



M U L T I S T A T E

[Lobbying policy for Blueprint IA teed up for Thursday vote](#) (Florida)

The Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency is set to approve its first lobbying policy, defining who would be considered a lobbyist and incorporating elements from both the city and county ordinances.

Blueprint is responsible for directing hundreds of millions into infrastructure investment across the county. The money is collected through a 20-year penny sales tax approved by voters in 2000. A portion of that funding, 12%, was set aside to support economic development through the Office of Economic Vitality.

Over the past year, OEV has been the agency that has reviewed and awarded grant funding to local businesses as they weather the affects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Blueprint is following the lead of Leon County, which strengthened its ordinance last year to include penalties and previously lacking enforcement mechanisms. Tallahassee commissioners passed a sweeping ethics package in 2019, but the [Tallahassee Ethics Board is working to strengthen](#) its oversight over those trying to influence government.

For the past year, after reporting in the Tallahassee Democrat that shed light on the intersection of lobbying, private business, political campaigns and public policy, local governments have worked to expand who would be considered a lobbyist and enact meaningful enforcement.

Blueprint, although made up of all 12 elected city and county commissioners, is a separate entity and requires its own lobbying policy. IA board members voted in December to bring back the agenda item to be considered Thursday.

The proposed policy adds language to include city and county employees, as well as those working for the IA and Department of PLACE.

Under the proposed rules, registered lobbyists must provide quarterly compensation reports, which must be signed under oath and pay a \$25 fee per principal represented.

Blueprint's attorney will be tasked with conducting reviews of alleged allegations of violations and prepare written findings that include corrective measures and penalties.

No monetary penalties will be imposed under the proposal. Instead, a first violation will come with a warning, two or more within a year will result in a yearlong suspension. Appeals can be made to the Director of PLACE Ben Pingree.

Board members will also be barred from lobbying for two years after leaving office. On Dec. 31, 2022, a six-year ban will go into effect due to a change in state statutes.

The proposed policy details the following exemptions from the lobbying policy.

Agency employees discussing government business

- Law enforcement personnel conducting an investigation
- Persons communicating with the IA Board members, or employees of the city, county or PLACE in an individual capacity, or on behalf of a family member, without reimbursement or compensation.
- Consultants under contract with the IA, city or county who communicate regarding issues related to the scope of services in their contract.
- Government employees or elected officials acting in their official capacity or in the normal course of duty unless proposing competitive procurement or are government employees whose substantial duties are government affairs or lobbying.
- Persons or representatives of organizations contacted by an IA Board member, the city or county, Department of PLACE or a decision-making body when the contact is initiated by the government official to obtain factual information only.

[Lobbyists spent less on lawmakers this COVID session, but nobody went home hungry](#) (Georgia)

On the day the Georgia House [gave final passage to a bill to ban volunteers from providing food and water to people waiting in line to vote](#), Statehouse lobbyists spent almost \$8,400 feeding lawmakers, according to an Atlanta Journal-Constitution analysis of ethics reports.

It was almost double that on the final day of the 2021 legislative session, March 31, when dozens of lobbyists chipped in about \$16,000 for food and drinks for lawmakers as they worked until midnight passing bills at a sometimes frantic pace.

While those numbers might sound big, an AJC review of reports filed with the state ethics commission showed less money was spent by lobbyists during the 2021 session — dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic and voting debate — than in any recent year. By a lot.

The biggest reported lobbyist spender wasn't some industry looking for yet another tax break or health care companies pushing for extra money in the budget. It was the Black Voters Matter Fund, which reported spending almost \$42,000 on advertisements opposing the election bills Republicans pushed in response to Donald Trump's false claims that he won reelection in the presidential contest and his conspiracy theories about how the vote was rigged.

Overall, including the newspaper ads, those who registered to lobby in Georgia spent a little more than \$335,000 during the 2021 session. That's just over half as much as lobbyists spent in 2019, the session before COVID-19 hit. It's also well below previous years.

Lobbyists' wining and dining of lawmakers during the legislative session has been going on for decades. They might take out an individual lawmaker or a group of legislators or an entire committee. Such committee dinners — which are usually at Atlanta fine-dining establishments — are as much a part of each session as the final Sine Die gavel that ends each three-month lawmaking extravaganza.

