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[Public employees union to file ethics complaint over Nixon consulting firm's lobbying for Koch-funded company](#)

A public employee union official is filing a complaint over Cynthia Nixon's campaign consultants lobbying on behalf of a Koch brothers-backed company and failing to report it. (Alec Tabak for New York Daily News) (Alec Tabak / for New York Daily News)

A top official at one of the state's biggest unions will file a complaint with the state's ethics watchdog after the political consulting firm running Cynthia Nixon's campaign failed to report it lobbied for a Koch-brothers-backed company, the Daily News has learned.

The complaint comes after the News revealed that Hilltop Public Solutions had done work for Infor Inc., a Minnesota-based business software company with ties to the conservative Kochs, but failed to report it.

Fran Turner, director of legislative and political action at the Civil Service Employees Association, who will file the complaint with the Joint Commission on Public Ethics, noted that the Koch brothers' long crusade against public sector unions.

"Cynthia Nixon says she stands for public sector unions and she hires a consulting firm with ties to the Koch brothers," Turner said. "The Koch brothers, it's very well known, is the driving force behind going after the public sector unions nationwide."

While Infor listed Hilltop Public Solutions as one of five lobbyists it had hired in the first half of 2018, Hilltop did not register itself with JCOPE as required by law. Infor reported paying Hilltop \$27,500 in 2018.

Hilltop is the main consultant working on Nixon's challenge to Gov. Cuomo in the Democratic primary.

Infor, meanwhile, has ties to the conservative Koch brothers — Infor received a \$2 billion investment from an affiliate of Koch Equity Development LLC, the investment and acquisition subsidiary of Koch Industries, Inc.

The complaint Turner will file asks JCOPE to investigate Hilltop's failure to register as a lobbyist for Infor as the law requires.

"The law is pretty clear. If you're going to lobby, you've got to register, you've got to report," she said.

Nixon, meanwhile, has knocked Cuomo for accepting \$87,000 in donations from the Koch brothers in the past.

"If you're gonna talk the talk, then walk the walk," Turner said.

But Nixon's camp again pointed to Cuomo's own ties to the Kochs.

“As a leader of principle and consistency, we assume Ms. Turner will immediately rescind her cynical endorsement of Andrew Cuomo, the favorite of the Koch Brothers, and recipient of \$87,000 of their money,” Nixon campaign consultant Rebecca Katz said in a statement.

Cuomo Campaign Manager Was Lobbyist for Controversial Pipeline

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo hired a lobbyist for a natural-gas pipeline company to run his re-election campaign at the same time his administration was throwing a potential lifeline to the company’s controversial New Jersey-New York pipeline project.

Less than three months before the administration postponed a decision on the project, The Williams Companies also donated \$100,000 to a Democratic Party governors’ organization that supports Cuomo, government records show.

Cuomo spokesperson Rich Azzopardi asserted that there was no link between the lobbying, the donations and the administration’s pipeline decisions.

“Protecting New Yorkers and our environment are this administration’s top priorities, which is why decisions on individual projects are made at the agency level by career public servants who conduct a rigorous review of the facts and the science,” Azzopardi said.

The company — [Transco](#), a subsidiary of Tulsa-based Williams — has been seeking permission to build the pipeline from Cuomo administration regulators since June of 2017. The natural-gas project runs 23 miles from Old Bridge, New Jersey to Rockaway, New York.

As residential customers seek to switch from heating oil to cleaner, less-expensive natural gas, Williams has [argued](#) that the pipeline expansion is necessary to “help ensure that reliable gas supplies are available to support these conversions.” The company says the project will displace about 900,000 barrels of heating oil a year and reduce carbon dioxide emissions in New York City and Long Island.

[Critics say](#) the location of the pipeline puts the waters and shores of Lower New York Bay at risk of contamination and other environmental damage, and that it will encourage the region’s reliance on fossil fuels, thereby setting back the fight against [climate change](#).

Just this week, [New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer](#), [echoing local activists](#), called for the project to be terminated.

