



Despite ban on lobbyists' campaign money, Lightfoot took \$53K from lobbyist's companies. Now, she's giving it back. (Illinois)

More than a decade ago, then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel issued an executive order that prohibited him and future mayors from taking any campaign money from lobbyists.

This year, Mayor Lori Lightfoot has accepted more than \$53,000 in 39 individual campaign contributions from 14 companies owned by Carmen A. Rossi, a registered city lobbyist.

Rossi — who is also a city contractor and restaurateur and nightclub owner and who holds the liquor license for the Lollapalooza music festival — didn't make any of the contributions to Lightfoot in his own name.

It isn't clear whether Lightfoot's taking the contributions from his companies would violate the ban Emanuel imposed on mayors taking political money from lobbyists.

Emanuel, now President Joe Biden's U.S. ambassador to Japan, was asked by a Chicago Sun-Times reporter whether taking campaign money from businesses owned by a lobbyist would violate the "spirit" of his 2011 ethics order — without being told the question was regarding Rossi, whom Emanuel appointed to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in 2015.

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Christina Freundlich, a campaign spokesperson for Lightfoot, said the mayor will give back the money.

“Our team executes a rigorous vetting process on every contribution to ensure we have complied with all campaign-finance rules and laws,” Freundlich said Friday. “To avoid even an appearance or implication of an issue, we are complying with the request that contributions related to the businesses in question be returned.”

Last year, a patron of one of Rossi’s nightclubs, LiqrBox, in the 800 block of North Orleans Street, was shot to death outside the bar.

Five days later, a customer reported having been sexually assaulted inside the same bar by an employee.

Also last year, a man was wounded in a shooting outside Rossi’s Joy District bar in the 100 block of West Hubbard Street.

The shootings remain under investigation, according to a Chicago Police Department spokesperson, who said the investigation of the sexual assault case remains open but has been suspended.

In September, the [Sun-Times reported](#) that the Chicago Police Department has closed dozens of businesses on the South Side and West Side because of violence linked to them. But that rarely happens downtown and on the North Side, though crime has been rising in those areas the past few years.

“Some of the bar owners are politically active,” the story quoted Ald. Brendan Reilly (42nd) as saying. “I hope that doesn’t have anything to do with it.”

A city ordinance bans city government contractors and their affiliates from giving more than \$1,500 a year to the mayor or other city officials.

Chicago Parking Solutions gave \$2,500 to Lightfoot's campaign fund on June 30, state campaign-finance records show. That's part of the \$53,000 Lightfoot has gotten from Rossi's companies this year.

Berlin said candidates for mayor or a Chicago City Council can't take more than \$1,500 in a calendar year from anyone who's "done business" with the city or its sister agencies, including the Chicago Board of Education, over the past four years. That \$1,500 total includes all of a contractor's affiliated companies — businesses with the same ownership and the same address. Most of Rossi's companies operate out of his law office in the 100 block of West Hubbard Street.

His companies also have given more than \$70,000 this year to other political committees besides Lightfoot's, including those of some Chicago City Council members.

Council members aren't covered by the Emanuel-era ban on lobbyist contributions to the mayor. But they still are required to abide by the \$1,500 yearly limit on contributions from city contractors, according to Berlin.

Five current Chicago City Council members and three other candidates now seeking that office have gotten campaign contributions exceeding \$1,500 from Rossi this year, records show. The incumbents received a total of \$20,735. The others got a total of \$20,500.

In November, one of the candidates, Chris Cleary, got \$15,000 from Rossi's companies in three contributions, records show. Cleary, who was a fraternity brother of Rossi, is seeking to unseat Reilly to represent the 42nd ward.

Incumbents who got more than \$1,500 from Rossi include:

- Ald. Walter Burnett Jr. (27th) — \$6,500.
- Ald. Raymond Lopez (15th) — \$4,500.
- Ald. Carlos Ramirez-Rosa (35th) — \$4,500.
- Ald. Brian Hopkins (2nd) — \$3,000.
- Ald. Timmy Knudsen (43rd) — \$2,235.

Challengers who got more than \$1,500 in Rossi contributions include Bennett Lawson, \$2,500, who's running in the 44th ward, and Bill Conway, \$3,000, who's in the 34th ward contest.

Lopez said he will ask the Chicago Board of Ethics to decide how much money he can accept from Rossi.

