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Weekly Lobbying Articles September 7, 2017

Tampa Bay Times
September 7, 2017

Hernando commission to debate ordinance requiring lobbyists to register

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/hernando-commission-to-debate-ordinance-requiring-lobbyists-to-register/2336384>

A method to publicly identify those who lobby the county's top decision makers, including the County Commission and other leaders, could soon be in place.

On Tuesday, Sept. 12, the commission will consider an ordinance that would require those who would gain directly or indirectly from county decisions to register and for logs to be kept of their communications with county officials.

In addition, lobbyists would not be able to make their pitches through private text messages, on private cellphones or via private emails, which cannot be easily viewed under public records laws.

The issue was raised by county Commissioner John Allocco last month, and the idea prompted a spirited discussion among commissioners, who on numerous issues in recent meetings have been divided.

Allocco said that with Hernando County growing and businesses hoping to expand in the area, he thought the time had come for Hernando to enact a lobbying ordinance similar to ones in other growing communities around Florida. Hernando, he said, "lacks transparency when it comes to lobbying interests."

Residents, he said, have "a right to know" when someone with something to gain is working to influence those who make decisions.

Commission Chairman Wayne Dukes noted that the last time he heard the discussion, it was led by state Rep. Blaise Ingoglia, who also is Hernando County's Republican committeeman and head of the state Republican Party.

"Did (Ingoglia) tell you to say that?" Dukes asked Allocco, who succeeded Ingoglia as chairman of the county's Republican Executive Committee.

"No, he didn't," Allocco said.

Commissioner Steve Champion asked which counties have lobbying ordinances. "Blue counties? Really blue counties?"

"I guess you guys aren't capable of thinking on your own, so you assume everybody else doesn't," Allocco shot back.

Commissioner Nick Nicholson said he wanted to take the issue a step further and create an ordinance that would prevent people who were trying to sell the county on something from talking to commissioners at all. He said he often tells people who email him that they need to talk to the county administrator or a county department head.

"I don't want to listen to them," Nicholson said.

Allocco said he just wanted records to be kept so that the community knows who is lobbying county officials.

Champion noted that the definition of a lobbyist could be fairly broad.

"Who is a lobbyist? There's a lot of good-old-boy club members who like to talk to everybody," he said. "I would consider them lobbyists when they own banks or real estate firms."

In recent years, the public and commissioners who are not involved in private conversations with politically influential business leaders — including SunTrust Bank executive Jim Kimbrough and Realtor Gary Schraut — have been critical of the influence those people exert when meeting one on one with commissioners.

Other questions were raised when business leaders, including officials at Cemex, lobbied commissioners several years ago over expanded mining west of Brooksville.

County Attorney Garth Coller said the definition of a lobbyist generally covers anyone with a financial interest who talks to board members.

"I'd say it's a slippery slope," Champion said, "because what if a business wants to talk to every commissioner, is there a problem with that?"

"There's no problem with it," Allocco said. "It's just that everybody sitting here should be able to know if company XYZ has reached out."

He noted that commissioners have had meetings with various companies at the government center. Champion said one recent example of a business talking to all commissioners was when the contract for Republic Services was proposed for expansion.

But Champion said there is another way to track influence.

"We can look at campaign contributions and tell exactly who's lobbying who," he said. "I was doing that on my campaign, and there was a whole lot of lobbying going on — on the other side" against his candidacy.

"This isn't anti-lobbying," Allocco said. "It's transparency. We're all about transparency on this board."

Champion said he wasn't sure he even knew any lobbyists and questioned how he would know he had talked to one. Allocco said it would be up to the lobbyists to tell county officials they were lobbying.

Dukes said the idea of lobbying has an even broader meaning.

"We had about 100 lobbyists here today telling us to fix the river," Dukes said, referring to Weeki Wachee residents in the audience who were pushing the commission to better police the Weeki Wachee River.

Champion wanted to know if there was some specific incident that sparked the interest in an ordinance.

"Where's the problem?" he asked. "Where's the breakdown? Is somebody being influenced by lobbyists somewhere?"

Said Allocco: "Taxpayers just deserve to know."

