaker of the House. Shortly after leaving state office, Rubio joined a law firm that, among other things, lobbied state government. His staff says he didn't work for the lobbying part of the firm and never lobbied anyone.

Rubio held that job before starting his own practice in 2009, shortly before he sought a seat in the U.S. Senate.

ABC Action News reached out to Rubio's staff to see how he plans to vote on Amendment 12, but his office didn’t respond to a request for comment by our deadline.

If voters approve Amendment 12, all elected and appointed state leaders would have to wait six years to lobby at the state house.

“I think it’ll make sure people are entering public service for the right reasons – not to profit,” said Ben Wilcox of the watchdog group Integrity Florida.

Wilcox says the amendment would make Florida’s lobbying laws the toughest in the nation.

“I think it’s always good for the state to lead in the area of lobby reform and ethics reform,” Wilcox said.

But Florida Tax Watch opposes the amendment.

“I think it’s embarrassing that we as a state would have to have a provision in our constitution that says elected officials can't use their elected office for personal gain,” said Bob Nave of Florida Tax Watch.

Nave's group argues Amendment 12 would also diminish the pool for high-level appointed positions, like cabinet secretary posts, because the lobbying rules would also apply appointed officials.

USF Political Science Professor Dr. Susan McManus says the new lobbying rules aren't a magic fix for the state's ethical problems and current state and federal already prohibit politicians who personally benefit from office.

"You're not supposed to, if you're in office, take advantage of your position to gain financial benefits from it," said McManus.

For example, former Jacksonville Congresswoman Corrine Brown, was sent to federal prison earlier this year after being convicted of stealing \$800,000 from a scholarship fund she managed.

"Can it eliminate corruption?," asked McManus. "No."

Update:

After our story ran, we were contacted by Marco Rubio's spokesperson who said the Senator did not join a law firm that lobbied the legislature after he left the House. He joined a large firm that did state administrative work in 2004. He left the law firm in January of 2009 just two months after he left the legislature and opened his own firm and did NOT lobby the state or anyone.

The spokesperson did not indicate how Rubio plans to vote.

While Rubio worked for the law firm, its website said "The attorneys and lobbyists in our Government Relations Practice Group are committed to help our clients get what they need from a wide variety of governmental entities at the local, state and national levels."

Rubio was not listed as one of the five attorneys in the Government Relations Practice Group.

[Missoula city, county hire lobbyists for session](#)

Missoula and Missoula County collectively will spend about \$53,000 on lobbyists for the 2019 legislative session.

Missoula County Commissioners on Thursday agreed to pay \$18,400 to Northbound Public Affairs to lobby on their behalf, plus incidental costs "not to exceed \$2,500." Commissioner Cola Rowley said they expect Northbound to check out about 500 bills that will be under consideration by the Legislature that could have an impact on the county.

Commissioner Jean Curtiss added that not only will Northbound advocate for some leftover bills from the 2017 session, the company also will lobby on some new bills the county wants to promote.

"We have a bill that we proposed during the last session that didn't make it out of committee," Curtiss said. "It gives the county authority to have speed limits of less than 35 mph on paved

roads. That makes sense in a situation like we have in Lolo, where there are 25 mph signs in these spaces where they are not supposed to have them.”

The county also is seeking to undo some of the legislative actions from the previous session, like cuts in the amount the state covers for expert witnesses at trials and mental health services, as well as the amount paid to house inmates at the county jail.

“We have a contract with the state for \$89 per day, but they’re only paying \$64 per day, so they’re in breach of contract with us,” Rowley said.

In addition, the county is seeking reimbursement for what are known as “entitlements.”

“It sounds like a bad word, but we are doing a job for the state and we should get paid for it,” Curtiss said.

Payments for the county’s lobbyist come out of the general fund, which mainly is property tax dollars.

The city of Missoula agreed during its recent budget deliberations to pay \$32,200 to lobbyist John MacDonald for the 2019 session. Ginny Merriam, a spokesperson for the city, said they’ll pay MacDonald \$2,000 for pre-session activities, and \$30,000 for the 90-day session. Included in the funding request is \$700 for bill tracking software.

