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[Bernie Sanders urges his 2020 rivals to reject pharma and insurance company money](#)

Bernie Sanders plans to crank up the pressure on his 2020 Democratic primary rivals over health care.

During a speech Wednesday advocating for “Medicare for All,” the Vermont independent will urge all Democratic presidential candidates to reject money from the insurance and pharmaceutical industries. He will push the field of about two dozen not to “knowingly” accept donations greater than \$200 from political action committees, lobbyists or “top executives” for the industries, the Sanders campaign said.

“If we are going to break the stranglehold of corporate interests over the health care needs of the American people, we have got to confront a Washington culture that has let this go on for far too long,” Sanders will say, according to his campaign. “That is why I am calling on every Democratic candidate in this election to join us in rejecting money from the insurance and drug industries. Candidates who are not willing to take that pledge should explain to the American people why those interests believe their campaigns are a good investment.”

Sanders has long pushed for a government run, single-payer health insurance system to offer comprehensive coverage to all Americans. He has contended the system will not only cover more Americans and cut their health costs, but also root out corruption and inefficiencies in the private health industry.

But as a means to stand out in a crowded field, single-payer has lost some of its luster for Sanders as it gains traction within the party. Four of Sanders’ primary competitors — Sens. Cory Booker, D-N.J., Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., Kamala Harris, D-Calif., and Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass. — co-sponsored the Medicare for All bill he introduced earlier this year.

By calling on his rivals to reject drug and insurance company money, Sanders aims to distance himself again on health care — which voters consistently rank among their top concerns. It also fits into a broader strategy within the Democratic field: Many candidates have railed against large individual contributions or corporate donations, arguing they corrupt the political process.

It was not immediately clear how much the industry executives, lobbyists and PACs have given to 2020 Democratic candidates so far. Candidates filed their financial disclosures for the second quarter, the first major fundraising period for some contenders, earlier this week.

Sanders’ remarks Wednesday come as he faces more pressure over his support for Medicare for All. Former Vice President Joe Biden — who has led most early national and state polls in the race — [slammed the single-payer proposal while outlining his health care plan on Monday](#).

He argued Medicare for All “means getting rid of Obamacare.” While Sanders’ plan would effectively scrap the private insurance industry, a foundational piece of the current health-care system that Biden helped to usher in, it would expand access to coverage and benefits for Americans.

The Biden campaign did not immediately respond to CNBC’s request for comment.

Some Democrats have worried about the political ramifications of advocating for getting rid of the private insurance industry. For instance, while Harris raised her hand at last month’s Democratic debate when asked if she would get rid of private insurance, she later backtracked.

[Short list of North Dakota ethics commission candidates shows varying backgrounds](#)

A tribal college president, a fire department chief and the former mayor of a North Dakota oil boom town are among 12 candidates favored for the state's new ethics commission.

A selection panel composed of Gov. Doug Burgum and Senate leaders from both parties has cut down the initial list of [almost 70 applicants](#) over the course of three meetings in recent weeks. The panel must come to a consensus on five commissioners.

Though the selection committee has slowly trimmed its choices down, Burgum [previously cautioned](#) that people who weren't initially selected could still be in the mix.

The selection committee hadn't set a date for its next meeting as of Tuesday morning, July 16.

The ethics commission, which was created through the passage of a constitutional amendment last year, will be able to write rules on rules on transparency, corruption, elections and lobbying as well as investigate allegations of wrongdoing.

Here's a quick look at the background of the remaining candidates, based on applications and resumes provided by Burgum's office:

Ronald Goodman, Oakes

Goodman was a lawyer in private practice before becoming a county judge in the early 1990s. He was North Dakota district judge from 1997 to his retirement in 2009, when he became a surrogate judge. He still holds that position. He said he worked for “several years” in the state’s human service system as a drug and alcohol counselor and program supervisor. He’s a U.S. Air Force veteran.

“I feel my varied background as a lawyer/judge, my work as a counselor, and my military background will assist the commission if I am appointed,” he wrote.

Cynthia Lindquist, Devils Lake

Lindquist is the president of Cankdeska Cikana Community College in Fort Totten, N.D., a post she has held since 2003. The tribal college has an average enrollment of about 200 students and an operating budget of \$12 million. She previously worked in the University of North Dakota's medical school and as the executive director of the North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission, which acts as a liaison between state and tribal governments.

