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[Duncan Hunter defends campaign spending on affairs with staffers, lobbyists as 'overtly political' outlay](#)

Congressman Duncan Hunter's defense lawyers Friday asked a judge to bar federal prosecutors from using evidence of infidelity in the criminal case against Hunter, who is accused of improperly spending \$250,000 in campaign dollars on personal expenses.

Prosecutors recently filed motions alleging Hunter spent campaign donations on hotels, trips, meals and drinks to support extramarital affairs he had with at least five women.

Hunter's attorneys argued in a filing on Friday that prosecutors were trying to embarrass their client and influence a potential jury against him.

They also said that because the alleged relationships were with lobbyists and congressional staffers, prosecutors can't prove all the expenses didn't serve legitimate political purposes.

"Just as with Mr. Hunter's platonic relationships, his friendships often blur the line between personal and professional, which is a widespread occurrence in modern politics," the filing states.

"However unpopular the notion of a married man mixing business with pleasure, the Government cannot simply dismiss the reality that Mr. Hunter's relationships with Individual's 14-18 often served an overtly political purpose that would not have existed irrespective of his occupation."

Prosecutors have said Hunter had affairs with five people which they refer to by numbers rather than names.

The filing was one of a flurry of motions and responses to motions that both sides in the case filed in San Diego federal court, in advance of a hearing on Monday.

The prosecution side has filed motions asking that its star witness, Hunter's wife, Margaret Hunter, be allowed to testify about the couple's history of dubious campaign spending.

The defense side has asked the judge to move the case far away from San Diego — or better yet, to dismiss it altogether.

In all, 17 separate motions and 16 responses were filed in the past week by lawyers representing the U.S. Attorney's Office and by defense lawyers representing the Republican congressman from Alpine.

It is unclear whether U.S. District Judge Thomas J. Whelan will hear oral arguments to support or oppose the many motions, or even if he will rule at the Monday hearing. He could issue his decisions over the days or weeks to come.

Rep. Duncan Hunter is scheduled to appear. Gregory Vega, the former federal prosecutor now representing Hunter, filed 10 motions.

Seven came from U.S. government lawyers.

Experts say the eventual rulings on the [rash of filings](#) in USA v. Hunter et al could make or break the case.

"It's a very important day for both sides," said Shaun Martin, a University of San Diego law professor who has followed the allegations since last August, when [Hunter was co-indicted with his wife](#) on 60 criminal counts.

Both Hunters initially denied all charges.

But at a surprise hearing earlier this month, Margaret Hunter [pleaded guilty](#) to a single charge of conspiracy and agreed to cooperate with prosecutors. She issued a public apology for her crime and faces up to five years in prison when she is sentenced later this year.

One motion filed by government lawyers asked Judge Whelan to rule that Margaret Hunter can testify against her husband, that the spousal privilege exemption is not applicable in this case because both defendants knew they were breaking campaign laws.

"The Hunters encouraged and assisted one another's embezzlement," prosecutors said.

The court records prosecutors filed in the past week appear to show the congressman and his wife fully understood what they were doing.

"Does my card work babe? I need \$," Duncan Hunter texted his wife in March 2015. "No doesn't," she replied moments later. "Take out petty cash up to \$100 off your work card, 1959 PIN. Today needs to be work day. We used to do petty cash all the time with Bruce it was great."

"Bruce" was an apparent reference to Bruce Young, who served as the Hunter campaign treasurer three years earlier.

In another text exchange minutes later, Margaret Hunter advised her husband to use the campaign credit card to pay for some "Hawaii shorts" her husband wanted to buy.

"Do a small pro shop purchase with your work card," she wrote. "Get some balls for the wounded warriors. Golf."

The Wounded Warrior Project is a veterans charity based in Jacksonville, Fla. The 47-page indictment filed in August singled out this transaction as one method the Hunters used to justify using campaign donations for personal expenses.

The defense argued that the case should be dismissed on the grounds that federal prosecutors [lacked "impartiality"](#) and that campaign violations should be adjudicated by regulators — not criminal prosecutors.

"This case was already the subject of (Federal Elections Commission) action yet the prosecutors chose to insert themselves into FEC's domain and charge numerous criminal offenses based on conduct usually resolved by the FEC (or the House)," Vega wrote.