Cuomo’s Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) temporarily denied a water-quality certification for the pipeline in [April](#). But the ruling also allowed the Williams subsidiary to re-submit the proposal for approval “without prejudice” — a maneuver that keeps the embattled project alive. The company submitted a new application [in May](#). Cuomo has declined to answer questions about whether or not he agrees with Stringer that the proposal should be blocked.

Amid the intensifying battle over the pipeline, Williams hired lobbying firm Kivvit to advocate for its interests in Albany last fall, according to [state ethics records](#). Among the lobbyists registered to represent Williams is Maggie Moran, a well-known operative who [advised](#) Cuomo’s gubernatorial campaign in 2010.

[Timeline: Connections Between The Williams Companies and Gov. Andrew Cuomo](#) by [WNYCNewsroom](#) on Scribd

Maggie Moran, Registered Lobbyist

In June of this year, while she was registered as a pipeline lobbyist, Cuomo hired her to take the reigns of his campaign. Moran took over two months after Joe Percoco, who ran both of

Cuomo's previous campaigns, was [convicted](#) on federal corruption charges — one of several corruption scandals that have dogged the Cuomo administration in recent months. She took a leave of absence from Kivvit when she joined the campaign, a Cuomo spokesman says.

[State records](#) show that Moran, who declined an interview request, began lobbying on behalf of Williams in September 2017 — three months after Williams [first](#) submitted its pipeline proposal to Cuomo administration regulators. Those records also show that Moran's lobbying has been specifically targeted at the executive branch that Cuomo heads. Kivvit's [website](#) says Moran "oversees all aspects of Kivvit's day-to-day operations" and Kivvit has continued to lobby for Williams in 2018. Kivvit's [managing director](#) is former Cuomo communications director Rich Bamberger.

The Money Trail

As Cuomo administration regulators were reviewing the pipeline this year, Williams made two donations totaling \$100,000 to the Democratic Governors Association, which [lists](#) Cuomo as a member of its leadership team and which has [provided the campaign with polling research](#). Internal Revenue Service records show that the money arrived in two donations in February — [\\$50,000](#) from The Williams Companies and another [\\$50,000](#) from the New York subsidiary Transco, the Williams Transcontinental Gas Pipeline Company. Soon after, the governor's association made an in-kind contribution of polling research worth \$20,000 to Cuomo's campaign, according to [state disclosure records](#).

A Cuomo campaign spokesperson, Abbey Collins, said the governor did not solicit Williams' contribution to the DGA.

Azzopardi, the spokesman for the governor's office, said: "At no point did the agency or the governor's office get approached on this project by Kivvit — any suggestion otherwise would be a trip into tinfoil hat country."

The company has given regularly to both the Democratic and Republican governors' associations in the past.

The 2018 donations appear to be among the company's largest ever to the governor's association. The DGA has said corporate donations to the group cannot be earmarked to specific campaigns or candidates, and therefore there is no link between donations and public-policy influence.

Williams spokesman Keith Isbell declined to discuss the company's lobbying activities, its relationship with Moran or its donations to the DGA on the record.

"New York's energy demands continue to grow at a startling rate," he said. "The Northeast Supply Enhancement project is a critical step toward ensuring New York has the infrastructure in place to meet that demand with a mix of energy sources that are reliable, affordable and clean."

Albany Corruption

In the last few years, Cuomo has faced multiple corruption scandals, fueling critics' assertions that he is too close to Albany influence peddlers. Percoco, one of his closest aides, was [convicted](#) in March, and in July several other top Cuomo allies were [found guilty](#) of perpetrating a massive bid-rigging scheme.

Despite questions about special interests and revolving doors, Cuomo [decided](#) to hire a registered lobbyist to run his campaign amid the corruption trials. That decision follows Cuomo's [2015 hiring](#) of [lobbyist](#) William Mulrow to serve as his top aide in Albany.

[Cuomo appointed Mulrow as chairman of his reelection campaign](#) last year, and Mulrow [returned to his job at Blackstone](#), a Wall Street colossus that also has had [fossil fuel-related business](#) before Cuomo's administration.

Cuomo is now facing a spirited Democratic primary challenge from actress Cynthia Nixon, who has [demanded](#) an end to pipeline approvals. During the campaign, the governor has touted his environmental record, including his formation of the U.S. Climate Alliance with other blue-state governors following the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement last year. The Cuomo administration has also [rejected two](#) other proposed pipeline projects.

