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Weekly Lobbying Articles

August 31, 2017

WWLP.com
August 30, 2017

Number of lobbyists on Beacon Hill increases dramatically

<http://wwlp.com/2017/08/30/number-of-lobbyists-on-beacon-hill-increases-dramatically/>

Although residents can attempt to influence legislators' lawmaking decisions, companies can also hire professionals to speak to legislators for them.

Active lobbyists actually out number lawmakers on Beacon Hill. There are more than 1,500 registered lobbyists in Massachusetts, compared to just 200 legislators.

According to the Associated Press, the number of active lobbyists has increased by about a thousand since 2006.

One lobbyist told 22News the increase may be due in part to a 2009 law change, that expands the definition of who is considered a lobbyist.

The law is aimed at increasing transparency in the industry and keeping money from influencing policy makers.

"If we're talking about getting an inside track, fundraising for lawmakers, using money to make the process go more smoothly, that's more problematic," Pam Wilmot, the Executive Director of Common Cause Massachusetts, told 22News.

You can find out whom lobbyists work for, what issues they lobby for and even their salary on the State Secretary's website.

Alaska Dispatch News
August 30, 2017

Alaska ethics initiative targets legislators' travel, per diem and lobbyist-paid meals

<https://www.adn.com/politics/alaska-legislature/2017/08/29/alaska-ethics-initiative-targets-legislators-travel-per-diem-and-lobbyist-paid-meals/>

A new Alaska ballot initiative is proposing new limits on state lawmakers' travel, daily expense payments and lobbyist-paid meals.

A pair of lawmakers — Democrat Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins of Sitka and independent Jason Grenn of Anchorage — along with longtime Anchorage Republican activist Bonnie Jack filed their proposal with Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott's office Monday.

ADVERTISING

The initiative proposal takes aim at several legislative perks and practices that have faced criticism amid Alaska's huge deficit, which has prompted lawmakers to slash spending on state programs.

Among the initiative's provisions:

- It would cut off legislators' daily payments
 - up to \$295 to cover food and lodging expenses
 - if it takes them more than an extra month to pass a budget after the end of their 90-day session. The 90-day limit is based on a voter initiative in 2006, but the Alaska Constitution allows for a 121-day session.
 - It would bar lawmakers and aides from accepting meals or drinks purchased by lobbyists, who occasionally treat legislators and staffers to dinners that cost hundreds of dollars. The law already requires lobbyists to report each time a meal and drink costs more than \$15 for a legislator or legislative aide, though there's no restriction on lobbyists paying for food that's immediately consumed.
 - It would broaden the conflict-of-interest rules for state legislators, who would be required to declare more conflicts related to their jobs and family.
 - It would bar state payment for legislators' foreign travel unless they first file a public report showing how their trip would benefit the state.
 - It would ban "foreign-influenced corporations" from spending money on campaigns that target individual candidates
 - defining such corporations as those more than 5 percent owned by a non-U.S. citizen or entity.
- Grenn, a freshman who made legislative ethics a focus of his campaign last year, said the initiative aims to boost constituents' trust with legislators as they take on weighty issues like restructuring — and reducing — the Alaska Permanent Fund dividend.

"We're asking them to trust their elected officials when we take on these big new ideas," he said. "We need to do things that are showing them that they can trust us, or that they can build on the trust that they have."

Grenn proposed changes to the expense payments and conflict rules during the legislative session earlier this year, but his colleagues didn't adopt them into law. He acknowledged the initiative is likely to get "pushback" from other lawmakers.

[Alaska legislator, in bid for public confidence, pushes tighter conflict of interest rules for legislators]

"I have no doubt that I'll probably get some sideways looks on this from other people in the building," he said, referring to the Capitol. "But my first concern is the people outside the building."

Grenn said the sponsors want the initiative on the 2018 ballot, which gives them just a few months to gather the more than 30,000 petition signatures they'd need before a January deadline.