Martin said his review of the defense motions shows that the defense attorney is employing every legal tactic he can think of to limit testimony, or even win a dismissal ahead of the September jury trial.

"The defense is swinging for the fences, with long-shot motions that would be major victories if they were granted," he said. "The prosecution's motions are more modest, and are designed to bolster the government's case and make it more difficult for the defense to appeal to a sympathetic jury."

Prosecutors in a motion also asked the judge to prevent the defense from presenting evidence for its claim that other members of Congress also misused campaign funds.

Another U.S. government motion urges Whelan to exclude any testimony from Hunter that his lawyer advised him that the spending was legal.

Former federal prosecutor Jerry Coughlan said that so-called advice-of-counsel defense appears unlikely to be allowed at trial.

"It depends to a certain extent on the nature of the particular charge, but it's very rare because you are assumed to know the law," he said. "Most crimes they won't allow you to claim that your lawyer said you could do it."

The defense filed a motion asking the trial be moved to the Eastern District of California, a jurisdiction encompassing a huge swath of northern and eastern California, a majority of which voted for President Donald Trump. The district's main courthouses are in Sacramento and Fresno.

Coughlan said the judge is not likely to move the trial outside San Diego, where the defense argued that the jury pool has been tainted by negative publicity.

"Change-of-venue motions in a federal court are almost never granted," he said. "I can't remember one. The judge will in all likelihood say, 'We'll deal with these concerns when we pick a jury.' That argument is not going to go anywhere."

The most notorious motion prosecutors filed dealt with the alleged extramarital affairs.

Three of the women were lobbyists and two were congressional staffers, including one who worked for Hunter, prosecutors said. Hunter moved in with one of the women soon after they began dating in April 2009, three months after he joined the U.S. Congress, they added.

"Evidence of the intimate, entirely personal quality of Hunter's specific encounters with these women is essential to demonstrate that his spending to facilitate those encounters was improper," the motion stated.

Federal prosecutors were aware of the explosiveness of the infidelity claims against the congressman, a self-described family-values Christian who has long enjoyed the support of East County faith leaders.

According to the filing, titled "United States' Motion to Admit Evidence of Defendant's Use of Campaign Funds to Pursue Personal Relationships," prosecutors negotiated with Hunter and his lawyers to stipulate to some of the findings so the allegations would not need to become public.

The congressman and his attorneys declined to reach such an agreement.

The same document mentions "additional potentially sensitive conduct" that prosecutors also have sought to keep out of the public court files.

"As with the evidence described above, the United States has offered to craft a factual stipulation that would eliminate the need to introduce this potentially sensitive evidence at trial," the motion states. "With respect to this evidence, Hunter has indicated that he may seek such a stipulation."

Vega has asserted that the criminal case against Hunter is improper, citing federal election laws that anticipate disagreement or misinterpretation of what constitutes a personal expense when it comes to using campaign funds.

"Congress also limited criminal enforcement of (election law) violations by restricting prosecutions to violations involving large amounts of money," he wrote in one request that charges be dismissed. "Disclosure violations involving less than \$2,000 are not subject to criminal prosecution at all, and violations involving less than \$25,000 are a misdemeanor."

The indictment accused Hunter and his wife of systematically using more than \$250,000 in political contributions for personal expenses over six-plus years.

Prosecutors said they used campaign funds for golf outings, private-school tuition for their children, oral surgery, bar tabs, tequila shots and, in one case, a \$600 plane ticket to fly a pet rabbit named Eggburt across the country.

The hearing Monday is scheduled for 10 a.m. The trial is scheduled for Sept. 10.

[How a longtime aide to Texas Gov. Greg Abbott became a top lobbyist](#)

The National Reined Cow Horse Association, organizer of the Snaffle Bit Futurity, an **[annual cowboying contest](#)** in Fort Worth that carries \$1.1 million in payouts, wanted some government help: The group thought the contest and others it hosts might qualify for money from the state's **[Major Events Reimbursement Program](#)**. Run out of Gov. Greg Abbott's office, the program is meant to attract economic activity to Texas, and by the association's reckoning, its Texas events have an economic impact of about \$10 million.

