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## [U.S. Rep. Rob Woodall, Carolyn Bourdeaux face off on congressional district issues at forum](#)

Democratic Seventh Congressional District candidate Carolyn Bourdeaux answers a question at a candidate forum hosted by the United Peachtree Corners Civic Association as her Republican opponent, U.S. Rep. Rob Woodall, left, looks on Monday night. (Staff Photo: Curt Yeomans)

In their first time going to head-to-head in the closely watched 7th Congressional District race Monday, U.S. Rep. Rob Woodall, R-Ga., and Democratic nominee Carolyn Bourdeaux tangled time and again over money.

Of top concern was who is contributing to their campaigns.

“We need to get special money out of politics, period, and that is that,” Bourdeaux said. “Yes, I understand that people on both sides of the aisle play that game, but it is not the right thing for us. What this means is our congressman is funded by PACs. He is funded by lobbyists.

“He is not funded by you all, and I think he should be listening to you all and not PACs and special interests.”

Meanwhile, Woodall — who has himself received contributions from out-of-state groups — pointed to out of state contributions to Bourdeaux’s campaign.

“That doesn’t make her corrupt, that doesn’t make her bad,” Woodall said. “It just makes California and New York incredibly interested in how we decide who (should be elected) this year.”

Woodall and Bourdeaux faced off in front of a standing room only crowd at a candidate forum hosted by the United Peachtree Corners Civic Association at Peachtree Corners City Hall. The event featured candidates in races for county commission, state legislative and congressional districts that represent the city.

The headline matchup, however, may have been Woodall and Bourdeaux. The incumbent congressman and the Georgia State University professor are facing each other in a race that has drawn national attention.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee added Bourdeaux to its Red to Blue Program, targeting the 7th Congressional District seat as one House Democrats feel they have a shot at flipping this fall.

How vulnerable the seat is to flipping, however, depends on which candidate you ask.

“To suggest we’re having some kind of rebellion in the 7th District of Georgia is just nonsense,” Woodall said. “To suggest there are a lot of angry New Yorkers and Californians who want to see Georgians do different things, that’s absolutely true.”

But Bourdeaux said, “People are fed up. They are fed up because of health care. They are fed up with special interest money. They are fed up with the traffic. They are fed up with a lot of the things that are happening in Washington, the rollback of environmental regulations, and there’s just a lot of energy out there.

“People are sick and tired of how we are doing business and Donald Trump is kind of the cherry on top.”

Campaign funding wasn’t the only issue Bourdeaux and Woodall tangled over. They also clashed over issues such as funding for Pell Grants, Medicare and health care, and particularly support for, or opposition to, the Affordable Care Act.

Bourdeaux questioned Woodall about votes to repeal the Affordable Care Act, claiming a repeal of the law would open the door for insurance companies to deny coverage to people with pre-existing conditions.

“This is a life and death situation for many folks to lose coverage for pre-existing conditions,” Bourdeaux said. “I am confused. Don’t you care about these folks or are you just too afraid to stand up to the leadership of the House and to the president?”

Woodall argued his votes to repeal the Affordable Care Act would not lead to people being denied coverage based on pre-existing conditions, at one point claiming “we’ll never return to pre-existing exclusions again.”

“What Carolyn would tell you is that if you vote to repeal the Affordable Care Act, which has destroyed the American health care system, and replace it with something like what Maine has done ... that somehow means you’re either corrupt or you don’t care,” Woodall said.

“Don’t believe it. That’s politics at its worst, and from someone who’s never even gotten elected yet, that’s a rotten start.”

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### **[AG challenger proposes tighter state ethics rules](#)**

Ethics proposals released by Democratic attorney general candidate Mike Lee on Monday would sharply curtail the privacy of relationships that lawmakers share with lobbyists and political donors, while empowering the state Ethics Commission to more aggressively pursue rules violations.

Lee, a former federal toy regulator, has accused Republican Attorney General Leslie Rutledge of inaction as federal investigators continue to probe corrupt dealings in the state Legislature.

Rutledge responded in a statement by pointing to her creation of a new Public Integrity Division this summer that is investigating an unknown number of individuals, as well as an uptick in Medicaid fraud convictions that were investigated by her office.

The attorney general also accused Lee of his own ethics mishaps, including filing financial reports late and accepting a contribution from a corporation. The in-kind donation of food and drink, recorded as coming from Trio's restaurant in Little Rock, will be amended to show it came from the restaurant's owner, Little Rock City Director Capi Peck, a spokesman for Lee's campaign, said. Lee attributed the late reports to problems with the state's new online filing system.

But Rutledge noted that under Lee's proposal to disallow do-overs on campaign-finance filings, Lee could be subject to a fine.