A political group supporting the initiative, Alaskans for Integrity, has already raised about \$25,000, nearly all of it from a Massachusetts-based organization called Represent.Us.

The group, on its website, describes its mission as passing "powerful anti-corruption laws that stop political bribery, end secret money and fix our broken elections." Key donors to Represent.Us include the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Atlantic Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

KPVI
August 29, 2017

Campaign Disclosure Review

http://www.kpvi.com/news/local_news/campaign-disclosure-review/article_1ade0f8e-8ce9-11e7-90a5-4f0d29451d60.html

Idaho lawmakers are mulling several key changes to the state's campaign disclosure laws to shine more transparency into a system that has seen more money funneled into state and local elections.

The bipartisan working group met Monday to hear possible recommendations from the state's top lobbyists and Secretary of State Lawrence Denney. The goal is to have the panel submit suggestions to legislative leaders before the 2018 Legislature begins in January.

Alex LaBeau, the leader of Idaho's influential pro-business lobby, says Idaho's disclosure laws should have more robust reporting requirements because candidates no longer have an offseason when it comes to campaigning.

Meanwhile, Denney — who serves as the state's top election chief — suggested local elections should file campaign finance reports if they receive more than \$500. Currently, local candidates running for school boards or county coroner are exempt from filing a sunshine report.

The Spokesman-Review

August 28, 2017

Lawmakers: Idaho 'uniquely poised' to stiffen campaign, lobbying disclosure requirements

<http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2017/aug/28/lawmakers-idaho-uniquely-poised-to-step-up-campaig/>

Idaho is "uniquely poised" to make major improvements in its public disclosure system, state lawmakers on a special panel said Monday, from requiring more and more frequent reports from candidates, lobbyists and PACs to modernizing and upgrading the state's online reporting system.

"There's a real sense or a sentiment in the Legislature that we need to do a better job of disclosure and sunshine," said Rep. Fred Wood, R-Burley, co-chair of the Idaho Legislature's ethics and campaign finance working group. "So I think there's an opportunity here."

With state revenues coming in strong and well ahead of forecasts, Idaho could fund a major improvement to the Idaho Secretary of State's reporting and disclosure system that could be easy for candidates to use, and easy for citizens to access, he and other lawmakers said — and give them real-time information about who's spending how much for what in politics in Idaho. But the state will need significant system upgrades to do it.

"We've got money and we've got the will," Wood said. "And when we've got those two things, we can accomplish a lot — and we want to do that while the iron's still hot."

Idaho Secretary of State Lawrence Denney, Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry President Alex LaBeau, lobbyist Elizabeth Criner, who chairs the Idaho Legislative Advisers, and Ada County Chief Deputy Clerk Phil McGrane all urged the panel to propose additional reporting requirements, and the five senators and five representatives on the panel were mostly receptive.

"I think this is going in the right direction," said Sen. Todd Lakey, R-Nampa.

Rep. Tom Loertscher, R-Iona, sounded a note of caution. "Some of these fixes are pretty good, if we get 'em right, if we do 'em the right way, and try not to make them too burdensome on candidates," he said. "We don't want to make it such a burden that it's undoable, because then that automatically creates a hindrance for people who are interested in running for office. ... The more complicated we make it, the more difficult it's going to be to get people to run. 'Cause there are a certain number of folks who say, 'It's too much detail, too much hassle for me – I'm just not going to do it.'"

House Minority Leader Mat Erpelding, D-Boise, responded, "If campaign finance requirements are limiting people from running because it seems burdensome, I guess I'm OK with those people not running for office. Because if transparency is what we're advocating for here, then this should be a very simple expectation, that you put forward what you spend, and you put forward what you bring in for money as a contribution."