Lindquist said she has “diverse professional experiences at national, state, local and tribal level” and “will commit to helping the commission to fulfill its intent for the people of North Dakota.”

Cynthia Lindquist talks at Candeska Cinka Community College about the new Head Start facility in 2017. (Joshua Komer/Grand Forks Herald)

Paul Richard, Fargo

A licensed attorney, Richard was the executive vice president of Sanford Health in Fargo from 2013 to 2018, which made him the “overall Fargo market leader.” He said the market’s operations were in excess of \$1 billion in annual revenues, and his tenure included the opening of a massive new medical center in 2017. He previously was Sanford’s chief legal officer and general counsel for MeritCare Health System, which merged with Sanford in 2009.

“My career experience includes providing advice and counsel in areas of professional ethics, corporate governance and regulatory compliance,” he wrote.

Ward Koeser, Williston

Koeser retired as mayor of Williston in 2014 after 20 years at the post. His tenure saw a surge of oil development in the Bakken, bringing rapid population growth and stress on government services. He’s now president of the Northwest North Dakota Community Foundation and the Williston State College Foundation.

“Ward is a man of strong ethics, honest and down to earth. He looks at both sides of an issue before giving an opinion and that opinion is usually on point,” Roger Cymbaluk said in a reference letter.

David Anderson, Bismarck

After retiring from the North Dakota National Guard, where he worked as Army chief of staff and then Army commander, Anderson took a job as coordinator of military student services at the University of Mary, where he’s been since 2015. In 2003 and 2004 he commanded the first North Dakota Army Guard unit to serve in Iraq.

“I believe my experience would greatly assist the establishment of the ethics commission to serve the best interests of the state, doing so without a political agenda, independent of ideologies and protecting free speech,” he wrote.

Bill Knudson, Mandan

A retired businessman, Knudson had an appraisal company that completed appraisals “for most banks in Bismarck and Mandan.” He was involved with the local chamber of commerce for “a number of years.”

“I believe that if asked bankers in the community would agree that I was ethical and fair in my valuation analysis,” he wrote.

Kenneth Christianson, Fargo

Christianson is a psychologist at Neuropsychology Associates and a clinical professor at the Department of Clinical Neuroscience at the University of North Dakota’s medical school. He also co-founded an “ethics review study group,” which he described as a “journal club that has met twice monthly since 2002.” His past employment includes working as a psychologist at Sanford Health and various roles at the North Dakota State Hospital.

Marilyn Foss, Bismarck

Foss described herself as a semi-retired attorney who has “worked in government relations in North Dakota for more than 35 years, working with the Legislature as an assistant attorney

general, appointed state official and registered lobbyist.” She served on attorney standards and ethics committees for the State Bar Association of North Dakota. In the 1980s, she was the commissioner of what’s now known as the state Department of Financial Institutions.

“My goal as member of the ethics commission would be to develop administrative rules that are practical and protective of legislator and citizen interests and clear in their interpretation and application,” she wrote.

Daniel Fuller, West Fargo

Fuller has been the chief of the West Fargo Fire Department since 2015, where he’s “working hard to keep up with the challenges being one of the fastest growing cities in the state presents.” A native of Massachusetts, Fuller joined the U.S. Air Force and was assigned to the Minot base. He later worked as a senior firefighter in Minot and as well as a flight paramedic on a part-time basis.

“Since my time serving on active duty, I’ve continued to internalize the core value of integrity, which to me means doing the right thing, even when no one else is looking,” he wrote.

Clarice Liechty, Jamestown

Liechty became the first woman to be Jamestown’s mayor when she was elected in 2006. She was previously the director of what’s now known as the North Dakota Grain Growers Association in the late 1980s. Her resume says she’s involved in farming and real estate.

Liechty said she’s known for “studying the issue, asking questions and listening.”

Shirley Meyer, Dickinson

A farmer and rancher, Meyer served in the Legislature as a Democrat as recently as 2011 and was a regional director for then-Sen. Heidi Heitkamp for six years. Her resume includes a six-year stint on the North Dakota Beef Commission.