In budget notes, the city writes that the “city’s political interests during the legislative sessions are often complex. Without a professional lobbyist, the city could miss out on opportunities to communicate with our legislative delegation. Considerable staff time would be required to travel to Helena and attend hearings.”

Bryan von Lossberg, the city council president, said they have a wide range of interests they’ll track during the session. Those include anything to do with urban renewal, tax increment financing and special districts; transportation and infrastructure; self-government and energy policy.

“These are broad topics, but typically the session touches all those areas,” von Lossberg said.

“Net metering, policies with utilities, obviously anything pertaining to land use, subdivision and townhome development — there’s a lot of categories for us to track.”

While the city and county have some shared interests, they historically have used separate lobbyists.

The city also pays for the services differently than the county does. Instead of general fund dollars, the city taps into fees from planning revenue, building permit revenue, transportation revenue, and money from water, wastewater and storm water collections. However, the bulk of the funding, \$16,600, comes from the Missoula Redevelopment Agency assessments, whose budget mainly comes from Tax Increment Financing (TIF) dollars.

Merriam said the proportions are based on topics where MacDonald has spent his time during past sessions.

“The overarching goal is to share the cost around the city but trying to keep away from the general fund as much as possible because it adds to the tax bill. Also, these are things we lobby about because there are bills for them all the time,” Merriam said. “John MacDonald spent about half his time on TIF legislation, so we split half of his fee with the MRA and the rest was divided by how much historically he has spent his time, tempered by the ability of that (district) to pay.”

[New Mexico voters to decide on need for ethics commission](#)

It will be up to New Mexico voters to approve a constitutional amendment that would allow for the creation of an independent ethics commission.

The proposal is on the ballot this year after many years of debate in the Legislature over establishing such a panel to address complaints involving state officials, legislative employees, lobbyists and government contractors.

The state has had a string of public corruption scandals going back more than a decade, with two state treasurers, two state senators, a secretary of state and a deputy insurance superintendent going to prison on criminal charges.

The number of states with ethics commissions has steadily increased in recent years, leaving New Mexico as one of six without one, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

"I think it's overdue," former U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman told the Albuquerque Journal. Bingaman, a Democrat, and former Gov. Garrey Carruthers, a Republican, are helping rally support for the measure.

"This will help, I believe, to reassure people that the folks representing them are generally honest and above board," Bingaman said.

Heather Ferguson, executive director of New Mexico Common Cause, said an ethics commission will help build trust in government.

Aside from investigating possible corruption, she told the Santa Fe New Mexican that a commission would serve as an educational tool for officials seeking to avoid violating laws.

She said the panel should be able to provide opinions much faster than the state attorney general's office, which also weighs in on questions from lawmakers and others.

It's unclear whether an ethics commission would reduce public corruption. A 2013 study at the University of Missouri found no correlation between corruption rates and the existence of such commissions.

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Paul Gessing, president of the libertarian think tank Rio Grande Foundation, argued in a recent opinion piece that smaller government, rather than a commission, would allow journalists, activists and taxpayers to better track and analyze bureaucracies, programs and subsidies.

If approved by voters, the Legislature would determine how the commission would operate. Lawmakers would have to decide when complaints are made public and how to fund the commission's operations.

Some worry the Legislature's ability to dictate how the commission would work could give some lawmakers a chance to water down the proposed agency, making it less effective.

Republican Rep. Jim Dines of Albuquerque is a retired attorney who spearheaded a bipartisan push to put the question to voters. He said much of the commission's business should be handled in the open.

"The real strength of the commission will be its transparency," Dines said. "We don't want it to be a toothless tiger."

State Senate candidates divided over Clean Missouri

Bernskoetter, Wilson troubled by redistricting plan; Thompson calls it a good 'first step'

Missouri lawmakers for years have talked a lot about ethics and ethics reform as they relate to politics and the state government — but their proposals have failed to win support in both chambers, so they haven't become law.