"Mr. Lee needs to clean up his own house before hypocritically proposing ethics reform," Rutledge said in a statement.

A half-dozen current and former lawmakers have faced criminal charges during Rutledge's first term, from both state and federal authorities. That includes four former legislators who have been convicted in a federal probe into kickbacks related to state surplus spending.

Among the legislative proposals for 2019 that Lee promised, if elected, are banning gifts from lobbyists and requiring lobbyists to disclose what legislation they are involved with and legislators they meet.

Lee also proposed tougher campaign-finance laws aimed at eliminating dark money -- a term for political spending made by groups that do not disclose their donor base -- and corporate donations to political action committees.

Lee also said he would seek to make the state Ethics Commission a "tough independent body" by revamping how its members are selected and giving them new powers to investigate wrongdoing and impose fines.

"This is a chance for Arkansans to vote and send a signal to the lobbyists and the Legislature in the state Capitol that the current era of corruption is coming to an end," Lee said in a news conference announcing his agenda.

Graham Sloan, the director of the Arkansas Ethics Commission, said Lee's proposal to require that the commission conduct "spot audits" of campaign finance and disclosure forms would require more staff members and resources for the agency. Under its current makeup, he said, the five-member commission has nine staff members and about an \$800,000 budget.

But Sloan said other proposals would be less of a change. For one, he asserted the commission already has the authority to begin investigations based on "reasonable suspicion," a standard proposed by Lee. It is only later in the investigative process that probable cause must be proved, Sloan said. And by removing certain exemptions in gift-giving rules or reporting requirements, Sloan said, the commission's job could even get easier.

"I don't know that more strict laws would be harder to enforce," Sloan said. "In some instances it would require stricter standards but easier analysis [of violations]."

Questioned about his proposal by reporters, Lee conceded that some details -- including a new system to appoint Ethics Commission members -- had yet to be worked out. Asked where he drew his ideas from, Lee said they came from several states, naming Texas specifically.

Lee's campaign spokesman, Jacob Kauffman, later provided several articles outlining changes in places such as Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Delaware that he said served as inspiration for parts of Lee's proposal.

The general election is Nov. 6.

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### **[Charlie Baker, Marty Walsh were anti-pot, but take donations from marijuana companies](#)**

Some of the Bay State's most prominent anti-pot pols are rolling in the green, taking thousands of dollars in donations from deep-pocketed marijuana companies seeking political leverage in the state's budding multimillion-dollar industry.

The willingness of top elected officials — Gov. Charlie Baker, Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh and House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo — to quietly accept political donations while publicly decrying legalized pot has shocked longtime cannabis opponents.

“It runs against everything they believe in,” said Jody Hensley, a policy adviser for the anti-weed Massachusetts Prevention Alliance. “I think this is carelessness in their campaign office. I just don’t believe that they would accept this knowingly,” Hensley added.

Baker and Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito have pocketed \$4,500 in the past two years from marijuana industry companies such as Happy Valley, Alternative Therapies Group and Garden Remedies, according to state campaign finance records.

DeLeo took in \$1,750, while Walsh accepted \$1,000, according to state records.

The bipartisan power trio vowed to fight legalized marijuana in 2016, creating the Campaign for a Safe and Healthy Massachusetts in 2016, a political opposition group that spent \$2.8 million to oppose recreational sales. They argued that making the drug more accessible could further increase the state’s opiate addiction toll.

“You’ll hear the other side say that marijuana is not a gateway drug,” said Walsh during a 2016 press conference. “If you know anyone in the recovery community ... you’ll hear that most of them, many of them started with marijuana.”

Baker cautioned about “the creation of a billion-dollar, for-profit commercial marijuana industry,” at the time.

But when reached yesterday, the Baker campaign appeared unfazed by suggestions of hypocrisy and defended the donations.

“Gov. Baker and Lt. Gov. Polito are proud to have broad, bipartisan support for their approach to governing and reaching across the aisle to serve the people of Massachusetts, working with the Legislature, educators, law enforcement and strong public health advocates like the governor’s Cannabis Control Commission appointee Jennifer Flanagan, to responsibly and safely implement the adult use of marijuana and honor the will of the voters,” said Terry MacCormack, a spokesman for the Baker and Polito campaign.

A Walsh representative had no immediate comment, asking for more time to review the campaign’s public filings, which are submitted to the Office of Campaign and Political Finance regularly by all elected officeholders.

The DeLeo campaign did not respond to requests for comment.