Jeffrey Risk, Minot

Risk is the commissioner of the Mon-Dak Athletic Conference, which is composed of eight state, community and technical colleges in North Dakota and Montana. He worked for almost 30 years as a physical education instructor in Minot and later served as the Nedrose High School athletic director. He was previously a member of the state’s teacher licensing board.

“As a retired educator, athletic director and official I have been applying black and white rules to gray situations my entire career. I do not have a law degree but do possess an extra dose of a lost commodity — common sense,” he wrote.

[California Lawmakers Consider New Rules For Political Ads](#)

Elections come and go, but the season for political advertising sometimes seems to never end.

Facebook users in California, for example, may have noticed ads in recent months showing a woman with duct tape over her mouth and text that warns: “Legislators are leaving sexual assault survivors from public universities out to dry.”

The ads urge readers to sign a petition seeking to add public universities to legislation that would give students at private universities more time to sue their schools over sexual assaults.

Neither the ads nor the website where they lead offer any clue about who is paying for them. Unlike most election season ads about candidates or ballot measures, they don’t have to.

Now, California legislators are considering a proposal by Assemblyman Kevin Mullin that would require groups buying such “issue advocacy ads” about legislation to identify themselves and major funders in the same sort of disclaimers required in election campaign commercials.

“This is about well-funded, sophisticated special interests,” said Mullin, a San Mateo Democrat.

Proponents say the measure would be the first in the U.S. to address what they see as a burgeoning issue in the world of influence peddling as interest groups seize on the anonymity afforded by the internet and social media advertising.

“I’ve never seen so many issue ads,” said Trent Lange, president and executive director of California Clean Money Campaign, which is sponsoring Mullin’s bill.

Critics argue the proposed law would discourage grassroots activism, particularly around hot-button issues.

Current law requires groups lobbying the California Legislature to disclose expenses such as advertising in routine quarterly filings with the secretary of state.

But an ad campaign may be over at that point, and groups do not necessarily have to specify which ads they funded, noted Kati Phillips, spokeswoman for the campaign finance reform group Common Cause California, which supports Mullin’s bill.

Chasing down who exactly is behind an advertising campaign to influence legislation at California’s Capitol can be a journey through corporation filings, political spending disclosures and anonymous social media pages — all sometimes leading to a dead end.

Mullin’s legislation would apply to groups spending more than \$10,000 a year on advertisements about pending legislation or regulation. A disclaimer attached to the bottom of such ads would have to include not just the group behind the ad but its top three donors, if any have given more than \$10,000. Some political messages — such as emails to a group’s members, small buttons or skywriting — would be exempt.

The California Teachers Association and some other labor unions — big spenders in California politics — have opposed the bill, saying it would stifle advocacy.

David Keating, president of the Institute for Free Speech in Washington, D.C., argued that requiring a group to put the names of its top three funders on advertisements could discourage people from supporting campaigns involved in divisive issues.

That would mean fewer ads and awareness campaigns about legislation, he said.

“You’re going to get less speech, less information about what’s going on in Sacramento,” Keating argued.

There are other examples of anonymous ad campaigns this session.

Turn on talk radio or check Facebook in many parts of California, and you may see an ad about pending legislation that would cap the interest lending companies charge on installment loans with rates spiraling into the triple digits.

The commercials are part of a campaign called Don’t Lock Me Out California, which argues the proposed law would leave customers with fewer options when they need quick cash in an emergency.

Click on the group's ads on Facebook, where it has spent more than \$26,000 to reach Californians, and there is no contact information. The ads do not indicate who is paying for the messages urging Californians to tell their lawmakers to vote against the bill.

However, Federal Communications Commission records show the Online Lenders Alliance, a national trade group that lobbies for the industry, bought time on Sacramento-area radio stations to air the Don't Lock Me Out California ads. The group is not necessarily required to register with the Secretary of State's Office.

Spokesman Andrew Ricci said the alliance has not made any financial contribution to the campaign, which he described as the work of a coalition that includes Online Lenders Alliance members as well as organizations that are not members of the group. He declined to identify other members of the coalition.

Fort Worth, Texas-based Elevate Credit Services reported spending more than \$100,000 in the first quarter of the year to influence the state government on top of its fees to lobbyists.