To qualify for the state subsidy, however, the association needed lawmakers to add the organization to a select list that includes the National Football League, NASCAR, the Academy of Country Music, the Commission on Presidential Debates and Formula One.

To navigate the Capitol, officials with the association — headquartered in the small North Texas town of Pilot Point — needed some help. In early March, they signed Daniel Hodge, **[a former Abbott aide turned lobbyist](#)**, to a contract worth as much as \$150,000, as they set about promoting **[House Bill 2402](#)**, which proposed adding the association to the catalog of qualifying groups for the state subsidy.

The association was one of more than two dozen clients Hodge, 41, represented during the legislative session. He earned as much as \$3.7 million total this year, according to state lobbying records.

At one committee hearing, association Executive Director Jay Winborn told lawmakers, "We're growing substantially in terms of popularity. We continue to trend upwards and continue to build on our western tradition." At another hearing, Hodge registered in favor of the bill.

The Texas House and Senate overwhelmingly approved HB 2402, with opposition coming chiefly from the chambers' most conservative Republicans. On June 14, Abbott signed the bill.

The new designation could be lucrative for the association: While a bill analysis by the state Legislative Budget Board found that the "specific fiscal impact to the state is unknown as the size and number of events that would become eligible and held in this state is unknown," records of disbursements from the major events program show that several cutting horse events in Fort Worth have already qualified for taxpayer payouts worth \$515,000 to \$1.4 million in 2017 and 2018.

Winborn did not return a request for comment.

Expert reporting

Asher Price has covered politics and environmental and energy issues in Central Texas for more than a decade, including examinations of how Texas sources its electricity; the state's long-term water supplies; and the consequences, science and politics of climate change.

The bill's author, Rep. Charlie Geren, R-Fort Worth, told the American-Statesman he filed the bill at the behest of his friend Dan Gattis, the former Republican state legislator who represented part of Williamson County and who, as president of Gattis Cattle Co., breeds horses for use in cattle operations, as well as for competition, show and sale.

"It was a pretty straightforward ask by Dan, just before the session, and it's a good event for Fort Worth," Geren told the Statesman. Geren said he couldn't remember if he had met with Hodge about the bill.

Gattis did not return a request for comment.

There is no suggestion that anyone did anything unlawful: In many ways, the story of how the association won its potential subsidy is a conventional Capitol tale. But the story illuminates the thin membrane between public service and the lobby, and how someone like Hodge can, within a couple of years of hanging a shingle, become one of the highest-paid lobbyists in the state.

Longtime lobbyists say the transition is a natural one, using knowledge learned and relationships built in the public sector for effective advocacy outside it. Government watchdogs, on the other hand, have long pointed to the close link between the Legislature and those who peddle access to the government purse as an erosion of public trust.

In recent years, lawmakers have tried, with limited success, to expand restrictions on the well-worn and lucrative path from state government to lobbying.

Loyal adviser

Hodge, who is from Fort Worth, earned a bachelor's degree in history from Davidson College in North Carolina and moved to Austin to attend law school at the University of Texas. In 2001, he started working for the Abbott campaign for lieutenant governor sorting mail. (By the end of summer, prompted by a domino effect started by Phil Gramm's retirement from the U.S. Senate, Abbott had switched targets, running instead for state attorney general.)

Hodge succeeded in another early task — collecting county Republican Party chair endorsements — and was soon asked to organize a variety of coalitions, such as Sheriffs for Abbott and Ranchers for Abbott. Working also as a travel aide and fundraiser for Abbott, he soon became indispensable.

Abbott was elected, and Hodge worked his way up to first assistant attorney general, managing operations under Abbott, and, after Abbott was elected governor in 2014, as his chief of staff.

This was a period of pitched partisan politics and a yawning ideological divide: As attorney general, Abbott once described his job as waking up each morning and figuring out a way to sue the Obama administration.

Among Abbott's inner circle and through the halls of the Capitol, Hodge won a reputation as a straight shooter and as a shrewd, dependable adviser to the politician he served.

His proximity to power appears to have paid off.

In September 2017, having told the governor two years earlier that he intended to wind down his government work, Hodge stepped down from public service and started a lobbying business.