Among the ideas the panel is considering recommending to next year's Legislature:

- - Requiring campaign finance reporting for all local elections, whether for candidates or for ballot measures, whenever \$500 or more has been raised or spent. Many local elections in Idaho currently don't fall under reporting requirements.
- - Increasing the frequency of campaign finance reporting to monthly during election years and twice a year in non-election years.
- - Placing new reporting requirements on political action committees, or PACs, including forbidding them from accepting more than \$1,000 per election cycle from any entity, in or out of state, that doesn't also file its own Idaho disclosure reports; and requiring PACs to disclose not only their treasurer but also who the decision-makers are behind the group.
- - Requiring lobbyists to report their expenditures year-round, rather than just during the legislative session.
- - Reconsidering fines for reporting violations, and possibly raising them, to ensure they deter violators.

Lobbyists themselves want more disclosure requirements, LaBeau and Criner told the lawmakers.

"We want a level playing field," said LaBeau, who represents a major business lobbying group and also operates a PAC that's active in campaigns. "Trying to play hide the ball doesn't do anybody any good. ... It really it paints a black eye on the state of Idaho."

Loertscher distributed a proposal for a very basic personal financial disclosure requirement for Idaho officials, based on what's already required for state legislators in Utah. "I think we are charged with coming up with something on this committee," he said; he based his proposal on a conflict of interest and financial disclosure form that Utah House members are required to file.

Idaho currently is one of just two states with no personal financial disclosure requirements for state legislators or any other elected or appointed officials; that's one key reason Idaho frequently ranks very low in national comparisons of ethics laws.

"People are looking for us to come up with some way that legislators have to declare what they do otherwise outside the Legislature, to try to eliminate any conflicts of interest as best we can," Loertscher said. "This is probably the most innocent thing that I've seen. It's not a lot, but it at least lets people know what we do for a living, and how that might affect our actions in the Legislature."

The form requires lawmakers to disclose their primary employer and occupation or job title; all entities they own or for which they're an officer; each entity that has paid them \$5,000 or more in income in the past year; each entity in which they own stocks or bonds valued at more than \$5,000, unless they're

managed by a third party; any boards on which they serve; real property they own that could create a conflict of interest; and their spouse's name, occupation and employer.

"It's not terribly invasive," Loertscher said. "It's not a lot, but it is something I think moves the bar a little." And because potential conflicts of interest then would be a matter of public record, he said, there might be fewer times that lawmakers would need to declare potential conflicts as they're voting on bills.

The Spokesman-Review

August 28, 2017

LaBeau: Lobbyists want 'a level playing field'

<http://www.spokesman.com/blogs/boise/2017/aug/28/labeau-lobbyists-want-level-playing-field/>

Asked why, as a lobbyist in Idaho, he's calling for more reporting requirements for lobbyists, IACI president Alex LaBeau said, "As a professional, you want to be able to put that information out there." Plus, he said, "We want to be sure that we have a level playing field." LaBeau said his group wants to know what other groups are doing as well.

LaBeau, speaking during a break in today's meeting of the Legislature's ethics and campaign finance reform work group, said he typically hosts some legislators at his group's annual meeting each year. In the past, he'd report those expenditures promptly, broken down by legislator, and get them to the Idaho Secretary of State's office, and they'd go into his lobbyist reporting records. But Idaho law doesn't require those reports outside the legislative session to be filed until the following January, and now that the state has moved to online reporting, he said there's no way for him to submit those reports early. LaBeau told the committee that lobbying now happens year-round, and reporting requirements should reflect that, as should the system for how those reports are filed.

LaBeau, who addressed the legislative panel this morning along with Elizabeth Criner, president of the Idaho Legislative Advisers, didn't mention personal financial disclosure, another issue that the legislative work group has been tasked to address. Idaho is one of just two states that doesn't require that disclosure from its legislators, or any other elected or appointed officials. "I don't think that it matters to anybody," LaBeau said. But he added that that issue is up to the Legislature, not the lobbyists. "That's for them to decide," he said.