"If there are limits to the law, the remedy is to return the money," Lopez said. "If the Board of Ethics makes the determination that we are beyond the scope, we will make the appropriate return of the money. And anyone who it relates to should do the same."

Rossi grew up in Frankfort. His father was the suburb's mayor and is now a Will County judge.

Rossi also has worked as a lobbyist for The Herbal Care Center, one of the city's largest cannabis dispensaries, recently sold by the family of another clout-heavy businessman, [Perry Mandera](#).

Rossi owns bars in Chicago and the suburbs and co-owns a bar that's among the most popular with students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Since he registered as a City Hall lobbyist in April 2019, he has worked for developers on residential and commercial projects including the conversion of the old Morton Salt building along the Kennedy Expressway into a concert venue called The Salt Shed.

One of Rossi's companies has submitted seven applications this year to operate medical marijuana dispensaries in Ohio, but he hasn't received any licenses.

Lightfoot began getting campaign contributions from Rossi's companies on March 29, 2019, days before she won a runoff election to succeed Emanuel as mayor. Rossi began lobbying City Hall shortly after Lightfoot's election.

Rossi hasn't registered as a lobbyist for companies he owns, though he has lobbied city officials on behalf of his companies, the Sun-Times previously has reported.

After landing the CPS parking-lot contract earlier this year, Rossi sent emails to Kenneth Meyer, Lightfoot's City Hall business affairs and consumer protection commissioner, asking for his help getting city business licenses that would allow the company to operate the lots.

Meyer's department has regulatory authority over Chicago restaurants and nightclubs, including Rossi's.

Meyer's staff and the police department didn't close Rossi's LiqrBox in September 2021 after a patron who'd been kicked out of the bar was fatally shot in the street.

Two weeks later, Meyer's inspectors made a "routine visit" to the LiqrBox and cited it for seven city code violations, including having a state liquor license that had been expired for several months and expired insurance. Rossi corrected the violations, and City Hall dismissed the citations.

[WA appeals court largely upholds Eyman campaign finance violations](#) (Washington)

A Washington state Court of Appeals on Tuesday upheld the vast majority of campaign finance violations that longtime anti-tax activist Tim Eyman was found liable for last year, keeping in place the multimillion-dollar verdict against Eyman and most of the restrictions barring Eyman from controlling the finances of political committees.

While the Division II Court of Appeals largely found for Attorney General Bob Ferguson in his long-running case against Eyman, it did hand Eyman a few limited victories.

It threw out one of the violations against Eyman, a small portion of the restrictions imposed on him, and asked the trial judge to reconsider the size of the fine levied against him.

A Thurston County judge, in 2021, found Eyman committed "numerous and particularly egregious" violations of campaign finance law from 2012 to 2017 as he intermingled funds between political committees he controlled and his own checking account.

"The court upheld the overwhelming majority of the trial court's ruling, including affirming Eyman's numerous egregious and intentional violations, and keeping in place key court orders to make it harder for Eyman to engage in future illegal conduct," Ferguson said in a prepared statement Tuesday.

Eyman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Court of Appeals, on Tuesday, upheld the trial court's ruling on four of the five campaign finance incidents in question, on issues involving hundreds of thousands of dollars of political donations, loans and payments.

It ruled, however, that there was insufficient evidence that a \$103,000 from a political committee to Eyman violated state campaign finance law.

The trial court ruled that Eyman himself is a political committee, under the definition in state law, and should have been filing monthly campaign finance reports for years. The appeals court upheld that ruling.

The trial court had also placed [extensive restrictions on Eyman's ability to handle political money](#), citing a long history of violations and misconduct.

Eyman can't authorize spending for any political committee, have a bank account that holds any political committee funds or accept a check for a political committee. He can have no financial decision-making authority for any political committee.

The appeals court upheld the vast majority of those restrictions, but tossed two.

The trial court had forbidden Eyman from misleading potential donors about why they should donate or how donations should be spent. And it had prohibited him from getting payments from vendors who also serve political committees he's associated with.

Washington's Fair Campaign Practices Act does not allow those punishments, the appeals court ruled.

"Misleading potential donors obviously is improper and may be illegal," Judge Bradley Maxa [wrote for the unanimous three-judge panel](#). "But the State does not point to any provision of the FCPA that prohibits a person from misleading potential donors."

Eyman was fined more than \$2.6 million for his campaign finance violations and ordered to pay attorneys' fees to the state of more than \$2.9 million for the case which has run for the better part of a decade.