“I have been privileged to have Daniel Hodge by my side dating back to my tenure as attorney general, bringing excellence to the organizations in which he has served. I am truly grateful for his commitment and service to the state of Texas,” Abbott said at the time.

By October that year, Hodge had signed up as clients AT&T, insurance companies and an American Indian tribe, among others, earning as much as \$300,000 for the final 2½ months of 2017, according to state lobbying records. By this year’s legislative session, which ran from January to May, lobbying records show he was among the top compensated lobbyists in Texas. (Because lobbyists report their compensation in a range, he could have been paid as little as \$2.35 million.)

In a sense, Hodge is emblematic of the go-to lobbyists at the Capitol: Nearly every one of them joined the lobby after stints in state government.

Lobbyist Rusty Kelley, who lists as much as \$4.3 million in contracts, served as chief of staff to former Democratic House Speaker Billy Clayton and chief sergeant at arms in the Texas House. (Kelley’s business partner, Carol McGarah, lists many of the same clients and contract amounts among her clients.) Many of the most prominent lobbyists were top aides to a lieutenant governor or worked on powerful finance committees. Some of them were lawmakers themselves. Their connections are typically central to their pitch to prospective clients.

Lobbyist Logan Spence, whose contracts total as much as \$2.3 million this year, lists on his firm’s website his posts dating to a 1999 internship with a state senator, as well as a stint as policy director in Gov. Rick Perry’s office and his work as campaign manager during Dan Patrick’s 2013 run for lieutenant governor and then as Patrick’s chief of staff.

“Logan’s broad experience in the Texas House, Texas Senate as well as the offices of Governor and Lt. Governor, give him a unique ability to advocate for his clients in Texas government,” says his bio.

In this way, Hodge is different: Known for his discretion, he does not have a website for his firm, DTH Strategies — which carries the initials of his name — nor does he put out news releases touting his work.

He declined comment for this story.

This year, his earnings included:

- As much as \$250,000 for a contract with Academic Partnerships, a Texas-based company that markets and provides technical support for online academic programs offered by colleges and universities.
- As much as \$150,000 representing AT&T.
- As much as \$150,000 representing Silver Eagle Distributors, the nation’s largest distributor of Anheuser-Busch products.
- As much as \$100,000 to represent the Lower Colorado River Authority as it faced a Sunset Commission review.
- As much as \$250,000 representing the Chickasaw Nation, which operates casinos just north of the Texas-Oklahoma border.

It’s hard to know how successful Hodge was, but his clients appear satisfied — his list has been growing year over year.

Unlike some other firms, which might have high overhead and lots of assistants, Hodge has only a single associate, a former legislative director at the governor's office who also is registered as a lobbyist.

"Over the years, we observed Daniel's work in both the attorney general's office and the governor's office and were impressed," LCRA spokesman Bill Lauderback said. "Daniel conducts himself in a highly professional manner, and we were pleased to have him assist us during the session."

Overall, the river authority is spending as much as \$660,000 on lobbyists in 2019, according to records reviewed by the Statesman.

'Strong moral compass'

There are no lobbying limits at the Legislature. A lawmaker or legislative aide can work in the Texas Senate or House one day and as a lobbyist the next, but many executive branch agencies bar employees from immediately lobbying their former colleagues.

Abbott, for one, implemented a policy that employees who work in the governor's office can't lobby the office for a minimum of one year. And if at the end of that year there has not yet been a legislative session, the former employee must wait until the next session ends.

"Daniel is guided by a strong moral compass, and he adhered to the governor's office ethics policy," John Wittman, a spokesman for Abbott, told the Statesman. "Daniel was a close aide and trusted adviser to Gov. Abbott for over a decade, and his relationship with the governor and our office continues to thrive. Given the success he experienced during his time in the governor's office, it's no surprise he was able to translate that to the private sector."

State law enshrines other executive branch limits: Former state employees and board members are barred from working for companies for two years with whom they worked on a state procurement contract. Rules also bar some state employees from representing a person in particular matters in which they participated, such as an investigation, contract or rulemaking. State law also prohibits a state agency from entering into any contracts with a former or retired employee of that agency for one year after that employee's departure. For two years after a board member or executive head leaves a regulatory agency, he or she may not appear before or communicate with officers of the agency with the intent to influence the board. And state law restricts for four years a state agency from contracting with a former executive head of the agency.