But Cuomo has [declined](#) to reject fossil-fuel industry campaign cash, and earlier this year, he [affirmed](#) his support for natural gas development — even as environmental groups continue to [pressure](#) his administration to block proposals for new gas-fired plants and pipeline projects around the state.

In the New York pipeline fight, the Cuomo administration denied Williams' subsidiary Transco a water quality certification, [citing](#) “potentially significant environmental impacts that raised serious concerns.”

“The construction of the project could have significant water quality impacts in New York State,” said Cuomo DEC [appointee](#) Thomas Berkman in a letter released just weeks after Nixon entered the primary race against the governor. “This includes potentially significant impacts from the resuspension of sediments and other contaminants, as well as to habitats due to the disturbance of shellfish beds and other benthic resources. In addition, the construction of the Project could potentially impact Atlantic sturgeon and other protected species.”

However, because state regulators rejected the application “without prejudice,” the state allowed Williams to [resubmit](#) its proposal in May. That has raised fears among environmental activists that Cuomo's administration is delaying a decision on the pipeline until after next week's gubernatorial primary and the general election in November.

According to bi-monthly reports filed with the state's Joint Commission on Public Ethics, Moran was [registered](#) to lobby the executive branch of New York State government on behalf of Williams as recently as [May and June of this year](#) — just as the pipeline's water quality permit was resubmitted, and just before she joined the Cuomo campaign as manager.

Cuomo campaign spokeswoman Abbey Collins said, “Maggie was not on the campaign when the decision was made by the governor's administration.”

She said Moran's firm handled media relations and advertising for the company, but didn't lobby the legislature or the executive branch. She said it was required to register as a lobbyist by [new rules](#) about companies that have contact with the press.

In a [letter](#) filed with state ethics regulators, an official from the Williams Companies said the conglomerate hired Moran's firm to “engage in communications activities to the general public that spur communications to the executive and legislative branches of New York State government.”

Client Support

Williams is not the only Moran client with business before Cuomo. [State records](#) show that as of June, Moran has also been registered to lobby “administrative branches of New York State government” on behalf of Vertex Pharmaceuticals, which is currently [negotiating](#) with the New York Department of Health over the price of its cystic fibrosis drug Orkambi. Records show that Vertex hired Kivvit in May of this year, immediately following a state panel’s [recommendation](#) that New York’s Medicaid program impose a price cap on Orkambi.

Another of Moran’s clients at Kivvit is [Tesla](#), the electric carmaker. It’s the parent company of SolarCity, a solar-panel factory known as RiverBend that’s at the center of the [ongoing Buffalo Billion probe](#). That investigation has seen Percoco convicted in federal court on three counts of bribery and fraud, and another former Cuomo aide, Todd Howe, plead guilty on similar charges. Kivvit clients have contributed at least \$544,000 to Cuomo’s campaigns since 2014, according to state campaign finance disclosures. Moran herself has donated \$10,000 to Cuomo since 2015, records show.

In addition to approval from the Cuomo administration, Williams’ northeast pipeline also needs approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, whose five commissioners — four of whom are appointees of President Donald Trump — are [expected](#) to rule on the project later this month.

The agency issued a [report](#) in March finding that the project “would result in some adverse environmental impacts,” including “long-term impacts on air quality and noise” from a compressor station. However, the same report also asserted that most of the “impacts would be temporary and occur during construction.”

A coalition of environmental and citizens groups, [Stop the Williams Pipeline](#), submitted more than 6,000 comments in opposition to the pipeline to the commission during its public comment period. The group is also collecting signatures on a [petition](#) its members plan to submit to Cuomo later this year.

In announcing his opposition to the pipeline this week, Comptroller Stringer said he was concerned about the impact on many of the region’s sensitive ecosystems.

“The 23-mile pipeline would extend from New Jersey, along the Staten Island coast, past Coney Island and into the Rockaways,” he said in a [statement](#). “Allowing the construction of the pipeline risks damage to many of New York’s most precious habitats and natural assets, including New York Harbor, Jamaica Bay, and the Rockaways’ many beaches.”