It also reported lobbying on the lending bill. Asked if it was funding the Don't Lock Me Out California campaign, spokeswoman Marian Daniells said only that Elevate Credit Services does not comment on "government relations-related expenses."

[Feds raid home of second Speaker Madigan ally, ex-Ald. Mike Zalewski](#)

Federal agents have raided the home of a second ally of Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan, this time former Southwest Side Ald. Michael R. Zalewski, his attorney said Saturday.

Thomas Breen, the former 23rd Ward alderman's lawyer, confirmed that a search warrant was carried out at Zalewski's home. Breen told the Tribune that he could not comment further.

[inRead invented by Teads](#)

"Michael has been known to be a hardworking straight shooter his entire life. We do not think that this investigation will change his good reputation," Breen said Saturday.

Citing unnamed sources, the Better Government Association and WBEZ-FM 91.5 [reported](#) Friday that the Zalewski raid involved an attempt to get work for Zalewski at ComEd and "interactions" between Madigan, Zalewski and Mike McClain, a veteran former ComEd lobbyist and Madigan confidant. None could be reached for comment.

ComEd released a statement confirming that it had received a federal grand jury subpoena "requiring production of information concerning its lobbying activities in the State of Illinois. Exelon and ComEd have pledged to cooperate fully and are cooperating fully with the U.S. Attorney's Office in expeditiously providing the requested information."

Asked whether the subpoena was related to efforts to get Zalewski lobbying work, a ComEd spokeswoman declined comment. ComEd routinely employs a large team of lobbyists at the Capitol and historically is one of the largest campaign contributors to Illinois politicians.

Zalewski has been a registered lobbyist in Springfield for all but a couple of years since 2001. He is not listed as a lobbyist for ComEd or Exelon. The village of Bridgeview is a longtime client, and he once registered to lobby for Hawthorne Racecourse in Cicero.

Public records indicate Zalewski, who was making more than \$114,000 a year as an alderman, has been having money problems recently. The IRS filed two liens totaling \$185,634 against Zalewski for unpaid taxes in the past two years, records show. The most recent, filed in March, was for \$99,770. The IRS last November filed a lien for \$85,864.

It wasn't the first time Zalewski had faced financial difficulties. In 2001, he and his wife, Mildred, filed for bankruptcy, which they emerged from a year later.

The former alderman paid Breen's law firm \$25,000 in May out of his aldermanic and 23rd Ward committeeman funds, state campaign finance records show. Zalewski, the former Aviation Committee chairman, [announced in April 2018](#) that he was stepping down and wouldn't seek another term this year.

In recent weeks, several calls to the former alderman and his son, Democratic state Rep. Michael J. Zalewski of Riverside, were not returned.

The Zalewski search warrant was executed in May, around the same time federal agents raided the Far South Side home of Kevin Quinn, a former top Madigan political operative, the [Tribune first reported](#) last month.

It's unclear what information the agents were seeking or whether the raid stemmed from Quinn's past work with Madigan's powerful political organization. One source, however, told the Tribune that federal agents had shown interest in computers and electronic equipment.

No charges have been filed against Quinn. Neither Quinn nor Madigan has commented.

The raid on Quinn's and Zalewski's homes come amid ongoing corruption probes at City Hall, including the bombshell racketeering indictment filed late last month against Ald. Edward Burke, the council's longest-serving member who was accused of using his clout to steer business to his private law firm. Burke has pleaded not guilty.

Ex-Ald. Daniel Solis was revealed to have been wearing a wire for the FBI for two years as part of the Burke probe but has not been charged.

A 2016 FBI search warrant affidavit filed as part of the Solis investigation detailed an alleged effort by Solis to send legal work to Madigan from an undisclosed businessman seeking to develop a hotel in Chinatown. Madigan, who was secretly recorded pitching his property tax appeal services, has denied any wrongdoing and has not been charged.

Meanwhile, the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners voted in December to refer to federal and county prosecutors a controversy involving the re-election bid of Kevin Quinn's brother, 13th Ward Ald. Marty Quinn.

The alderman's team tried to knock off the ballot challenger David Krupa, a teenage DePaul University student. To do that, the alderman's campaign challenged Krupa's signatures and included affidavits from 2,796 residents who said they were revoking their signatures for Krupa. But only 187 of them matched signatures contained in Krupa's paperwork.