But recent attempts at regulating state officials who lobby their former colleagues have been unsuccessful. In 2017, one such proposal led to a high-profile dispute between the legislative and executive branches.

Abbott called on lawmakers to pass ethics reform measures during the 2015 and 2017 sessions. In 2017, three ethics bills passed, and three others — including one that would have required former lawmakers to take a two-year "cooling off period" before joining the lobby — died in the House, where some members grumbled that the Abbott-backed reforms applied to the Legislature but not to his office.

Reps. Lyle Larson, R-San Antonio, and Sarah Davis, R-Houston, criticized Abbott for not asking the Legislature to address ethics during the 2017 special session and called on him [to back a clutch of bills](#), including another attempt at instituting a two-year cooling off period for former lawmakers and statewide elected officials who want to lobby. They also called for

prohibiting governors from appointing major campaign donors to state boards and commissions and for [banning political contributions to the legislative and executive branches](#) during special sessions and 20-day veto periods. (Abbott had been sending out fundraising solicitations during the 2017 special session.)

Abbott, who as governor prescribes the policy areas for the Legislature to tackle during a special session, rejected adding ethics legislation to the agenda. Wittman called the lawmakers' plea to the governor showboating.

The next year, Abbott endorsed GOP primary challengers to Larson and Davis, an almost unheard-of maneuver for a sitting governor of the same party, but both lawmakers won reelection.

In a move that some interpreted as a sign that ethics reform would not be a priority in the 2019 session, new House Speaker Dennis Bonnen, R-Lake Jackson, dropped "Ethics" from the title of the panel previously named the House General Investigating and Ethics Committee. Under Bonnen's rules, most ethics bills were referred to the State Affairs Committee, where no significant proposals gained traction.

Corrosive effect?

Longtime lobbyists say the current system serves the public well.

"Texas has a strong lobby law, providing strict requirements of when and how to provide the public, and the governmental bodies with which they deal, with detailed info about their clients and issues," said Jack Gullahorn, an attorney who founded the Professional Advocacy Association of Texas and who runs an ethics compliance practice.

"The public has cynicism about lobbyists and legislators, and together they think no good can come of that," Gullahorn said. But, he said, "there's nothing wrong with someone opening a practice after leaving state service if they're providing a legitimate, ethical service using knowledge they have of the process and of the issues."

"When I hear from folks who say, 'I'd like to be a lobbyist,' I suggest they go work at the Legislature for a few years and learn the process," he said. "There's nothing untoward about that, and in the long run, we're well served by people who understand how government works on the inside while working from the outside."

Andrew Wheat, research director of Texans for Public Justice, a group that tracks money and politics, has a different view: The revolving door has a corrosive effect, he said.

"There's a biennial lobby mating ritual in which former public officials embrace corporate clients on a bed of cash," Wheat said. "Watching these wanton displays through the revolving door's glass walls drains public confidence in government. Viewing this Nature Channel show repeatedly fosters the impression that the money-and-power courtship dance begins long before public officials leave office."

This year, Abbott was mostly silent on the issue of ethics reform.

[Legislators make sense of lobbyist spending](#)

Lobbyist spending may be nearing record levels, but Rogers County's legislators are among the bottom of the pack in terms of gifts received.

Recent reports from the Ethics Commission shows that lobbyists spent about \$473,500 on meals, beverages, and gifts for lawmakers during the first five months of this year despite rules meant to curb the practice.

The Ethics Commission says this is a 34 percent increase over last year.

The legislators representing Rogers County, though, said they made a conscious effort to avoid lobbyist gifts as best they could.

While they were all near the bottom of the pack, one managed to have received the smallest amount of any legislator in the state.

The Ethics Commission reports indicate:

Representative Mark Lepak (R)- \$943.08

• Representative Tom Gann (R)- \$4.31

• Senator Micheal Bergstron (R)- \$1,307.89

• Senator Marty Quinn (R) - \$1,047.14

Each of the legislators were asked what this report means to them, what their constituents need to know and what the numbers really mean.