But COVID-19 brought some changes. Numerous lawmakers — and lobbyists — either got the virus before the session or during it. Masks were required in the chambers, and the rope line — where lobbyists traditionally stand two or three deep waiting to buttonhole lawmakers as they exit the House and Senate — was dispensed with in the interest of safe health.

Two of the most costly expenses each year — the big events such as the Wild Hog Supper the night before the start of the session and committee dinners — were either called off or cut way back in 2021.

The AJC [reported earlier this year that lobbyists were taking a different approach to their jobs](#) this session because of the pandemic.

Trip Martin, a 38-year lobbying veteran of the Capitol whose firm spent about \$10,000 on food and drinks — among the highest of any group this session — said he missed some of the personal interaction with lawmakers.

“I am a face-to-face, eye-to-eye kind of guy,” Martin said. “I like to see people's expressions.”

When asked whether he was worried about wining and dining in the time of the coronavirus, he said: “Hell yes, I got my shots. But I am still concerned.”

On the day the voting bill won final passage and was signed into law by Gov. Brian Kemp, lobbyists paid for meals for members of both parties, but most of the big spending was on Republicans.

The law pushed by Republicans and opposed by Democrats limits where drop boxes can be located and when they are available, adds ID requirements for those wanting to vote absentee, prohibits anyone from mailing unsolicited absentee ballot application forms, requires voters to request absentee ballots at least 11 days before elections day, and bans volunteers from feeding or giving drinks to people in line. Several lawsuits have been filed against it.

Mercer University - which gets state funding - spent \$900 on breakfast for the House Republican Caucus on the day of the House vote, according to lobbyist reports. The trial lawyers lobby reported spending \$345 on lunch for the House Republican leadership. Several lobbyists, including those representing the Realtors and Piedmont Healthcare, reported spending about \$2,000 on a dinner for the Republican whips, who help manage the party’s legislative program on the House and Senate floors.

Overall for the session, the biggest spenders, according to the AJC’s review, were the Beverage Association, Realtors and the trial lawyers lobby, groups that are traditionally in the top 10, particularly for spending on key committees or on House and Senate leadership.

The leading individual spender was Kevin Perry of the Georgia Beverage Association, at \$15,549, up a bit from 2019. His biggest listed expenses were a \$3,894 lunch for the Georgia Senate, a \$3,519 lunch for the House Republican Caucus and a \$3,293 lunch for spouses of lawmakers a few days before Valentine’s Day. The Beverage Association represents Coca-Cola and Pepsi, and the expenditures were made well before [Coca-Cola’s CEO angered Republican lawmakers by calling their new voting law “unacceptable.”](#)

Second on the list was Scott Palmer MacGregor, who represents, among others, the Augusta Metro Chamber. Most of the \$7,600 he listed spending for the session went toward Masters Tournament hats for Gov. Brian Kemp and lawmakers.

Lawmakers said earlier this year that as more Georgians get vaccinated, the routine dinners and other events are likely to return. The first test of that will come this fall, when the General Assembly meets to redraw district lines for state lawmakers and congressional seats. But the 2022 session, when more business interests will be seeking to push or kill legislation, will likely be a better indicator of whether the pandemic slowdown was an aberration.

Big spenders at Capitol

Top business association/groups and individual lobbyist spenders during the 2021 legislative session, according to lobbyist disclosure reports:

Associations:

Georgia Beverage Association — \$15,862

Georgia Association of Realtors — \$14,777

Georgia Trial Lawyers Association — \$11,100

Augusta Metro Chamber of Commerce — \$7,227

Georgia Electric Membership Corp. — \$7,137

Georgia Automobile Dealers Association — \$6,399

Georgia Food Bank Association — \$6,090

Individual lobbyists

Kevin Perry, Georgia Beverage Association — \$15,549

Scott Palmer MacGregor, various clients — \$7,621

Trip Martin, various clients — \$6,581

Danah Craft, Georgia Food Bank Association — \$6,090

Mary Caroline McLean, Georgia Trial Lawyers Association — \$5,983

[David Cameron, Britain's biggest \(hidden\) lobbyist](#) (UK)

David Cameron [once warned](#) that lobbying was Britain's "next big scandal."