[Since Voters Approved A \\$5 Cap On Gifts, Lobbyist Spending On Missouri Lawmakers Dropped 94%](#)

Beyoncé tickets. Pricey steak dinners. Royals games.

Lobbyists used to be able to spend thousands in an effort to influence Missouri lawmakers. Voters approved a \$5 dollar limit on gifts for lawmakers in November. A KCUR analysis of data released this month by the Missouri Ethics Commission shows there's been a 94% decrease in spending from the 2019 to 2018 legislative session.

In this year's session, lobbyists spent less than \$17,000 on lawmakers. That's a significant drop from the about \$300,000 spent in the 2018 session.

“These sorts of financial gifts or benefits that have been directed to lawmakers don’t actually buy their votes, but they do buy access,” University of Missouri political science professor Peverill Squire said. “That access is important because lawmakers have to decide how they are going to spend their time and what energy they want to devote to different topics.”

Squire said most of the spending is now on larger events that all lawmakers can attend. There is still a \$5 limit per lawmaker for those events.

Lobbyist and president of the Missouri Biotech Association Kelly Gillespie said the new rules have changed how he does business.

His association typically invites lawmakers on a tour of life science businesses in Missouri in an effort to educate lawmakers on topics like the drug discovery pipeline and healthcare affordability. In 2018, the association spent about \$4,000 taking lawmakers on a tour in western Missouri. This amount of spending is prohibited under the new rules.

“I believe that the state is worse off by not having an education program like that where there is absolutely no direct ask of these legislatures other than, ‘Can you make Missouri better?’” Gillespie said.

Gillespie added that he understood why voters supported the change to lobbyist spending.

“There were other folks that were taking people to the Daytona 500 or to rock concerts or Masters golf tickets,” Gillespie said. “And there was a feeling that it had gotten too much, and it was the wild west.”

More than 60% of voters supported Amendment 1.

“Voters left, right and center were all disgusted at the problem that was in Jefferson City,” Clean Missouri’s campaign director Sean Soendker Nicholson said. “To be clear, it was a bipartisan problem. The top gift takers were both Democratic and Republican legislators.”

[Ellis proposes ethics reforms for Harris County government](#)

Harris County Precinct 1 Commissioner Rodney Ellis has proposed two ethics reforms he says are needed to improve transparency in county government, though Texas counties’ limited rule-making power may scuttle his plan.

Commissioners Court on Tuesday unanimously backed Ellis’ request to study how the county can establish mandatory registration of lobbyists and a blackout period for campaign contributions to elected officials from firms who seek or receive county contracts.

“We’re living in a time when public trust in government is shaken and everyday people are concerned about the undue influence of special interests,” Ellis said in a statement afterward. “We have an opportunity and obligation to strengthen public trust by reducing any appearance of or actual preferential treatment when it comes to how public dollars are spent.”

University of Houston political science professor Brandon Rottinghaus said the Ellis proposal was a bold, necessary first step to make county government more open to the public. He said relationships between Commissioners Court members and developers, engineers and builders whose businesses are affected by county policy often are shrouded in secrecy.

“Harris County is so big, and is continuing to boom, such that the need to have very clear lines between development and politics is imperative,” Rottinghaus said. “As the county shifts to a more progressive way of thinking, the commissioners will have to respond by giving voters tools to investigate what the connections are between campaign funding and political decisions.”

Ellis said the county needs an ethics commission to enforce any new rules. His vision, however, may be hamstrung by the limited ability Texas counties have to enact such policies. Unlike municipalities, which can establish their own rules and ordinances, counties can follow the lead only from the Legislature, said Robert Soard, first assistant county attorney.

That limitation tied the hands of former County Judge Ed Emmett, who established a task force that recommended a series of ethics reforms in 2009. Among them: creating an ethics committee, posting officials' personal and financial disclosure forms online and ethics training for county employees.

The county attorney at the time concluded Commissioners Court [lacked the authority](#) to act on many of the proposals. The ethics committee met only twice before the county attorney said state law prevented the body from meeting confidentially, granting protection to whistleblowers or having the authority to supervise elected officials or their departments.