The ordinance commissioners will consider puts the investigation of potential violations in the hands of the county's code enforcement officers. A first violation would come with a warning; a second within 12 months would bring a fine of \$250. A third infraction within 12 months would bring a prohibition from lobbying for six months, and a fourth would mean a year without lobbying privileges.

Idaho Statesman
September 5, 2017

GOP gubernatorial candidate unveils ethics reform plan

<http://www.idahostatesman.com/news/state/idaho/article171281772.html>

Idaho's top politicians should face term limits and tougher disclosure laws, political newcomer and Republican gubernatorial candidate Tommy Ahlquist announced Tuesday as part of his 10-point plan on ethics reforms.

The sweeping reform proposal is the latest push by Ahlquist to hone his image as a political outsider.

"When professional politicians spend too much time in office, they lose touch with the realities of what Idaho families and businesses face — and as a result — put the needs of special interests ahead of the needs of taxpayers," Ahlquist said in a prepared statement.

Unlike his GOP opponents — U.S. Rep. Raul Labrador and Lt. Gov. Brad Little — Ahlquist has never held a political office. His ethics plan, with its emphasis on term limits, suggests he isn't planning on staying long if elected.

Idaho is one of two states to have the Legislature repeal its term limit laws.

In 1992, Idaho voters approved a term limit law with the approval of nearly 60 percent of the electorate.

A decade later, Republican legislative leaders — convinced the public was being heavily influenced by campaigns funded with money from outside the state — passed a bill overturning the limits law. The governor vetoed that bill, but legislators pulled a rare move and overturned his action.

The issue has failed to gain traction inside the conservative Idaho Statehouse ever since, with term limit opponents arguing that such measures have faced constitutional challenges in the past and produce legislatures with inexperienced lawmakers who can be easily swayed by lobbyists.

Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter, who is not running for re-election, is currently in the final years of his third term. Little has served as his lieutenant governor each term.

Labrador is in his fourth term as a congressman, he has previously supported legislation putting a six term limit for U.S. House members and two term limits for U.S. Senate members.

The longest serving governor in Idaho was former Democratic Gov. Cecil D. Andrus, who served four, non-consecutive terms.

Another key element in Ahlquist's plan is requiring elected officials to disclose sources of personal income for themselves and their spouse, including investments and property assets.

Idaho is currently just one of two states with no such requirement. Ahlquist will release his own economic interests as outlined in his plan in the next few weeks.

"This is the most basic and simple of transparency measures that helps avoid conflicts of interest and impropriety among elected officials," Ahlquist's plan states.

Ahlquist's plan says he would fight to eliminate a pension perk that lets longtime lawmakers "spike" their benefits by taking a higher-paid state appointment for 42 months at the end of their careers. Lawmakers have long debated the merits of this perk, but have not taken any major steps to repeal it.

Ahlquist also says he wants public officials banned from immediately transitioning from the public to private sector.

The practice — known as a "revolving door" — has been criticized by government watchdog groups who argue lawmakers use their positions to leverage lucrative jobs in the private world. But under Ahlquist's ethics plan, state legislators and state executives would have to wait two years before becoming lobbyists.

The ethics plan goes on to state that Ahlquist would create a searchable database of lobbyist gifts to elected officials, as well as requiring lobbyists to report to the state if they are working on a political campaign for an elected seat.

In addition, Ahlquist wants a ban on lawmakers collecting campaign contributions during the legislative session.

Ahlquist says more than half of the statehouses across the United States have already enforced some sort of fundraising prohibition during legislative sessions and that doing so would help avoid any impropriety.

Finally, Ahlquist's plan would ban the paying of family members from campaign accounts. While the practice is not illegal, it is contentious.

Labrador previously defended using his congressional campaign funds to pay his wife to keep the financial books, arguing that he trusts her more than anyone else. However, without an explanation, he took his wife off his campaign payroll in July.

Press Herald
September 3, 2017

Maine lobbyist pay nears \$5 million

<http://www.pressherald.com/2017/09/03/maine-lobbyist-pay-nears-5-million/>

Maine lobbyists have been paid \$4.8 million so far this year, including familiar political faces involved in fights over solar power, voter-approved laws and the two-year, \$7.1 billion budget.