Jim Borghesani, spokesman for the Question 4 campaign that legalized pot, said of the donations, “This is a logical progression of normalization that cannabis companies are mirroring other industries in political contributions, even if, in this case, the contributions flow to prior legalization opponents. Whether or not these politicians show some actual leadership regarding the voters’ legalization decision remains to be seen.”

Despite the concerns of top pols — about the dangers of gateway drug use, stoned driving and other enforcement issues — Bay State voters legalized recreational marijuana sales on Nov. 8, 2016, and lawmakers spent over six months developing regulations and creating the state’s Cannabis Control Commission. The five-member-board is still reviewing and granting licenses to grow and sell marijuana before the first pot shop can open. Law enforcement agencies meanwhile are trying to find ways to determine how stoned a driver is, and sounding alarms

about the illegal pot trade, with police chiefs saying drug dealers use pot's legal status as a cover for illegal activity.

The marijuana-based political donations come as cities and towns prepare for the first pot shops to open and Beacon Hill becomes increasingly flooded by marijuana lobbyists. Companies like Weedmaps, Good Chemistry Inc., Weston Roots Management and others reported paying \$435,000 this year to lobbying companies, according to state records.

Hensley, meanwhile, argued that taking even small donations sends the wrong message.

"Politicians should not risk the perception of their support for this new addiction-for-profit industry," she said.

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### **County's lobbyist blasts Volusia for lack of transparency**

Jim Dinneen's final months as Volusia County's manager were plagued by a repeated criticism: not enough transparency.

When it came to light that a 2016 taxpayer-funded impact fee study was never presented to the public, it gave credence to Sheriff Mike Chitwood's long-held assertion that the county "shrouds in secrecy" too much of its public business. Some council members called it a problem, too, and have cited a need for more open government as a top priority as they seek a replacement.

But since Dinneen's June resignation, the issue still reverberates through the county, proving a factor in the county's loss of its federal lobbyist.

James Pericola, who is paid \$90,000 a year to seek funding in the nation's capital, said a "lack of transparency" hinders his efforts and is one of the reasons he won't try to keep the job next year, he wrote in an Aug. 6 letter to the County Council and its interim manager.

The county declined to comment on the letter.

Some on the council dismiss the criticism as "sour grapes" after the county moved to drop the fee it pays for the position to less than half of what Pericola's firm makes. But Councilwoman Billie Wheeler wants the county to reach a point where she no longer has to hear complaints about a lack of transparency.

"That's the most-used word right now in the county," she said. "And we are all demanding more of it."

While Pericola's letter didn't name Dinneen, he described how efforts to inform leaders about opportunities didn't always reach council members. Specifically, he said the county missed out on the chance to address two pressing issues: the opioid crisis and water quality.

"Many of our ideas and suggestions have unfortunately (been) withheld from the Council or filtered to the point of irrelevancy," Pericola, a Spruce Creek High School alumnus who has served as the county's lobbyist since 2014, wrote in the letter.

He added that securing a grant requires more legwork than simply applying for it. "With billions (in federal dollars) set to go out the door (for opioid and water quality), it is unconscionable we never received a response for basic data and information, let alone the opportunity to strategize with staff and the Council to set priorities and map out a plan before the money is allocated. ... It is clear why other counties are consistently being selected over Volusia."

Email records show that nobody with the council or county responded to his 1,981-word letter and it was never discussed in a council meeting.

George Recktenwald, the interim county manager who vowed for more transparency when he took over in July, declined to comment on the letter. In an email, he gave examples of federal funding the county has received in recent years. They include millions for the Daytona Beach International Airport and the entire \$40 million in funding for the Orange Avenue bridge project currently under construction. The county also receives millions of dollars every year for community block grants, used to help people find affordable housing.

“None of this money comes to the county automatically,” Recktenwald wrote. “Experienced county staff work with the various federal and state agencies to secure this funding.”

Yet in light of recent events that have thrown transparency into question — years of problems at the medical examiner’s office that were never discussed in a meeting, complaints from Councilwoman Heather Post about an inability to get information, an impact fee study that suggested developers pay up to 300 percent more for growth that was never shared in a meeting — some weren’t surprised to learn that it was at the center of a fallout with a lobbyist.

“Wow,” said Chitwood, Dinneen’s most vocal critic, when he learned of the letter. “Transparency is something I’ve been talking about all along. This shows how bad the problem is.”

Doug Daniels also wasn’t surprised after serving on the council in 2014 when another federal lobbyist backed out of a contract due to a “fractured County Council.”

“The county has zero transparency or as close to zero as you could possibly get,” Daniels said, adding, “But I don’t know how that would have affected (the lobbyist’s) ability to get stuff done.”