Some county ethics rules remain in place. Elected officials still must complete the disclosure forms, and any county employee involved in negotiating contracts with vendors must declare conflicts of interest. Commissioners Court members often disclose during meetings why they are abstaining from a vote, though written conflict of interest forms are not filed with the district clerk until afterward.

No new powers

Soard said the Legislature has not given counties any new powers to establish ethics rules in the decade since Emmett tried, though El Paso and Montgomery counties sought and received special permission from state lawmakers to set up their own ethics commissions. Harris County could try a similar approach, Soard suggested, though the Legislature will not return to Austin for a regular session until 2021.

"We're certainly working with the commissioners to see what the county can do," Soard said.

There is precedent at the state level for the kind of reforms Ellis has pitched. A blackout period bars state lawmakers from accepting donations from one month before the legislative session until 20 days after adjournment. Lobbyists also must register with the Texas Ethics Commission.

The city of Houston requires lobbyists to register with the city secretary, an effort to show the public what players attempt to influence elected officials. A 2015 Houston Chronicle investigation, however, found the city [struggles to enforce](#) the rule. That year, not a single person or firm was cited for noncompliance despite evidence dozens of lobbyists failed to record which clients they represented, did not keep their registrations up to date or did not report expenses incurred while trying to influence city leaders.

Harris County since 2009 has allowed lobbyist registration on a voluntary basis. Participation has been dismal: Just 17 lobbyists have signed up in the past decade, according to records from the county clerk.

Houston also has a blackout period for campaign contributions. The city prohibits council members and the mayor from accepting donations from firms seeking a contract from the date it appears on a City Council agenda until 30 days after the body votes to award the contract.

A similar rule in Harris County would have barred engineer Karun Sreerama from [mailing a \\$5,000 check](#) to the campaign of Precinct 4 Commissioner Jack Cagle in March, two days after a

contract he recommended for Sreerama's firm won preliminary approval. Cagle's office this week said the commissioner since has returned the donation.

Bay Scoggin, state director of the Texas Public Interest Research Group, said blackout periods are only marginally effective at curbing unethical behaviors, as donors simply can wait several months before cutting a check. A more effective proposal, he said, would be limits on how much individuals and PACs can donate.

"You want to switch the incentives from county commissioners being financially beholden to their biggest business partners to their constituents," Scoggin said.

Ellis' proposal also asks the county purchasing agent to explore how to disclose campaign contributions from firms seeking to do work from the county.

Just the beginning

A Chronicle analysis of political donations earlier this year revealed commissioners [rely heavily on vendors](#) — mostly architecture and engineering firms — to finance their campaigns. In 2018, 78 percent of donations to Ellis came from vendors, compared with 42 percent for Adrian Garcia in Precinct 2, 88 percent for Steve Radack in Precinct 3 and 82 percent for Cagle in Precinct 4.

Commissioners control tens of millions of dollars in annual infrastructure spending within their precincts and have discretion over which firms to choose to design projects.

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo in January announced she would [refuse contributions](#) from county vendors, citing a desire to act ethically. Her Commissioners Court colleagues declined to follow her lead.

Ellis, who said his proposal was the beginning of a broader push for ethics reform in county government, has drawn questions about his use of campaign funds. His war chest of \$2.92 million is larger than the combined accounts of his Commissioners Court colleagues.

Ellis invests most of that sum [in the stock market](#), an unconventional though permitted strategy under the Texas Election Code. The commissioner lists purchases and sales of securities on his campaign finance reports, as required by law, but he declined to disclose his entire investment portfolio to the Chronicle.

His large campaign account permits Ellis to fend off challengers and also supplement his office budget. Last year, Ellis billed to his campaign \$11,000 for groceries, \$25,400 in contributions to other political campaigns, \$27,008 to charity and \$11,400 at restaurants, including 32 visits to a Smoothie King five blocks from his home.

Ellis said he expenses meals only when he is working, though he said he considers himself on the job at all times.

[North Dakota Focuses on Ethics](#)

While many states foundered economically after the 2008 housing crash and subsequent recession, [North Dakota](#) and its 760,000 people instead saw the fracking-fueled [Bakken oil boom](#) explode. Along with it came people from all over the country [looking for work](#), record-breaking [tax collections](#), an increase in [prostitution and crime](#), and [oil industry interest](#) and investment in the state's politics.