He probably didn't imagine that he would be at the center of that scandal and that his actions would shine an unfavorable light on the government transparency system that the former prime minister himself helped set up.

The current government is treating the scandal, which has seen successive newspaper stories about Cameron's attempts to influence British ministers on behalf of his post-government employer, a now-collapsed financial firm called Greensill, so seriously that it's just [launched an independent inquiry](#), and the opposition Labour Party wants to grill ministers in parliament Tuesday.

Yet transparency campaigners and even Westminster's lobbyists themselves point out that the steady drumbeat of revelations comes in spite of, and not because of, the U.K.'s promises about open government.

"The whole system doesn't work, everyone knows it doesn't work, everyone's known for years it doesn't work. David Cameron knew it didn't work, which is exactly why his actions didn't turn up anywhere on any official disclosure," said Steve Goodrich, senior research manager at Transparency International UK.

The Greensill saga has two main parts. There's the access afforded to the firm's founder Lex Greensill when Cameron was in government, with Greensill [brought in](#) to combat "wasteful contracts" and advise on supply-chain finance. Then there are the headline-grabbing efforts by Cameron to lobby for Greensill once he'd left office and, in 2018, become a paid adviser to the firm.

Text messages sent to Chancellor Rishi Sunak, making the case for Greensill to be part of a key coronavirus business lending scheme, have raised eyebrows, as has [a reported drink](#) with Health Secretary Matt Hancock. Although Cameron's pleas were ultimately rejected by the Treasury, [Sunak told the former Conservative leader he had "pushed"](#) officials to consider the proposal.

Cameron [broke weeks of silence Sunday night](#) to acknowledge he had learned "important lessons" from the row and say he should have engaged Sunak "through only the most formal of channels" to ensure "no room for misinterpretation." Yet Cameron also pointed out he was "breaking no codes of conduct and no government rules."

That, argue those pushing for transparency reform, is precisely the point.

'Groundhog Day'

Despite being a former world leader with a contacts book most lobbyists would die for, Cameron, who left office in 2016 after unsuccessfully campaigning against Brexit, did not have to log his Greensill work with either main Westminster watchdog.

Rules laid down by the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOPA), meant to police the new jobs that ex-ministers and senior officials take, cover only the two years immediately after such figures leave government. Cameron's Greensill work started in 2018, meaning he was free to pursue any subsequent opportunity without seeking the watchdog's advice.

Hannah White, deputy director of the Institute for Government (IfG) think tank, said ACOPA's shortcomings were clear. "Essentially the way ACOPA works is all the people who probably don't need telling consult it assiduously and the ones who are doing something more questionable don't bother," she said. "Or they get the advice but ignore it and then there's nothing that ACOPA can do apart from publish a letter which may or may not get much attention."

White acknowledged that sanctioning those no longer on the government payroll may be difficult in practice, and that overly stringent rules could dissuade people from going into politics in the first place. But even bolstering the link between ACOPA and parliament would help give it "teeth." Cameron's Labour predecessor as prime minister, Gordon Brown, on Monday called for a five-year ban on lobbying by ex-prime ministers.

Britain's statutory lobbying register — set up by Cameron's own government in 2014 — also provides no record of the ex-prime minister's lobbying. While Westminster's third-party "consultant lobbyists" have to disclose their activity with the regulator or face the prospect of a fine, Cameron was under no obligation to detail his influence work because he was directly employed by Greensill.

It's a gap in the register that has long prompted warnings from parts of the lobbying industry itself.

"To me, this is Groundhog Day," said Iain Anderson of CICERO/AMO, a communications agency. Britain should, he said, adopt a "register of lobbying, rather than lobbyists," logging attempts to influence government regardless of whether those approaches come from people working for trade associations, businesses, think tanks — or ex-prime ministers.

Lobbying, Anderson said, will never be “the most popular profession in the world,” but he argues that a more comprehensive register could prompt a “huge reset in public attitudes to lobbying because people would be able to see it.”

Goodrich of Transparency International agrees that “fundamental” reform is needed. “We are one of the few advanced Western democracies that doesn’t have a comprehensive register of these activities — one that covers everyone from consultants to those working in-house — with clear information about who is trying to influence who, about what and when,” he said.