### **‘Sour grapes’**

Tuesday, the council will select a new federal lobbying firm to work under a \$42,500 contract. That’s less than half of what it pays Pericola’s firm, Seward Square Group, which will serve out its \$90,000 contract through December.

Some council members reached this week speculated that pay cut is the reason why Seward Square didn’t place a bid to renew.

“They had sour grapes over something,” County Chair Ed Kelley said.

“How would he know anything about our (level of) transparency? I don’t know what he could be referring to,” Kelley said. “It would be ridiculous to say that we have no interest in grants. There would be no reason for us to not pursue a grant.”

“Sour grapes” is also how Councilman Pat Patterson described the letter, which he feels is further proof why the county no longer needs a federal lobbyist.

Patterson, a former state legislator, is frustrated that the county still has been unable to collect the roughly \$40 million in federal funding that’s required to extend SunRail from DeBary into DeLand — which was part of the deal when the commuter rail contract was inked in 2010. At the Sept. 4 council meeting, the District 1 councilman made a motion to drop the federal lobbyist altogether and use the money to boost its presence in Tallahassee by adding another state lobbyist.

“We have more going on in Tallahassee than we do in D.C.,” Patterson said. “Let’s just focus on local issues. We haven’t gotten (anything) out of Washington.”

But council members instead chose a new state lobbyist. They ousted the Gray Robinson firm, which has served in that role since 2013, and supported a \$90,000 contract with Southern Strategy Group — a company that represents more than 250 clients nationwide, including

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Consolidated Tomoka Land. Co and a group the county has opposed on issues in the Legislature this year: the Florida Sheriffs Association.

Councilwoman Joyce Cusack, another former state lawmaker, believes it's important for the county to have a presence in both the state and nation's capital.

"We ought to have some skin in both games," she said in response to Patterson's motion. "I think it's important that we have a relationship on the federal level."

Pericola's letter raises questions about how well those relationships are working. But Kelley expressed confidence that any communication issues between the county and its lobbyists will improve thanks to addition of a new position. In January, the county hired John Booker, a former aide for John Mica when Mica was a congressman, to oversee all legislative affairs, including grants, and serve as the staff point person for SunRail. He earns a salary of \$90,000.

"I feel confident we will get the information we need," Kelley said.

Wheeler, who had a phone conversation with Pericola this week, said it's clear that there are still changes that need to be made going forward. "If the lobbyist is saying we (council members) need to be more involved, I want to make sure we step that up."

### **'Dysfunctional and ineffective'**

Ironically, concerns about information and communication are among the reasons why the council chose during its Sept. 4 meeting not to keep Gray Robinson as its state lobbyist.

In 2017, council members weren't notified immediately when a bill intended to give homeowners more freedom with their property evolved into a threat against public beaches. The news sent county officials scrambling to ensure Volusia was exempt. This year, as the county considered putting a half-cent sales tax on the ballot, the council was surprised by a law that required additional steps, including an audit.

That's "not acceptable," Councilwoman Deb Denys told representatives with Gray Robinson, citing it as a reason the county put the services out for bid. "We don't want to feel like we are getting second-hand information. We need better communication."

Pericola said better communication would have helped him do his job. And that's not "sour grapes" talking, he said. The letter, he noted, was intended to provide constructive feedback as the county moves forward with a new firm.

The last time the council selected a federal lobbyist was a "circus," Daniels said at the time. During that hearing in 2014, council members, looking to hire two firms for that job, had a difficult time making a choice.

Holland & Knight was ultimately selected along with Seward Square, despite concerns from some about a potential conflict of interest. A month later, Holland & Knight backed out, citing "apparent fractures in the County Council."

Those fractures have not been repaired, according to Pericola's letter.

"We believe the County's existing culture and structure promotes a lack of transparency which leads to a dysfunctional and ineffective process that largely leaves the Council out of the loop," he wrote. "As a result, countless opportunities are missed."

Later in the letter, Pericola compared the county's handling of its lobbyists to a person who never uses a gym membership and wonders why he's not losing weight.

“It leads them to quit the gym and look for a new one the next time out,” Pericola wrote. “Yet, it’s clear to everyone else, until they change their habits and get involved in the process, the results will never change.”

Here is the Aug. 6 letter Volusia County’s federal lobbyist, James Pericola, sent to the county council.