This year, Vermont enacted its first financial disclosure requirements, making Idaho and Michigan the last two states without any such reporting. Idaho's lack of financial disclosure – the mechanism that allows the public to decide whether they think lawmakers have conflicts of interest or not when they cast votes – long has contributed to the state's very low grades in comparisons between states for their ethics and transparency requirements. In the Center for Public Integrity's State Integrity Investigation in 2015, states were compared for their ethics and disclosure laws, practices and enforcement; Idaho earned a "D-minus."

The Spokesman-Review

August 28, 2017

Lobbyists call for more, and more frequent, reporting of lobbying, campaign expenditures

<http://www.spokesman.com/blogs/boise/2017/aug/28/lobbyists-call-more-and-more-frequent-reporting-lobbying-campaign-expenditures/>

Lobbyists Elizabeth Criner and Alex LaBeau have offered a long list of suggestions to the Legislature's ethics and campaign finance work group to increase requirements for lobbyist and election reporting. Among them: Upgrade the online reporting systems, and ask the Legislature to appropriate money to do so, to make it both easy to report and easy for the public to get the information; LaBeau said the state would likely need to purchase software from a vendor. Require lobbyists to disclose regularly all year, not just during the legislative session. Require lobbyists for government entities to disclose just like those for the private sector. Require professional lobbyists who represent nonprofits without pay to disclose that, without requiring non-profit volunteers to disclose like professional lobbyists. Require anyone spending money on Idaho elections to disclose, regardless of their federal tax status. Clarify definitions of reportable events and expenditures, and make fines consistent for both individuals and PACs – they're now \$250 for individuals and \$2,500 for PACs – and high enough to be a deterrent.

The two lobbyists also called for expanding the definition of electioneering communications to include email and social media; requiring disclosure of the decision-makers behind any PAC, not just the treasurer; requiring more reporting of expenditures in local elections, from sewer measures to school bond issues; and removing the 48-hour cutoff on reporting before elections, which LaBeau called "a giant loophole that needs to close." Currently, campaign expenditures in the final day or two before voters go to the polls don't get disclosed until well after the election.

LaBeau said campaigning now goes on year-round, not just in the months or weeks before the election, and Idaho's reporting requirements should reflect that. "A whole lot's going on and nobody knows about it," he said. He added, "Trying to play hide the ball doesn't do anybody any good. ... It really it paints a black eye on the state of Idaho."

Criner told the lawmakers, "We do believe that there are some updates that could be made that would improve the sunshine on the processes of our current government."

Sen. Patti Anne Lodge, R-Huston, co-chair of the working group, told the two, "Wow, great presentation. We really appreciate the time and effort you and others have put together in order to come up with these suggestions, because for me, they really hit the nail right on the head." LaBeau responded, "Thank you, Madam Chairman. We stand ready to help."

Daily Beast

August 28, 2017

How D.C. Lobbyists Helped Paul Manafort Prop Up a Putin Puppet

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/how-dc-lobbyists-helped-paul-manafort-prop-up-a-putin-puppet>

Taking a Putin ally to meet political heavyweights on Capitol Hill. Using other pals of Vlad to "prove" to the world that a suspect election was totally kosher. Working side-by-side with Paul Manafort, the famously dictator-friendly operative who once sat atop Donald Trump's political campaign.

Those are just some of the moves that two of Washington's most powerful lobbying firms made on behalf of a pro-Putin political party. For years, those efforts went largely ignored—just another instance of influence-peddling in a Washington full of it. But now, they're being dragged into the light by Robert Mueller's Trump-Russia probe.

These firms, staffed with ultra-connected power brokers, are now facing questions from the special counsel because of work they did on behalf of that Kremlin-philic political party—work they didn't disclose to the Justice Department for years.

According to NBC and The Washington Post, Mueller has subpoenaed at least two Washington lobbying firms—the Podesta Group and Mercury LLC—regarding work they did with one-time Trump campaign chief Paul Manafort that was paid for by Putin allies.