As the culture in the Peace Garden State began to shift, so did its political optics. In February 2018, [Gov. Doug Burgum and his wife took a Super Bowl trip funded by Xcel Energy](#) (which he later paid back), and Rep. Jim Kasper (R-Fargo) took [multiple trips](#) involving the internet gambling industry in 2005. In response, a coalition of citizens pushed for an ethics commission. Fast-forward to 2018, when voters passed [Measure 1](#), amending the North Dakota Constitution to add [Article 14](#), which required the Legislature to pass laws to regulate funding disclosures and established an ethics commission designed to "support open, ethical, and accountable government" among [other responsibilities](#).

The commission is being formulated this summer, and its creation hasn't been without controversy. Experts have concerns about how effective the commission will be, largely due to changes in the legislation that established it. For example, lobbyists are allowed to serve on the panel, and several have applied.

Rep. Corey Mock (D-Grand Forks), who has been [trying to introduce ethics legislation since 2011](#), is unsatisfied with the legislation after the [House and Senate bills were incorporated](#) into the final product. "I wish it never would have come to an initiated measure" – one created by citizens through signatures rather than introduced by legislators. "I wish the Legislature would have handled this or taken it up the first time we brought it forward," he says.

The idea for the initiated measure started with a conversation over coffee among Ellen Chaffee, who is a senior fellow at the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, her husband and some friends.

"In 2016, South Dakota had the same idea for an ethics commission and we thought that was a good idea since we have initiated amendments in North Dakota, too," Chaffee says, referring to the method by which the state's constitution can be changed. What started as a group of four became a slowly expanding circle of people who gathered every Tuesday to move the issue toward the ballot box, culminating in the establishment of the nonprofit [North Dakotans for Public Integrity](#) in January 2018.

"Changes in North Dakota have occurred since three things happened at the same time," Chaffee says: "the financial crash of 2008, the oil boom and (the passing of) Citizens United" – a [Supreme Court decision](#) that established political spending, even on the part of corporations, as free speech. "So, new people, the growth of the population and the incursion of strangers, and the high-stakes impact of government" have changed what life looks like in North Dakota, she says.

"The common phrase is that North Dakota is a moderately sized city with a very long street – everybody knows everybody," Chaffee says. "It has been a culture, generally speaking, of trusting your neighbor and that's a luxury we don't have anymore."

The Bakken oil boom was a significant agent of that change, some say. Many North Dakotans found the boom to be "an assault on their communities and the places they love," the [Guardian reported](#) in 2012. "The anger some North Dakotans feel toward the oil and gas industry is fueled by the feeling that the situation is totally out of their control. In many instances, people say, the oil companies haven't been invited to drill – they've just invaded."

While traveling the state to lobby for Measure 1, Chaffee encountered wide public support for the initiative – "from 'Well, in these times, boy, a lot needs to change' to 'Oh, yes!'" she recalls – particularly in the western cities and counties most impacted by the oil boom.

Paul Anderson of Rutland noted in a [Bismarck Tribune letter to the editor in 2018](#): "South Dakota passed a similar law and it is working well there. This law will be good for transparent government in North Dakota."

It's the loss of the "everyone knows everyone" mindset that led the Chaffees' group to push North Dakota to establish an ethics commission that the Democratic minority had been asking for.

"North Dakota has definitely changed in a lot of ways over the last decade or so. Western North Dakota, for example, is almost unrecognizable to anyone who grew up there and moved away a generation ago," Mock says, adding that another reason that ethics legislation hasn't been created until now has been "denial that people would care enough to put something in place on their own," Mock says. The state joins [46 others](#) in creating an ethics commission.

"Folks here don't automatically think folks are doing evil things, but they do like transparency, says [Dennis Cooley](#), an ethics professor at North Dakota State University and director of the Northern Plains Ethics Institute, though he spoke to U.S. News in an individual capacity. "They like to have a process in place where it can be fairly adjudicated in the public eye so we can trust each other."

While Burgum declined to comment, Rep. Kasper tells U.S. News that his trips were unrelated to the gambling legislation he introduced in 2005 because they occurred after his bill failed and that North Dakota doesn't need an ethics commission. "I do not appreciate or agree with how it was sold to the people of North Dakota. ... I don't believe there is or has been corruption in North Dakota government," he says. "You might say there (have) been mistakes by some people, but not corruption."