The Associated Press reviewed lobbying reports through July and found big spenders include the pharmaceutical industry, Maine's largest electrical utility, a nonprofit energy group, and organizations hoping to shape the state's recreational marijuana industry.

The spending follows renewed concern from political and advocacy groups over the influence of former lawmakers and administration officials. Maine bars lawmakers from registering as lobbyists in their first year after holding office, while certain former executive branch officials — like the governor's policy advisers — don't face such a prohibition.

But the state must better enforce a loophole that allows former lawmakers to lobby in that first year if they report lobbying fewer than eight hours a month, Maine Republican Party Executive Director Jason Savage said.

“Lobbyists play a huge role in how our State House functions,” he said, and noted all individuals – including those who lobby – have a right to petition their government. “I think it’s perfectly acceptable that we hold them accountable.”

FAMILIAR FACES

Four lobbyists for the Augusta-based Mitchell Tardy Jackson Government Affairs reported about \$934,000 in pay since January. Its lobbyists include former Republican House leader Josh Tardy, and clients include Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, Central Maine Power Co., and pipeline companies pushing for more natural gas infrastructure throughout the Northeast.

Other lawmakers-turned-lobbyists include former Democratic House Speaker Michael Saxl, former Democratic Rep. Edward Dugay, former Democratic Rep. Robert Howe and former seven-term Republican lawmaker Pamela Cahill.

Holly Lusk, a former adviser to Republican Gov. Paul LePage, and former Democratic Rep. Adam Goode lobbied this year after more recent departures. Lusk left the governor’s office in December 2015 and rejoined the firm Preti Flaherty to lobby for clients including private health provider Correct Care Solutions this year, while Goode – term-limited out of office in December – lobbied lawmakers for the Maine AFL-CIO.

This spring, Maine’s ethics commission voted against investigating Republican Rep. Sheldon Hanington’s complaint that Goode didn’t stay below the eight-hour lobbying threshold. Commissioners unanimously supported stalled legislation prohibiting any paid lobbying for lawmakers in the year after their service ends. A similar bill to extend such a ban to former executive branch officials died.

‘NO POWER IN THE LOBBY’

Maine is one of at least 34 states the National Conference of State Legislatures found have a “cooling off period” before formers lawmakers can lobby.

Tardy said effective lobbyists need a “comprehensive understanding of the legislative process and the executive branch” but takes exception to the commonly held belief that lobbyists carry outsized power to shape legislation.

“There’s no power in the lobby,” Tardy said. “The power is in the people who have a vote. Lobbyists don’t have a vote.”

Mary Orear, a Rockport resident and Democrat, wants a four-year lobbying ban and hopes to train Maine citizens to lobby. “It gives them incredible power and an unfair advantage, and it opens the door for financial wheedling and abuse,” she said.

Ann Luther, advocacy chairwoman of the League of Women Voters of Maine, said that it’s hard for the public to tell why former lawmakers may lobby, and that eliminating term limits could lead to more empowered lawmakers. “When the Legislature gets weaker, the lobby gets stronger,” she said.

Former Democratic Rep. John Brautigam, interim head of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, said that in his view, “legislators need more resources and they need more time to master the legislative process” than current law allows.

WINNERS, LOSERS

Some companies fared better than others in lobbying efforts.

Nonprofit Industrial Energy Consumer Group and Central Maine Power Co. reported spending over \$200,000 on lobbyists, including Tardy. They helped quash a solar energy bill strongly supported by solar installation companies and environmental groups.

Lobbyists representing McDonald's, Wal-Mart and Maine business groups took on the labor and education lobby to remove a voter-approved tax on high earners to fund schools and roll back a voter approved minimum wage law impacting tipped workers. Doves of Maine residents testified on both sides.

Several leading tobacco producers lost their fight against a law barring tobacco sales to those under 21. A bill to prevent sale of furniture made with flame retardants became law over the objections of the American Chemistry Council and chemical manufacturer Albemarle Corp.

Groups such as Maine Professionals for Regulating Marijuana hoping to shape the state's recreational marijuana industry have reported spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on lobbyists.