**Mr. Chairman, Vice-Chair Denys & Members of the Council:**

*As a follow up to my individual phone calls to you last month, I wanted to explain why Seward Square Group did not respond to the RSQ and make clear we intend to complete the terms of our existing contract. Out of respect for all of you and in appreciation for the opportunity to represent my home County, we made a point of staying out of the fray related to the Manager during that extremely contentious period. It was clear it would not have been helpful to be another voice highlighting that the County suffers from a lack of transparency and the keeping of critical information from the Council. It is clear many of the issues that led to the Council to “turn the page” over these same issues in other areas have also had a negative impact on our firm’s efforts over the years. Many of our ideas and suggestions have unfortunately being withheld from the Council or filtered to the point of irrelevancy from our client, the Council.*

*We were disheartened and disappointed when the County elected to move ahead with an RSQ for 2019 without any conversation or notice to SSG. I have heard many discussions related to the Council’s concern over the County’s reputation. I will leave it to the Council to determine if actions such as these help or hurt. We hope the Council will be receptive to this feedback and allowing a more transparent and effective process moving forward. Our feedback echoes the likes of Holland & Knight, former Congressman Mica, and many others with decades of experience actually working in Washington. The selection of Mr. Recktenwald as Interim Manager is the most positive sign that things are changing in a positive direction. I hope he will be considered for the permanent position, or at a minimum, given enough time and authority to open some doors and create more of the collaborative environment that is so desperately needed.*

*We believe the County’s existing culture and structure promotes a lack of transparency which leads to a dysfunctional and ineffective process that largely leaves the Council out of the loop. As a result, countless opportunities are missed, and mistakes are constantly repeated because there is no oversight from the Council other than the hiring and firing of firms. This process is also filtered, as the Council relies heavily on the Manager’s recommendation. Remaining in the good graces of the Manager has been prioritized over establishing an open and collaborative process. Once the Council hires a firm, staff actively works to limit contact or are ordered to filter information and opportunities to the Council. Thus, the Council does not see actions, recommendations and proposals the staff choose not to act or report on either because they don’t want additional work, or because they do not understand the issue, or possibly have another agenda. Ultimately, this results in the Council repeating the cycle of shopping for new lobbyists every few years, with little to no insight to the internal failures or inability to engage or execute on the advice given by a wide range of outside experts and professionals.*

*Throughout our tenure, we have proactively raised numerous issues and opportunities on behalf of the Council. It is no longer enough to simply identify grant opportunities, apply, and hope for the best. Until the County changes its mindset, other counties will continue to reap the*

*benefits while Volusia continues its cycle of hiring and firing government relations firms without being able to work productively with their team. Today, getting in front of issues, establishing clear objectives and priorities, maintaining a process, leveraging resources, and building coalitions, and remaining nimble, humble and a willingness to put some skin in the game is what is crucial.*

*Two recent examples worth noting are positioning the County in the opioid crisis debate and pursuing federal water grants and funding opportunities at the USDA. Both are issues on which the federal government is set to spend billions of dollars. Without question, Florida will be central to the debate in the opioid crisis debate, which the local media has noted in recent weeks. With billions set to go out the door, it is unconscionable we never received a response for basic data and information, let alone the opportunity to strategize with staff and the Council to set priorities and map out a plan before the money is allocated. As we were able to achieve with Zika funding, where the County was initially reluctant to even engage in the debate, we ensured hundreds of thousands of federal dollars made its way to Volusia County. We did this by working with lawmakers and staff on the front end to set the language that guaranteed funds to counties and municipalities, instead of them using the funds only on hardest hit areas and international communities.*

*Nearly six months ago, I learned the USDA had received \$1 billion for rural water and waste disposal infrastructure, an increase of over \$500 million from the previous year. At the same time, a close contact accepted a Presidential appointment in the Secretary's Office and offered direct assistance navigating the process. Obviously, we, like everyone else competing for dollars, need to be thoughtful and prepared in any outreach to the Agency. I made several attempts to begin a dialogue with USDA, but did not receive a reply from County staff until recently.*

*After repeated calls to County staff to engage with USDA and in the absence of any engagement with their staff to tell Volusia's story, I received an email from staff noting a success story from another part of the State from, you guessed it, the large influx of USDA grant funds I had highlighted six months earlier. I also fear none of these discussions have been mentioned to the Council. This is concerning, particularly as Vice-Chair Denys has made it known that seeking relief for Oak Hill is a priority and this could be a perfect vehicle to do so. The Council can hire all the lobbyists in the world, but until it addresses these serious and fundamental internal deficiencies, it is foolhardy to expect different results.*

*Nonetheless, I again reached out to my contact in the Secretary's Office and asked to be put in touch with his colleague, USDA's Chief of Staff for Rural Development. He confirmed what I had already communicated and noted that Volusia would need to be prepared to answer basic questions and have clear priorities and know what the County was prepared to match or commit to low interest loans to begin a dialogue. This basic request seemed too challenging, as the response I received was, "I think we are talking chicken and egg here and I don't want to ask departments to do work unless there's a possibility... Let me know Volusia would qualify for septic to sewer...and we'll look into specifics for projects."*