A review of documents these two firms filed belatedly with the Justice Department paints a picture of questionable practices and controversial allies.

At issue is work that Manafort did for Viktor Yanukovich, a pro-Putin Ukrainian politician who was the country's president from 2010 to 2014. Yanukovich fled the country to Russia after protesters overthrew his government. Vladimir Putin reportedly helped him escape.

The Podesta Group and Mercury LLC, two powerful Washington lobbying firms, worked alongside Manafort from 2012 to 2014 to try to persuade American officials of two things: that Ukraine's 2012 election was above-board, and that the country's leaders wanted it to move further away from Putin and closer to the West.

Russia experts say neither of those assertions is true; they say Yanukovich and his allies only hired those firms to shield themselves from Western criticism. The country's 2012 elections drew substantial criticism from democracy advocates around the world since his main political rival, Yulia Tymoshenko, was imprisoned at the time. The pro-democracy group Freedom House ripped the Yanukovich government for limiting peaceful protests, restricting media freedoms, and torturing its political opponents.

To try to persuade Americans that Ukraine was moving in the right direction, the two lobbying firms undertook a public relations offensive—pitching journalists, meeting with Congressional staff, and introducing Yanukovich allies to top Washington power brokers.

The client paying the firms for that work was the European Center for Modern Ukraine. ECFMU told both firms it wasn't backed by any political entities. But new reports indicate it had the support of Yanukovich's party, the Party of Regions—which means the two lobbying firms should have disclosed their work for the group to the Justice Department.

The Podesta Group didn't return multiple requests for comment, and Michael McKeon of Mercury LLC didn't answer questions about who at his firm had been subpoenaed and why.

The Podesta Group is helmed by Tony Podesta, whose brother, John Podesta, was the chairman of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign. The Podestas have long been some of the Clintons' closest allies and confidants. And they've used their access to one of Washington's formerly powerful dynasties to build a lobbying empire. The Podesta Group is famous for connecting foreign government clients with D.C. insiders—including clients with abysmal human rights records. The firm represented Vietnam's repressive government, as well as that of Azerbaijan and South Sudan.

To try to sanitize Ukraine's elections, the firm distributed materials to Hill staff with quotes from election observers praising Ukraine's process. It was a tall order, given Yanukovich's penchant for imprisoning his political opponents. But the Podesta Group did its best.

“Initial Reactions from International Observers Positive,” claimed one Podesta Group document.

One person they quoted to make that argument was Sergey Markov, described as “Observer— The Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation.”

“The elections to the Ukrainian parliament were successful, democratic and organized according to standards even better than some of the European Union member states,” he said.

Markov likely relished the chance to bash the EU. He was no ordinary election observer; rather, Markov is well-known as an informal adviser to Vladimir Putin. He also advised Yanukovich on campaign tactics, according to a former State Department official with knowledge of the region’s politics. The official said Markov was likely in Ukraine helping Yanukovich at Putin’s behest.

“That might be something that a good-faith Washington lobbyist might not know,” continued the official, who requested anonymity to speak candidly. “But it’s knowable.”

The Podesta Group’s documents also quoted Thierry Mariani, a former French foreign minister, saying it was the best election he had ever seen. “This is the first time that I have seen such a transparent competition,” Mariani said. “These elections are a great success for Ukraine and a great success for democracy. Today, Ukraine is a real European democracy.”

Mariani tends to materialize wherever Russia’s actions draw international condemnation. In 2015, he visited occupied Crimea, drawing condemnation from his home country and Ukrainian leaders. According to the BBC, France’s foreign ministry said Mariani’s visit violated international law. It also defied international sanctions. In 2017, Mariani toured the Syrian city of Aleppo and praised Russia’s involvement in the country’s brutal civil war. The visit provided useful fodder for Russia Today, one of the country’s many state-run propagandistic media outlets.