Eyman has filed for bankruptcy and [sold his house](#). He argued the amounts violated prohibitions on excessive fines in the federal and state constitutions.

The appeals court said it didn't have enough information to evaluate the claim and asked the trial court to look at it again.

It also ruled that the attorney general had "predominantly prevailed" in the appeal and ordered Eyman to pay more attorneys' fees to the state.

[SEIU secretly lobbied the Washington State Redistricting Commission, court filings allege](#) (Washington)

A lobbyist for SEIU 1199NW failed to report lobbying activities related to the Washington State Redistricting Commission in 2021, recent court records allege. The documentation was filed Nov. 15 in Thurston County Superior Court by Arthur West, an Olympia resident and open government advocate, as part of a lawsuit filed against the commission in August. West is suing the Redistricting Commission and the state for withholding and deleting public records. In court

filings last week, the state admitted that one of the 2021 Redistricting Commissioners deleted communications on a private phone, but claimed those records were not subject to West's public records request.

West told McClatchy that the state Legislature recently disclosed more communications that the Redistricting Commission intentionally withheld from him in previous public records requests, and that those communications included the unreported lobbying activity by SEIU lobbyist Lindsey Grad. The text messages disclosed by the Legislature showed communications between Redistricting Commissioner April Sims, Rep. Joe Fitzgibbon and Grad in a group chat on Nov. 15, 2021, the day that redistricting maps were supposed to be finalized. At one point Grad tells Sims that "people are willing to do more when and if it's helpful."

Additionally, texts showed Grad congratulating Sims in the group chat just minutes after the Commission voted to finalize the redistricting maps. "This circus never would have made it to the finale without you, you were a ring master par excellence," Grad told Sims in the text. "I seriously hope you get some good sleep after driving safe, what a triumph of your fortitude and skills!" Lobbyists are required to file monthly reports called an L2 that disclose their compensation, other expenditures related to lobbying, and lobbying activities. The reports are required to be filed monthly by all registered lobbyists in the state, whether lobbying occurred that month or not.

Grad's November 2021 L2 report did not include reports of any lobbying activities related to the Redistricting Commission. "Instead, the L2 states that 100% of this lobbying activity was lobbying the Legislature in regard solely to health care issues, and states that 0% of lobbying activity was directed at state agencies," West's suit said. Because the Redistricting Commission intentionally withheld public records from being released, West alleged that it "facilitated secret lobbying of the WSRC in regard to their proposed redistricting maps that took place outside of the public's view in the apparent absence of the reporting required by State Law.

"Unreported and concealed lobbying activities of a well-financed, influential and powerful organization such as the SEIU in the redistricting process should be a matter of legitimate concern regardless of whether one agrees with the majority of their progressive agenda," West added in court filings. "The concealment of this type of back room activity in regard to redistricting does not serve the public interest regardless of what private goals a wealthy and influential lobbying organization may be attempting to further." SEIU is the largest healthcare worker's union in the U.S., according to the SEIU 1199NW website. The next hearing in the lawsuit against the Redistricting Commission and the state is scheduled for March 3, 2023. Additionally, on Monday, Dec. 5, the Public Disclosure Commission opened an enforcement case to do an assessment of facts regarding the SEIU lobbying, but Kim Bradford, deputy director for the PDC, told McClatchy that the assessment could take up to 90 days. If necessary, a formal investigation can then be opened by the PDC. Perhaps coincidentally, SEIU also donated over \$80,000 to multiple lawmakers on Nov. 15, 2021, including Fitzgibbon and Speaker of the House Laurie Jinkins, as well as Republicans such as Rep. Gina Mosbrucker and Sen. Phil Fortunato, according to Grad's L2 from that month. SEIU did not respond to McClatchy's request for comment. The Redistricting Commission meets once every 10 years to redraw legislative and congressional districts, and the Legislature is charged with appointing the four commissioners.

In addition to Sims, the other members were Paul Graves, a former state representative from Maple Valley; Joe Fain, a former Republican Senator, and President and CEO of the Bellevue Chamber; and Brady Piñero Walkinshaw, the CEO of Grist, a leading national environmental media organization. Sarah Augustine, executive director of the Dispute Resolution Center of Yakima and Kittitas Counties, chaired the commission. In February, the Redistricting Commission admitted to breaking the law when it conducted the redrawing of state districts secretly, and without any public deliberation. The commission came to a settlement agreement by adopting rules that would prevent them from conducting the process behind closed doors in the future.