*Given that the USDA just announced another \$4 billion, I cannot think of a better opportunity to be connected with the person in charge of distributing the funds. However, if we cannot answer basic questions and be prepared to engage in a constructive dialogue, it is clear why other counties are consistently being selected over Volusia.*

*For more than ten years, Volusia County has sought counsel and held discussions with dozens of Washington lobbying firms, often through public and acrimonious discussions. In the end, several consistent themes emerge: the outgoing firm somehow under-delivered; no analysis, or lessons learned in terms of staff or structural shortcomings is undertaken; state lobbying is given greater weight, primarily because it is better understood; staff filters information and limits access to the point where Councilmembers have little understanding what the federal team is doing, the Council is rarely in the loop, and direct contact with the Council is strongly and increasingly discouraged. The end result is the Council is unhappy with the federal team or believes it is unnecessary; the process is either cancelled for several years or begins anew. Like those who buy gym memberships, never use them and then cannot understand why they have not lost weight, which leads them to quit the gym and look for a new one the next time out. Yet, it's clear to everyone else, until they change their habits and get involved in the process, the results will never change.*

*For a client, particularly a municipality, changing its team every few years sends the message that the client either has no idea what they are doing and/or they are difficult to work with. Since the engagement will not last more than a few years, that impacts effort, talent and how much political capital they spend, i.e., offering meetings of little importance and even less significance with the most junior people in the Congressional offices with no ability to influence policy of their boss (for the Councilmembers elected in 2006, this was one of the complaints with the big name firm prior to us); despite the fact the senior partners close the deal, they will spend almost no time working on the account and will likely never be seen again.*

*Most firms are focused on the recruitment of new clients, and less on achieving results for existing clients. Many firms sign new clients and will promise the moon and the stars, with little actual follow through especially with less litigious and normally aggressive clients like cities and counties. They bring in their closers and senior partners for the pitch, but they are immediately replaced with junior members of the firm tasked with providing rote updates. The lower the retainer, the less attention is received.*

*In stark contrast to these models and the constraints placed on us, SSG have fulfilled our promise of aggressively seeking opportunities and we have been successful on many fronts. Additionally, on the few occasions we have been able to impress upon the staff the importance to have Councilmembers in Washington, even though it should be through discussions with the Council and staff that those decisions are made, we provided unprecedented access to Senators, Committee Chairmen, senior Members of Congress on key committees and Administration officials.*

*Since the Council is the one hiring and expecting results, it is not enough to rely on reports from staff. Furthermore, working in a congressional office in the state on constituent and state related issues certainly gives some insight into process and terminology, but does not match the actual experience of federal lobbyists as we work in an entirely different system.*

*Suggesting otherwise is a tremendous disservice to the County. The same would apply to a creature of Washington advising anyone on the Florida legislature or any other system with which they are not intimately well versed. The process needs to be open and collaborative and the Council must take a more active role in ongoing discussions to ensure it is looped in on future opportunities.*

*It has truly been a privilege to work on behalf of the Council. It is in that spirit I am sharing this feedback and I hope it is received as intended to be helpful. Volusia County is a wonderful community and will always be home in my heart, but one would not necessarily know it given the years of infighting, pettiness and bad headlines.*

*Finally, in terms of positive news for the community, I noticed the induction of one of Volusia County's favorite sons, Chipper Jones, to the Hall of Fame at Cooperstown. If the County is planning to honor this tremendous achievement, SSG stands ready to assist and would be happy to coordinate Senate and House floor statements and press releases once Congress is back in town.*

*Thank you for considering this feedback. I look forward to hearing from you as I hope this can be the beginning of a constructive and productive conversation.*

*Respectfully,*

*Jamie*

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### **[Lobbyists, clergy, among the diverse groups that give their top campaign dollars to Sherrod Brown](#)**

Who loves Ohio Sen. Sherrod Brown? Campaign finance records compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics indicate he's the U.S. Senate's top campaign cash recipient from a surprising variety of special interests.

Brown is one of the U.S. Senate's top campaign fundraisers. His campaign had collected more than \$23 million when he last filed a Federal Election Commission report over the summer.

As the only Democratic statewide office holder in a state that President Donald Trump [carried by eight points](#), Brown must raise big bucks to get out his election message and counter potential attack ads from outside groups.

#### **Opponent Jim Renacci's fundraising lags behind Brown**

Brown's Republican opponent is Wadsworth Rep. Jim Renacci, a businessman who entered the contest with Trump's backing in January, after [Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel dropped out](#) of the race.