Mariani runs a lobbying group called French-Russian Dialogue, alongside crony Vladimir Yakunin—who the U.S. Treasury sanctioned in 2014 over Putin’s annexation of the Crimea.

Podesta Group literature also quotes Kazbek Taisaev as saying the elections were “organized very well.” The Podesta Group describes Taisaev as an “observer” with the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation. It didn’t note that Taisaev is a former secretary of the Communist Party of Russia who has said North Korea is a “wonderful country... not at all like what Western propaganda tries to describe in its mass media.” It also didn’t note that the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation is an entity Putin created in 2004 for domestic policy purposes—and certainly not for monitoring Ukrainian elections.

Despite this, the Podesta Group distributed comments from all these people to Congressional offices as part of their effort to convince Capitol Hill that the country was moving in the right direction.

A longtime Russia watcher based in Washington—who requested anonymity given the political sensitivity of the issue—said the Podesta Group’s promotion of these Putin allies as credible voices on the legitimacy of Ukrainian elections was, at best, “gross incompetence.”

Mercury LLC, meanwhile, maintains that its work for ECFMU was part of an effort “to build support for the Ukraine’s entrance into the EU, which would bring Ukraine closer to the west and further from Putin’s influence,” according to Michael McKeon, a partner at the firm. “We believe it was a worthwhile goal,” he added in an email to The Daily Beast. Mercury LLC has a stable of former members of Congress, including former Sen. David Vitter of Louisiana, who lobby their old colleagues for their clients. Its site boasts it can “influence elected officials at all levels of government” and is especially effective in Africa, the Middle East, and “the Islamic world.”

The firm filed disclosures with Congress in 2014 that gave only limited detail on their work for ECFMU. They only disclosed their work to the Justice Department under the requirements of the Foreign Agents Registration Act a few months ago. And those belated disclosures included much more detail on what they did for their client.

Mercury LLC's filings with the Justice Department show its lobbyists—including Newt Gingrich ally Ed Kutler, who has since departed for his own firm—spent time setting up in-person meetings related to Ukraine issues. One person they introduced to numerous Hill offices and to a senior official at the Export-Import Bank as part of their EU-friendly push was Sergiy Klyuyev.

Klyuyev is not necessarily the kind of person you'd expect to be part of a pro-Western public relations campaign. He and his brother, Andriy, have amassed a fortune worth more than \$100 million. When Mercury LLC was introducing him around the Hill, Klyuyev was a member of parliament in Yanukovich's political party, the pro-Russian Party of Regions. His brother and business partner helped run Yanukovich's 2010 presidential campaign and was his former chief of staff.

Less than a year after Mercury LLC introduced Klyuyev around the Hill as part of their stated effort to bring Ukraine into the EU, the EU froze his assets. It was in the wake of the collapse of the Yanukovich regime, and Sergiy was one of more than a dozen Yanukovich allies the EU suspected of embezzling state money. Klyuyev reportedly fled to Russia, along with his brother— who's accused of orchestrating mass killings of Euromaidan protesters—and Yanukovich himself.

For this work, Mercury LLC was paid more than \$130,000.

They maintain that they had no idea they were working for a group funded by a political entity, even though Klyuyev himself was a political figure and the brother of one of Yanukovich's closest allies. McKeon said the ECFMU told them in writing that they weren't government-affiliated, so they decided they didn't need to disclose their work to the Justice Department.

The Podesta Group came to the same conclusion—that there was no way ECFMU was associated with or funded by a foreign government, so they didn't need to disclose.

"It's not plausible that they didn't know what the purpose of their contract was," said the former State Department official familiar with the region.

A longtime Russia watcher who requested anonymity because of political sensitivities shared that view.

"Taking on this project, effectively in support of the Yanukovich government, without doing due diligence about where the money was truly coming from—that amounts to negligence, especially given the state of Ukrainian politics and economy," he said.