When the member-selection process began in late June, 70 [applications](#) had been received (68 of which are viable) for the ethics panel. A three-person group – the governor, Republican Senate Majority Leader [Rich Wardner](#) and Democratic Senate Minority Leader [Joan Heckaman](#)– tasked with choosing the five ethics commission members has narrowed down the applicants to [17](#) and [identified three front-runners](#): a retired district judge, a college president and a legal officer for a Grand Forks-based engineering consulting firm.

North Dakotans for Public Integrity is pleased with the progress, writing on its [Facebook page](#) that the selection process so far "appears to be a thoughtful, reasoned approach to selecting a high-quality, non-partisan Ethics Commission."

Heckaman echoes that sentiment: "I would hope that we would appoint members who are ethical themselves and their integrity is beyond doubt."

The significance of the selection committee's choices for the panel isn't lost on residents.

"The ethics commission needs to be a cross section of the people in our state," says Bismarck's Carl Young. "It should have an equal mix across gender lines; there should be representation from the Native American population.

"In addition, the makeup of the commission should not be solely those people from the good ol' boy network. If the first commission is made up of people who are solely friends of the people who picked the commission, they will set the tone for all future versions of the commission."

[Corp Comm adopts ethics code, limits on campaign contributions](#)

State utility regulators unanimously approved a new code of ethics July 10, including new limits on how much anyone with business before them can contribute to candidates for the Arizona Corporation Commission.

But two of the panel members said the wording has a gaping hole that could still give utilities a way of financing their favorite commission candidates, at least indirectly.

The language crafted by Boyd Dunn technically does not keep current and wannabe commissioners from taking campaign cash from utilities and others who are trying to convince the panel to approve or reject some pending issue. Instead it says that if people take the money they cannot vote on any matter before the commission affecting that person or corporation.

The idea, said Dunn, is to make it clear, particularly to the public, that there is no nexus between a campaign contribute and how a commissioner votes.

But here's the thing: Candidates can still take money from individuals on the do-not-give list, ranging from company owners and executives to staffers, lobbyists and even hired attorneys, but only if they are running with public financing.

What that's all about is the fact that voters in 1998 created a system that allows but does not require candidates for statewide and legislative office to get public funds for their campaign if they refuse to take private contributions.

In the case of those seeking seats on the commission, that means gathering at least 1,500 \$5 contributions from individuals. Those who qualify get \$116,016 for a primary race and, if they survive, another \$174,024 for the general election.

Commissioner Justin Olson said that paves the way for a utility or group of companies to get all employees and executives to each provide \$5. That, he said, would qualify the favored candidate for more than \$290,000 in public funds, and at a real discount.

"I don't think we're addressing the concern that I feel the public has with candidates for the commission financing their campaigns from the entities that we regulate," Olson said. "I think that's a significant concern to the public."

He wasn't alone in his objections. Lea Marquez Peterson, appointed to the commission five weeks ago, also opposed the public financing exemption.

Dunn brushed aside the concerns, saying the whole purpose of the Clean Elections Act was to remove the burden of candidates from having to seek money from special interests and be beholden to them. And he said that public financing system has its own reporting and enforcement mechanisms.

He also called the example cited by Olson a "hypothetical."

What the newly adopted rules appear not to directly address are situations where utilities and their political action committees give not to candidates but instead to other groups, often with innocent-sounding names, who then, in turn, spend money to try to elect the candidate.

That's what happened in 2014 when Pinnacle West Capital Corp., parent company of Arizona Public Service, funneled \$10.7 million to other groups to secure the election of three Republicans running for the commission.

By law the candidates cannot officially be aware of that spending, coordinate that spending — or even block outside groups from running those ads. And the Republican-controlled Legislature has adopted laws to allow these groups to hide their actual contributors.

Dunn said the rules cannot preclude commissioners from voting on matters even if they are the beneficiaries of such third-party cash, money he said they did not seek and may not have wanted in the first place. Instead, he said, it would be up to each regulator to decide whether the spending on their behalf should preclude them from voting on the issue.

He said making this recusal optional is important. Otherwise, Dunn said, someone could effectively disqualify a commissioner from voting by spending a small amount of money on that person's behalf.