He hasn't raised or spent nearly as much money as Brown. His campaign attributed the lag to Brown's significant head start. When this summer's campaign finance reports were filed, Renacci had collected \$6.2 million, \$4 million of which came from his own pocket. He'd spent around \$6 million.

Revenue from [fundraisers that Trump](#), Vice President Mike Pence and Donald Trump Jr., held for Renacci since then hasn't yet been reported to the Federal Election Commission. His spokeswoman, Leslie Shedd, said Renacci managed to outraise most other Senate challengers during his last fundraising quarter, even though he got into the race late.

According to the Center for Responsive Politics, Renacci's [top donation source](#) apart from his own funds has been other politicians' campaign coffers. They gave him more than \$250,000. Renacci also got more than \$59,000 from the oil and gas industry.

#### **Brown tops the U.S. Senate in donations from lobbyists**

While Renacci doesn't qualify as a fundraising leader in any of the categories the Center for Responsive politics monitors, its records show Brown is the U.S. Senate's top recipient of campaign donations from numerous industries, including [lobbyists](#).

Brown has collected more than \$430,000 from lobbyists during the current election cycle, the group found - more than any other U.S. Senator or candidate. The \$3,750 that Renacci got from lobbyists ranked near the bottom of the pack.

### **While taking more lobbyist money than any other Senator, Brown ran an ad denouncing Renacci as a 'lobbyist'**

Despite lobbyists' generosity toward Brown, the Senator doesn't hold their profession in high esteem, to judge from an ad Brown ran in May that criticized Renacci for having registered as a lobbyist.

Brown's first television ad of the 2018 campaign season, which [Politifact ruled was "Mostly False"](#) recycled claims about Renacci that were [made during his first run for Congress in 2010](#). The claims stemmed from a 2008 lobbying registration form that Renacci filed at the U.S. Senate for a company called "Smokerise International Group." A Renacci spokesman said the filing was a precautionary measure, in case the company ever needed to do lobbying. Senate records show Renacci and the company never did any lobbying, but the company's attorney didn't [formally terminate](#) Renacci's lobbying registration until after he was in Congress. That led Brown's campaign to maintain that Renacci was a lobbyist while he served in Congress.

"Renacci misfiled paperwork about his lobbying activities, but there's no convincing evidence he actually worked as a lobbyist while a member of Congress," PolitiFact said.

Republican National Committee spokeswoman Mandi Merritt branded Brown a hypocrite for raising big bucks from lobbyists while running an ad that accused Renacci of being one.

"Sherrod Brown is now the #1 recipient of lobbyist cash, beating out 99 other Senators to take the cake," said a statement from Merritt. "This new ranking puts Sherrod Brown's hypocrisy on full display, proving he is the ultimate D.C. insider."

Brown campaign spokesman Preston Maddock responded by reiterating that Renacci "was a registered lobbyist while in Congress," and declaring that "Renacci's lack of self-awareness is embarrassing."

### **Brown is also the top recipient of accountants' campaign cash**

Brown - the top Democrat on the U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs - also got more campaign cash than any other U.S. Senator from [accountants](#).

During the most recent campaign cycle, they gave Brown \$86,000, making him the top recipient of their donations.

Renacci himself is a CPA, and the Ohio Society of CPAs endorsed both Renacci and Brown in the Senate race. Throughout his years in Congress, Renacci has collected more than \$236,000 from accountants, Center for Responsive Politics records show.

Brown is also the favorite Senate candidate of the [insurance industry](#), which gave him more than \$357,000, and of the [business service](#) industry, which gave nearly \$635,000

### **Hospitals, nursing homes and health professionals give top dollar to Brown**

Brown, a vocal Affordable Care Act advocate, got almost \$932,000 from health care professionals during the current election cycle. The next highest recipient of money from health

professionals, Alabama Democratic Sen. Doug Jones, was far behind, with close to \$628,000. Workers at the [Cleveland Clinic](#) gave more than \$140,000 to Brown, making them among his top campaign cash sources. He also got around \$70,000 from employees at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, and around \$56,000 from those at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

The more than \$341,000 that hospitals and nursing homes gave Brown during the election cycle is also far more than any other member of the Senate or U.S. House of Representatives received.

Renacci, who is a former nursing home owner, has collected around \$245,000 from hospitals and nursing homes throughout his congressional career.

### **Brown is Congress' top recipient of abortion rights money**

During the past election cycle, abortion rights groups gave Brown more than \$145,000. That's more money than any other member of Congress received from them. Renacci, who opposes abortion, has received \$10 so far from anti-abortion interests for his Senate campaign, the Center for Responsive Politics says. Throughout his time in Congress, Renacci has received around \$20,000 from anti-abortion groups.