Rep. Tom Gann

With only \$4.31 reported, Gann was noted as receiving the smallest amount of gifts from lobbyists. He said this was a personal choice.

He said the report is done yearly to track lobbying spending and it's influence, or perceived influence, on lawmakers.

"The Ethics Commission's disclosure rules are intended to let citizens know who is paying for what and to limit their influence. I think this benefits citizens so faith can be restored in their elected officials. Elections and decisions can be won without the use of lobbyist money. There are two lies that people believe: Contributions don't make a difference and lobbyist contributions don't make a difference to me personally," he said.

Gann said he believes it is important for people to know who their lawmakers are accepting contributions from, "so they will better know who has an influence, or at least a perceived influence, over their vote."

He added, "Every lawmaker has to make their own personal decision on whether to accept such gifts or contributions. I personally have chosen not to."

Gann conceded that lobbyists have a role as information givers and that with term limits in place, lobbyists' institutional knowledge of issues can be of value.

"Therefore, I can see why people might want to spend time over lunch or dinner hearing a lobbyist's perspective. But, the issue of contributions or gifts could be perceived as clouding the issues. Therefore, in my opinion, there is no reason to accept such gifts," he said. "Anytime a lobbyist and I have lunch or dinner, I reimburse with personal funds for the sake of my own conscience in maintaining a code of conduct just like other professionals."

Gann said this was a campaign pledge he made to constituents, that they would be his top priority.

"I can represent their interests without being constrained by the demands of the special interests in Oklahoma City. This allows me to build true professional relationships based on

communication and the merits of the issues instead of having any conflicts of interest. With zero conflicts of interest, I naturally tend to represent my district instead of special interests," he said.

Rep. Mark Lepak

Rep. Mark Lepak said the report doesn't carry much weight with him personally, and that most lawmakers don't "keep score" of lobbyist spending.

"I might be curious to see where I land in context to others in a report like this, but don't think too much about it personally. I suspect most of the spending is the form of meals, 'refreshments,' and tickets to events. I will accept an invitation to a dinner or event if there will be some policy discussion of interest, or if there is someone attending with whom I want to meet," he said. "For example, I accepted a ticket to a boxing match once, at the invitation of our state boxing commission, where I had a chance to learn about their work. The matches were secondary, although a first for me, and interesting up close."

Lepak added, "Other than a dinner like that, or making an appearance at a reception where all legislators are invited, I spend most of my time in the evening privately. There is always something to read and study, and the days inside the capitol are busy, with little opportunity for focused time to contemplate the issues of the day or bills soon to be heard."

In his time at the capitol, Lepak said he has seen the impact of the rules governing these gifts.

"The ethics rules around lobbyist "gifts" have reduced their impact just in the five years I've been there. My first Christmas, for example, I saw a large box of chocolates delivered to every office. That box got smaller, and then eventually disappeared as the guidelines tightened," he said.

Lepak likened these gifts to campaign fundraising.

"I suspect most office holders will tell you that such spending has no impact on their decision-making, and might even take offense at the suggestion that such a thing has any influence on them. I would say it is naive to believe it doesn't have an influence at some level. If you are spending time with people, whether other legislators or lobbyists, you will develop a relationship of some kind, and that has impact. Personally, I view it the same way I view campaign financing and fund raising—I appreciate the gesture and support, but don't keep score," he said. "I can't remember most of them, although I have to record them for required ethics reporting. If you are contributing, then you are saying you support my candidacy, for whatever reason you choose. That said, I'll try to listen to and discuss issues with anyone who engages. I suspect most of us look at it that way. The most effective way to influence your legislator is by establishing a good relationship with him or her. And for me, good policy arguments will even trump that. I think of a group meal with a lobbyist the same way."

When asked what constituents need to know, Lepak said, "I think most constituents will think what they think about these reports, and their opinions will be shaped more by their relationship with their legislator."

Sen. Micheal Bergstrom

"Having this information easily available to the public is very important," Bergstrom said. "It helps Oklahoma citizens to see what is being provided to their elected officials by lobbyists."