Mueller's reported subpoenas of these two firms could cast a spotlight on Washington's shady world of foreign lobbying—and take his probe in a direction that could be discomfiting not just for Republicans, but for Democrats, too.

Northwest Arkansas Democrat Gazette

August 27, 2017

Lobbyists get subpoenas over ties to ex-Trump aides

<http://www.nwaonline.com/news/2017/aug/27/lobbyists-get-subpoenas-over-ties-to-ex/?news>

Lawyers for special counsel Robert Mueller, who is investigating Russian meddling in the 2016 election, have issued subpoenas to several prominent Washington lobbying firms as the probe examines the finances of two former Trump campaign advisers, according to people with knowledge of the requests.

The subpoenas asked the firms to answer questions and provide records regarding their interactions with the consulting firms led by Michael Flynn, a former national security adviser to President Donald Trump, and Paul Manafort, former chairman of Trump's presidential campaign, the people said.

The requests suggest that Mueller's investigators are looking closely at Manafort and Flynn as they seek potential links between Trump's campaign and the Kremlin. The two are suspected of failing to disclose that foreign governments or parties may have been the beneficiaries of their consulting and lobbying work.

A spokesman for Manafort declined to comment, while a lawyer for Flynn did not respond.

Two of the subpoenas were issued to Mercury Public Affairs and SGR LLC, according to people familiar with the requests. A handful of other lobbying firms that did similar work have also received subpoenas from Mueller's office in recent days, those individuals said.

A lawyer for SGR LLC confirmed that the company received a subpoena. Representatives of Mercury declined to comment, but people close to the company confirmed that it also received requests from Mueller's team.

The investigators asked Mercury for information about its public relations work at Manafort's behest for a Brussels-based organization called the European Center for a Modern Ukraine, which pushed for improved relations between Ukraine and European countries. The Brussels group primarily advanced the interests of a Russia-friendly Ukrainian political party that had been a client of Manafort's before he joined the Trump campaign.

Mercury, which has prominent Republicans among its senior partners, had worked on the Ukraine lobbying project with the Podesta group, led by Anthony Podesta, brother of John Podesta, who led Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.

Podesta principal Mark Tavlarides declined on Friday evening to comment on whether his firm had been contacted by Mueller's team.

The firms involved with the Ukraine project did not initially register as foreign agents, citing legal analyses that indicated they were not required to do so because they were working for a nonprofit and not a foreign political party or government. In recent months, the Podesta Group and Mercury have filed retroactively, acknowledging that the Ukrainian political party benefited from their efforts.

Mike McKeon, a partner at Mercury, declined to comment on or confirm that his firm received a subpoena, but he said the company took care in asking the European Center about its finances and consulting with lawyers about its duties to file.

"Before we accepted this assignment in 2014, we went through our own due diligence to determine the proper disclosure required under federal law," he said.

Some of the subpoenas were first reported Friday evening by NBC News.

Investigators have sought information from SGR LLC in relation to work Flynn did for a Dutch company with ties to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, according to people familiar with the request. Flynn's company, the Flynn Intel Group, hired SGR LLC to help handle public affairs work on that contract.

The Flynn Intel Group initially described the project to SGR LLC as promoting a good business climate in Turkey, according to a person familiar with the discussions. Later, under pressure, Flynn filed formal reports indicating that the contract focused on a public affairs campaign to raise concern in the United States about Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish cleric living in exile in Pennsylvania. Erdogan's government blamed Gulen for a failed coup against him and wanted to persuade the United States to extradite Gulen to Turkey. Flynn also acknowledged in his retroactive filings this spring that he had secretly met with two top ministers to Erdogan, including Erdogan's son-in-law, two months before the election, where they had discussed Gulen's extradition.

Eric Lewis, a lawyer for SGR LLC, confirmed that the lobbying firm received a subpoena.

Information for this article was contributed by Devlin Barrett, Rosalind S. Helderman and Alice Crites of The Washington Post.