### **Clergy and religious groups gave more money to Brown than anyone else**

Brown is also Congress' top recipient for campaign money from clergy and religious groups, the Center for Responsive Politics says. So far, they've given him more than \$55,000 during this election cycle.

Renacci hasn't collected any money from them so far during his Senate race, although he got \$12,000 during his House of Representatives years.

Brown is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Renacci is Catholic.

### **Food stores brought home the bacon for Brown**

[Food stores](#) gave Brown - a member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry - more than \$31,000 during the election cycle. That's the largest amount they gave to any U.S. Senator. They gave \$500 to Renacci.

### **Home builders, real estate interests and mortgage bankers are sold on Brown.**

Brown is the top U.S. Senate recipient of money from the real estate industry, which gave him more than \$950,000, mortgage bankers and brokers, who gave him more than \$75,000, and home builders, who gave him more than \$56,000. He was a vocal advocate of the restraints that were put on the mortgage industry after the 2007 subprime mortgage meltdown that led to a blight of foreclosed houses in Cleveland and other cities.

Over the years, real estate interests gave more than \$460,000 to Renacci - which is lots of money, but not nearly as much as Brown.

### **Brown is also #1 with steel producers**

It's not surprising that the steel industry would contribute to a legislator who represents lots of steel manufacturers and who advocated for tariffs on foreign steel. Brown got more money from them than any other U.S. Senator: more than \$66,000. AK Steel representatives were among his biggest campaign contributors.

Renacci has collected around \$6,000 from steel makers so far during this election cycle, the Center for Responsive Politics says.

## **Union dollars unite behind Brown**

Brown is the top recipient of donations from several categories of unions, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. [Miscellaneous unions](#) gave him more than \$53,000, [air transport unions](#) gave him more than \$31,000 and [teachers unions](#) gave him more than \$29,000.

The group says [organized labor](#) gave Brown \$370,000 during the election cycle, while giving \$21,500 to Renacci. Brown frequently addresses union events in Ohio and Washington, and gets many of their endorsements.

## **Movie and television interests direct campaign cash to Brown**

Although Brown's Ohio base is a long way from Hollywood, he nonetheless gets the most campaign donations in the U.S. Senate from a variety of entertainment sectors.

He ranks #1 with the [TV production industry](#), which gave him more than \$106,000, [commercial television and radio stations](#), which gave him more than \$75,000, and nearly \$770,000 from a category the Center for Responsive Politics describes as "[TV/Movies/Music](#)."

Brown's big campaign donors include employees of Sony and Comcast, who respectively gave him nearly \$86,000 and close to \$73,000.

By way of comparison, throughout his career Renacci got slightly more than \$17,150 from donors in that last category, including a \$1,000 donation from rock star [Jon Bon Jovi](#). Bon Jovi and Renacci both owned teams in a defunct arena football league.

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## **[Iowa governor defends trip on vendor's plane to bowl game](#)**

Gov. Kim Reynolds dismissed criticism Thursday of her decision to travel to Iowa State's bowl game for free on a plane owned by a longtime and controversial state vendor.

Reynolds told reporters that she saw nothing wrong with her flight to Memphis on the plane owned by Sedgwick, which administers claims for workers' compensation benefits filed by injured state employees. She noted that she had received written approval from the ethics board director to take a donor-funded flight with her husband and two other family members to the bowl game in order "to campaign."

Reynolds said that the trip was a legitimate campaign expense, saying that she met with donors and potential voters.

"It was an opportunity to get in front of Iowans and share the excitement of Iowa State making a bowl game," she said.

The ethics board director, Megan Tooker, has said that she wasn't aware that a state vendor owned the plane. Sedgwick CEO Dave North has said that he and his wife reimbursed his company for the costs of the flight, which the Reynolds' campaign reported as a \$2,880 in-kind contribution from the Norths.

Reynolds dismissed arguments that accepting the flight was out of step with the humble, small-town image that she has sought to build. "There were a lot of small town girls that were down there" at the game, she said.

Her comments came as the Iowa Democratic Party criticized the trip by the Republican governor as an example of poor judgment and "pay-to-play" politics. Reynolds is running in the Nov. 6 election against businessman Fred Hubbell.

Iowa's gift law bars public officials and their family members from accepting anything worth \$3 or more from contractors and lobbyists. But that prohibition doesn't extend to campaign donations.

Meanwhile, Iowa State confirmed Thursday that Reynolds paid for her family's tickets to the game at face value with a personal check dated Jan. 27, nearly one month after the game. University spokesman John McCarroll said that it was "normal procedure" to provide the tickets upfront to the governor and send an invoice that she paid later.