Labour’s Shadow Cabinet Office Minister Rachel Reeves told POLITICO the saga “illustrates perfectly” the “toothlessness of current lobbying rules” as well as a “complete disregard for any self-driven integrity.” Her party wants the register to include in-house lobbyists, and the opposition is promising its own wide-ranging ‘Integrity and Ethics’ commission to bring in “a fairer framework for commercial lobbying.” The Cabinet Office, which oversees transparency in the U.K. government, did not respond to a request for comment.

‘Transparency revolution’

Those hoping to find evidence of Cameron’s lobbying efforts through Britain’s open data on ministerial meetings will also be disappointed. Cameron appears nowhere on the government’s transparency logs in connection with his Greensill work, and such releases do not cover letters, emails or phone calls.

“The level of detail that’s provided about these discussions is quite threadbare,” said Goodrich, leaving “no real indication of what the intent is of those who are attending the meeting.” In the U.S. and Canada, he pointed out, lobbyists are required to be “very clear about what they’re trying to influence,” while in the U.K. it’s down to government, and broad-brush descriptions like “to discuss business” or “introductory meeting” are accepted.

Cameron took office pledging to be a reformer, vowing to lead a “transparency revolution,” and [arguing in 2013](#) that open government was “absolutely fundamental to a nation’s potential success in the 21st century.” On some fronts, his government did boost transparency. As well as introducing the lobbying register, it opened up much more information on state contracts and Whitehall spending.

Yet even on these measures, Institute for Government analysis [finds a stalled revolution](#), with government departments responding more slowly to Freedom of Information requests and lagging on spending data. “It’s always the case that you can stick a load of data in the public domain which is more or less easy to interrogate and say, ‘Oh, we’re being transparent therefore

everything's fine.' Transparency is essential, but it doesn't necessarily mean everything's fine," said the IfG's White.

In a bid to draw a line under the row, the U.K. government [on Monday outlined plans for an inquiry](#) into Greensill's government engagement, to be led by Whitehall auditor Nigel Boardman. "We recognize the public interest here and that's why the PM has commissioned this inquiry," Boris Johnson's spokesperson said, promising the probe would report shortly.

Another body, the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which advises on government ethics, is [already reviewing the U.K.'s wider standards set-up](#), and has [made clear that lobbying is now in the frame](#). A review of Britain's lobbying laws — pre-dating the Cameron stories — is also underway, although [few are expecting significant changes](#).

For those urging change, the Cameron saga offers the chance to think big. "Now is absolutely the time to revisit this, to revisit it on a cross-party basis — and therefore have something that's going to stand the test of time," said Anderson.

[**California politicians owe \\$2 million in campaign fines, don't get punished**](#) (California)

California's secretary of state's office has failed to collect \$2 million in fines owed by politicians, lobbyists and campaign donors who the office says filed disclosure reports late, a CalMatters analysis shows. It's allowed some of the largest fines to languish for many years with no consequences to those who are supposed to pay up.

The debts are owed by a range of political players, according to [a list](#) published on the secretary of state's website that details outstanding fines as of April 1. It shows fines owed by 26 state lawmakers and 21 superior court judges, as well as former legislators, losing candidates, ballot measure campaigns, Democratic and Republican clubs and corporate and labor-backed political action committees.

Some of the fines are very small. About 300 of them are less than \$100, reflecting paperwork filed a few days late — a routine violation of campaign finance law that's the political equivalent of a parking ticket.

But 45 of the fines are more than \$10,000, and some are for violations more than a decade ago — raising questions about whether California is effectively enforcing [its campaign finance law](#) that is meant to promote transparency and prevent corruption.

“Enforcement in California is horribly lax up and down the scale, whether it’s regulatory compliance or criminal compliance,” said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. “The rules ought to be clear, they ought to be fair, they ought to be enforceable and they ought to be enforced.”

The secretary of state’s office sends three letters to people who owe the fines, but doesn’t take steps beyond that to collect the money, spokesperson Joe Kocurek said. In the past, he said, staff members called people who were behind on paying their fines, but that became too time consuming.