He said, "When my constituents look at my information they will see that I spent time with a wide variety of organizations and individuals, everything from a celebratory gathering at NEO A&M College in my district, to a dinner where lobbyists unsuccessfully tried to get me to support an electric rate increase that would negatively impact my constituents, to a lunch provided by the Oklahoma Cattleman's Association."

Bergstrom said these meals and gatherings are often a place to " network with other members of the legislature, industry leaders, and those who have expertise in things like education, transportation, tourism, workforce development and criminal justice."

When asked what the numbers really mean, Bergstrom explained: "My guess regarding the increase in lobbyist spending this year is that it is related to the large, unprecedented number of new legislators we saw this year. Lobbyists want to get their foot in the door with new legislators, and they tend to want to introduce themselves at a meal."

Senator Marty Quinn

Quinn said he's making a conscious effort to not allow himself to be overly influenced by special interest groups.

"I'm very selective on who I go to dinner with," he said. "And it's about making sure you're not going out to dinner wasting time, that you're doing something legislatively productive. That reflects a very conscious effort that I don't allow myself to be overly influence by special interests.

However, if I was the appropriations chairman you'd see that number go up significantly because there's only so many hours in the day at the capitol."

Quinn said it's not as much about the dollar amount, as who the money is coming from.

"To me, what you look for, is when you see an exorbitant amount of money from one particular group you should watch the legislation. Did it turn out to be in the best interest of the constituents you represent or is it in the best interest of the special interest group who was funneling money into the events and meals?" he said.

He suggests following the money trail to see the result of the investment, or gift: "How did it effect the constituents back home? Was it in the best interest of taxpayers or special interest groups?"

He called out one industry in particular.

"How much has the wind industry spent in campaign donations and taking people out to eat? And look to see what has happened on the issue in legislation. That's an easy trail to follow. The wind industry has had too much influence over the taxpayer dollar in Oklahoma over the last 12-14 years at least," he said.

When it comes to the dollar amount next to his name, Quinn said it's about relationships and trust.

"In my opinion, and many, many, others as evident in my election numbers, people believe I can be trusted and this is another example showing I can be trusted," he said.

[Lawmakers score \\$270K jackpot in campaign donations from stalled gambling bill](#)

The only big winners from the [state's stalled sports gambling bill](#) were the lawmakers — they scored a \$270,000 jackpot in campaign donations from casinos and gambling apps.

Gambling-industry players set to cash in on the mothballed proposal — which would have allowed New Yorkers to place sports bets online from anywhere in the state via servers at the four upstate casinos — have been making massive political contributions since January 2018, a Post review of campaign finance records found.

Gov. Cuomo was one of the biggest benefactors, collecting \$25,000 from the principal owner of del Lago Resort & Casino in Seneca County, Thomas C. Wilmot. He cashed in another \$25,000 from Resorts World, which operates casinos in Queens and the Catskills and is owned by Malaysian gaming company Genting.

A good-government critic blasted pols who took the industry’s political “bets.”

“Sky-high campaign contributions from companies seeking favorable determinations from the governor create a perception the government is for sale,” said Alex Camarda of Reinvent Albany. The mobile-gambling bill stalled in the Assembly in the final hours of the 2019 legislative session last week, when Assembly leader Carl Heastie didn’t bring it to the floor for a vote, Assembly sponsor Gary Pretlow (D-Mount Vernon) told The Post. Cuomo has questioned the constitutionality of the measure.

The sponsor in the Senate, Sen. Joseph Addabbo, scored \$13,760 in gambling donations. They included \$500 from FanDuel and DraftKings, which operate digital betting apps and casino sports books.

The Queens Democrat also received \$7,500 from lobbyists affiliated with the two companies in October 2018, two months before he was appointed chair of the Senate Racing, Gaming and Wagering Committee.

He noted he’s been a longtime supporter of legal gambling, and that the donations came after he co-sponsored a similar bill last session.

“I was supportive of a gambling facility at Aqueduct,” Addabbo said of the Resorts World Casino that opened in his district in 2011.

Other lucky pols include former Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan (R-Long Island). The New York Gaming Association PAC gave him \$1,500.