Supporters of Amendment 1, the Clean Missouri proposal on the Nov. 6 ballot, say passing it would make the changes lawmakers have failed to achieve.

State Rep. Mike Bernskoetter, R-Jefferson City, and one of three people on the Nov. 6 election ballot in the race for the state Senate's 6th District seat — said he likes parts of the proposal.

"But the main thing that the Clean Missouri thing does is the change in redistricting," he said, "and I think most people want their state rep (and senator) to be somebody they know and somebody they get along with well."

The other two candidates on the ballot in the 6th District race are Democrat Nicole Thompson and Libertarian Steven Wilson.

Thompson supports the proposed amendment.

"I do think that is a good, solid first step to ending a lot of our (campaign) finance issues and gerrymandering in our state," she said, "and making sure that the government has a fair and open process when it comes to creating and passing legislation."

But Wilson thinks the proposed amendment isn't practical.

"They want to give a third-party player the authority to come up with a (legislative) district that is more fair," he told the News Tribune. "Who watches the watcher? Who is this third-party player? Who do they work for?"

The proposed amendment would have the state auditor choose an independent "state demographer" to redraw the state House and Senate districts every 10 years.

The demographer still would have to create districts that are "compact and contiguous," the amendment's supporters have said — and the proposal seeks to achieve more balance among political parties by requiring the new districts to be "designed in a manner that achieves both partisan fairness and, secondarily, competitiveness" based on recent election results.

Today, redrawing districts based on new population numbers is done by two bipartisan committees — and the proposed amendment keeps those committees to review the state demographer's work.

Bernskoetter said: "I don't think people are going to like the idea of having — it's been referred to as 'spaghetti-like,' where you could go all the way from Boone County to Osage County, to make a district 50/50. At least, the way it is presently, either we have to have bipartisan support for redrawing the districts — or it's non-partisan and the judges do it. If you go to this Clean Missouri thing, it's going to be completely partisan — whoever the auditor is is basically in charge of redrawing the districts."

Wilson said he's concerned the auditor's selection of the state demographer could make districts more partisan.

"The only answer that I give people is, if you want to get rid of gerrymandering, you're going to have to change the political system" away from our current winner-take-all method, Wilson said.

Thompson said she wasn't concerned about the state demographer's work because "it's a non-partisan position."

Although he opposes Clean Missouri's redistricting language, Bernskoetter supports capping the donations any one person can give a single candidate — the proposed amendment sets that cap at \$2,500 for state Senate candidates, per election, (currently \$2,600) and \$2,000 for state representative candidates (also currently \$2,600).

He also supports preventing lawmakers from leaving their elected posts and, immediately, becoming lobbyists. The proposed amendment sets a two-year waiting period for lawmakers and their staff members between working in the Legislature and being hired to lobby the Legislature. If Missouri voters reject the proposed amendment, he said, the Legislature will "still continue to have those conversations and, hopefully, we'll come up with something that both bodies will agree on, and the governor will sign."

Thompson likes all of Clean Missouri's proposed amendment, and said: "I think the lobbyists' gifts (limits) is a huge part of that amendment, as well as the open records requirements."

Courts have ruled the Legislature can make its own rules under the state Constitution, so some of the Sunshine Law's requirements for government agencies like city councils, county commissions and school boards don't apply to the Legislature — and the proposed amendment would change that.

Wilson said, even if voters pass it, "Clean Missouri won't get through the Supreme Court because they've already made a ruling that financing a campaign is freedom of speech."

Wilson also said Clean Missouri shouldn't be needed, "if the voter is actually identifying with people of integrity" and paying "attention to who you're voting for."

Bernskoetter, Thompson and Wilson are seeking to succeed now-Lt. Gov. Mike Kehoe in the seven-county district that serves Cole, Moniteau, Morgan, Miller, Maries, Osage and Gasconade counties.