The problem has persisted long before Shirley Weber, the current secretary of state, took office in January. Still, she said she’ll look into the issue to see if any changes should be made. Though \$2 million is a tiny portion of California’s more than [\\$200 billion annual budget](#), it’s roughly as much as the state spends to educate about 190 students for a year.

“It’s a large amount of money, and so the question is: What can we legitimately do?” Weber said in an interview this week. “They’ve done things in the past, (but) what good is a fining system, if you can’t enforce it?”

Sam Mahood, a spokesperson for U.S. Sen. Alex Padilla — who was secretary of state for six years before Weber — said the office “has limited resources and enforcement mechanisms to collect late fines.” Even so, it collected more than \$3.6 million in fines during Padilla’s tenure, he said.

The lax enforcement is a far cry from the experience ordinary Californians face if they, for example, [neglect to pay a traffic ticket](#). Those fines increase when people don’t pay. Eventually, people can be charged with a misdemeanor for not paying, or have their tax refunds seized through a debt collection process.

“Once you get a fine in the criminal justice system, it compounds and increases and it easily takes over your life if you are low-income,” said Natasha Minsker, a lobbyist who has pushed for [more leniency in traffic fines](#).

“The fact that these fines (on politicians and judges) can go unpaid without any consequence, it’s definitely an illustration of privilege.”

A bureaucratic maze

Legislators write laws and judges enforce laws, so they have an especially high duty to obey them. CalMatters analyzed the list posted on the secretary of state's website and contacted lawmakers and judges who, according to the list, owed more than \$1,000 as of April 1. CalMatters also contacted campaigns that owe more than \$30,000 and politicians who owe relatively small amounts but hold prominent positions.

The process revealed a byzantine system of accountability. Until CalMatters contacted them, many officials on the list said they had never been notified about an outstanding fine. Others said they were aware of it, but were negotiating to have it reduced or waived. Some were confused that the secretary of state was lodging campaign finance violations because they had already resolved an issue with the Fair Political Practices Commission. While the FPPC is responsible for enforcing broader provisions of the campaign finance law, both agencies can levy fines for late disclosure reports. The Commission on Judicial Performance also can discipline judges for violating campaign finance law.

The largest outstanding fine for a public official is nearly \$38,000 owed by Alameda County Superior Court Judge Jennifer Madden stemming from her 2016 campaign. She did not return multiple messages seeking comment. In 2019, [she paid a \\$4,000 fine](#) to the FPPC for failing to file required campaign disclosures in 2016.

CalMatters found several instances where officials said they are working to resolve the fines, either by paying them off or asking to have them waived:

- Assemblymember Eloise Reyes, a San Bernardino Democrat, owes nearly \$15,000 from her 2016 campaign. She said in a statement that her attorneys are working to resolve the issue “and once that occurs any outstanding fines will be paid as soon as possible.”
- State Sen. Shannon Grove, a Bakersfield Republican, owes a total of \$3,940 from campaigns in 2012, 2014 and 2018. The fines “should have been paid in full when we were first notified,” Grove said in an email. “I regret the payment was not made on time, as promised to me. I have been assured by my Treasurer that the fines will be paid in full by (mid-April).”
- Stanislaus County Superior Court Judge Annette Rees owes \$2,410 from her 2020 campaign. She said the secretary of state notified her of the fine last month — a year after she had resolved the same issue with the FPPC, which resulted in a warning letter. “I filed an appeal of the (Secretary of State) fines,” Rees wrote in an email. “I am currently awaiting a decision in my appeal.”
- Sen. Steven Bradford owes \$1,490 and Assemblymember Chris Holden owes \$1,160, both from their 2020 campaigns. The Los Angeles Democrats have asked to have the fees waived, according to their lawyer Stephen Kaufman. “Once they receive a determination from the Secretary of State, the committees will pay any remaining fees that have not been waived or reduced,” Kaufman said by email.