Heastie (D-Bronx) and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Yonkers) also received \$1,000 each, from the New York State Gaming Association PAC, and Tioga Downs Casino owner Jeff Gural and his wife, respectively.

The Gurals contributed \$120,100 to lawmakers’ campaign coffers in 2018, including \$20,500 to the Democratic Assembly Campaign Committee.

Addabbo said Friday he is “hopeful” Cuomo will approve mobile sports betting in next year’s budget.

“We will talk about this again in January,” the lawmaker said, estimating that legal mobile sports gambling could bring in \$10- to \$30-illion in annual tax revenue, and \$48 million in one-time licensing fees.

[NRA Suspends Two Leaders Amid Accusations of Coup Attempt](#)

The National Rifle Association suspended its top lobbyist and one of his deputies, adding further turmoil to the gun-rights group’s leadership ranks as it wages legal battles on multiple fronts and prepares for a bruising 2020 election cycle.

The NRA confirmed Thursday that it had suspended Chris Cox, the lobbying chief who was viewed widely as a future leader of the group, and his deputy chief of staff, Scott Christman.

The moves came after Oliver North, the former NRA board president, was ousted from the organization in April after it accused him of leading an attempted coup against Wayne LaPierre, the executive vice president of the NRA who has long served as the organization's leader. North alleged that LaPierre used the group to enrich himself. As part of the infighting, the NRA sued Ackerman McQueen Inc., its longtime advertising firm, and in turn Ackerman cut ties with the group.

On Wednesday night, the NRA filed a lawsuit against North arguing that he didn't have the right to legal fees from the NRA. The lawsuit says that Cox, described as a "likely successor" to lead the organization, participated in the failed bid to oust LaPierre.

The leadership struggle came to a head on April 24, according to the lawsuit. That's when North talked to a LaPierre aide by phone and threatened to reveal unflattering details about LaPierre's travel and clothing expenses unless he resigned and supported "North's continued tenure as president," according to the complaint, which calls the exchange an extortion.

North also promised to arrange an "excellent retirement" for LaPierre through Ackerman McQueen if he resigned, the NRA claims.

The NRA filed its suit against Ackerman McQueen in mid-April, claiming it refused to turn over details about North's contract with the advertising firm. Last month, the NRA sued again, claiming Ackerman McQueen engineered the failed coup attempt by leaking damaging information to undermine NRA leaders.

The firm fired back with a breach-of-contract countersuit, claiming that the NRA was just trying to get out of its service agreement with the firm and that it had provided all the information sought by the gun group.

North was aided in his efforts against LaPierre by NRA board member Dan Boren, a former congressman who's now a top executive for Chickasaw Nation, a major Ackerman McQueen client, according to the NRA complaint filed on Wednesday. Boren "helped to choreograph the ultimatum they presented to Mr. LaPierre," it said.

In emails obtained by the NRA, Boren "admitted his knowledge that Ackerman may have been invoicing the NRA for full salaries of employees who were actually working on the Chickasaw Nation account." Those emails also show that Cox was an "errant fiduciary" who "participated in the Ackerman/North/Boren conspiracy," the NRA claims.

The complaint asks a judge to declare that the NRA shouldn't be required to cover North's legal fees for subpoenas arising from its litigation with Ackerman McQueen and from a Senate Finance Committee request for information. North's attorney had demanded that the NRA cover his legal fees for the congressional probe and for "any other inquiries" that he "may receive" in the future, it said.

Cox's suspension was reported earlier by the New York Times. Cox's spokeswoman told the Times that he played no role in the coup attempt.

The suspensions throw the group's political operation into turmoil just days after President Donald Trump announced his re-election bid. The NRA spent heavily to support Trump during

the 2016 race, and Cox has met with the president multiple times during his tenure. Speaking at the NRA's annual meeting this year, Trump was introduced by Cox rather than LaPierre.

A lawyer for North, Brendan Sullivan, declined to comment and said he would respond in a court filing.

As the group's chief lobbyist, Cox oversaw nine different divisions, including federal, state, and local government affairs. "Cox develops and executes independent political campaigns and legislative initiatives. He also serves as the Association's principal contact with the United States Senate and House of Representatives, the White House and federal agencies," the NRA Foundation wrote on its website in a profile of Cox.