[Gillum's Attorney Says Ethics Probe Much Ado About Nothing As Candidate Releases Receipts](#)

Florida’s Commission on Ethics is investigating a complaint filed against Tallahassee Mayor Andrew Gillum. It calls for a look into two trips Gillum took with lobbyists in 2016, and prompted his campaign to release receipts to show a paper trail. The Democratic gubernatorial candidate’s attorney isn’t optimistic about the matter being resolved before the general election.

The complaint began with a local businessman and frequent critic of City Hall that Gillum is surely familiar with. Erwin Jackson, a fixture at City meetings, previously filed a complaint with the State Ethics Commission that ousted a Tallahassee City Manager for taking gifts like pricy football tickets. Jackson claims lobbyists paid for Gillum’s trips – one to New York City and one to Costa Rica.

“Those two trips, I’ve modified my initial complaint with the trip to New York ... Now we’ve got a second trip where he’s taken money and gifts,” Jackson said in June, when he filed the complaint.

The trips were unrelated to Gillum’s mayoral post – but he was accompanied by lobbyists on both.

“Andrew Gillum went over there with Adam Corey, city lobbyist and Sean Pittman, city lobbyist,” Jackson said, citing the Costa Rica trip. Gillum’s campaign says that trip was a part of his wife’s birthday celebration.

“Gillum says that he paid for his as well, but he just paid cash,” Jackson said. “So he has no credit card receipts – which most people aren’t going to believe.”

Gillum’s attorney, Barry Richard, says Gillum met with an Ethics Commission investigator recently.

“They have an investigator who does his research, he interviews people. I don’t know if he’s finished with his interviews or not,” Richard said. “We had an interview with him this past Tuesday, this week. So he had not completed his investigation at least by Tuesday.”

Hours after the meeting, Gillum’s campaign posted on its website receipts intended to show Gillum did in fact pay his way on the trips. One is a \$400 cash withdrawal Gillum says he used to pay for his “share” of a villa in Costa Rica, which he shared with lobbyists. Richard insists there is nothing inappropriate to be found.

“Andrew produced all of his receipts to show that they paid for their food, they paid for their travel – everything they paid for with a credit card. And he gave some cash to Adam to reimburse him for the few nights in the room,” Richard said. “So, all these things are like – they’re being treated like it’s a big investigation. There’s nothing involved here – nobody is suggesting anybody paid for any favors. It’s just a bunch of silly business.”

There, Richard refers to lobbyist Adam Corey, who is connected to an FBI investigation of corruption in Tallahassee government. Corey’s lawyer, Christopher Kise, told the Associated Press his client never received cash reimbursement from Gillum – and that Corey won the accommodations in a charity auction.

During the trip to New York, Gillum and Corey were accompanied at times by an undercover FBI agent. Together, they saw a Broadway musical, which the campaign said was provided by Gillum’s brother through a “swap” for another concert ticket. Gillum has produced a bill for his hotel stay, and says his airfare was paid for through another job he held, with the foundation People For The American Way.

Again, Richard says it’s a non-issue.

“He met his brother in New York to go see Hamilton, and his brother gave him a ticket to Hamilton. So, there’s a big uproar over, where did the ticket come from? Did it come from Adam Corey, because Corey went as well,” Richard said. “Adam Corey and Andrew and his brother have been friends since college, and they socialize a lot. But nobody, including Corey, has said that Corey gave them the ticket. Andrew got the ticket from his brother. So, it’s just a speculative issue that is not based on anything.”

The Gillum campaign's document dump has become fodder for criticism from his competitor in the governor's race. The campaign for Republican Congressman Ron DeSantis is calling Gillum's release of documents "incomplete."

Included in the release of Gillum's bank records was a poorly-redacted document showing a \$15,000 dollar transfer from a savings to checking account made around the time of the trip. The Miami Herald, Politico and others reported on the transfer, which Richard says is making much out of nothing.

"Where it came from was Andrew's savings account, and he transferred it to his checking account to pay expenses," Richard said.

Though he maintains his client did nothing inappropriate, Richard does not think the Ethics Commission will have a complete finding until after the general election in November. The Commission has one more meeting, on October 19, before votes are cast.