- Marin County Superior Court Judge Sheila Shah Lichtblau owes \$1,090 from her 2016 campaign. Her treasurer, David Lichtblau, said he filed required disclosures on time with the county elections office, but that the secretary of state didn't accept the forms through the county's electronic filing system. He said that he resubmitted them directly to the state, and that he and the county registrar requested that the state waive any penalties. The secretary of state "recently admitted the waiver was never processed," David Lichtblau wrote in an email, adding that he has re-submitted the request and expects the fine to be waived in the next two weeks.
- Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon owes \$90, from his 2016 and 2020 campaigns. He believes the fines should be waived, said his campaign spokesperson Bill Wong: "Sometimes there is a mistake in billing. While it's in dispute, we are not going to pay it."

In other cases, officials said they were unaware that the secretary of state's list shows they owe outstanding fines until CalMatters raised questions:

- Assemblymember Carlos Villapudua, a Stockton Democrat, owes more than \$10,000 from his 2018 run. A campaign spokesman said Villapudua was not notified of the fine. Last year, Villapudua [paid a \\$483 fine](#) to the FPPC for filing 2018 campaign disclosures late. He "never got anything from the secretary of state saying, 'You owe \$10,000,'" said Lee Neves.
- Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge JoAnne McCracken owes \$4,097 from a 2010 campaign. She said it must be an error because she never received notice of a fine. "To my knowledge, I do not have an outstanding fine nor did I fail to comply with any reporting requirements during my 2010 campaign for judge. In fact, your email is the first time I have heard of this," McCracken wrote to CalMatters.
- Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Efrain Matthew Aceves owes \$1,450 from his 2016 campaign. He also said he had no knowledge of the fine until contacted by CalMatters. "I want to follow the law to the letter of the law," Aceves said in a phone interview. "What's odd to me is that there weren't any notifications at all, and now it's five years later."
- Sen. Richard Roth, a Riverside Democrat, owed \$1,120 from his 2016 campaign. He was unaware of the fine until questioned by CalMatters, attorney James C. Harrison said, but promptly paid up after learning of it. Days later, Roth's campaign heard from the secretary of state's office "that the fine was assessed in error and that they would be returning Senator Roth's check," Harrison said in an email.
- GOP gubernatorial candidate John Cox, who says he will challenge Gov. Gavin Newsom if there's a recall election, owes \$650. "California residents face a maze of burdensome regulations covering nearly every part of their lives," he said in a statement. "This is a perfect... example."
- State schools superintendent Tony Thurmond owes \$550 from a 2014 campaign for Assembly. His spokesperson David Beltran called it a clerical error and said "it'll be paid immediately."

- Weber did not address any specific fine but said that her office may have difficulty collecting some debts if campaign committees disband after an election.
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- “Some of these folks on this list haven’t been in existence in forever. And so as a result... who do you contact?” she said.

Confusing enforcement

The FPPC has its own log of outstanding fines — which stands at \$414,112 for cases from 2014 to 2020, according to spokesperson Jay Wierenga. It includes fines for various violations of California’s political ethics law, not just for filing disclosure reports late. But its procedure can include more repercussions than the secretary of state’s: It refers outstanding debts to the Franchise Tax Board, which can garnish tax refunds and state lottery winnings.

Bob Stern, who helped write California’s campaign finance law in the 1970s, said it was intentionally designed with multiple channels of enforcement, even though that comes with some inefficiencies.

“We were concerned that if you put it all in one agency there could be a problem,” Stern said. “It was a conscious decision we made to have different agencies enforce the law because we wanted to ensure there was somebody out there who would enforce the law.”

But that divided responsibility and an apparent lack of coordination has also led to some confusion.

A 2014 campaign committee that hoped to overturn a law allowing transgender students to use the bathroom of their choice (but never qualified for the ballot) owes more than \$42,000 in fines, according to the secretary of state. Treasurer John Fugatt said the committee had [paid off its fine to the FPPC](#): “My understanding is that the secretary of state fees are then waived once an FPPC agreement is reached. Not sure why these are still showing as due.”

Similarly, the secretary of state’s list shows that unsuccessful Assembly candidate Robert Bernosky, a Hollister Republican, owes more than \$34,000 from a campaign in 2012. But his attorney Harmeet Dhillon said Bernosky [paid a \\$2,500 fine](#) to the FPPC and was never notified that his name sat on a list of outstanding fines: “If the secretary of state is defaming people with nonsense like this, that just underscores the incompetence of the office.”