



M U L T I S T A T E

[Lobbyists face challenges meeting newly elected lawmakers in November](#)

Lobbyists are preparing for the difficulty of virtually getting to know newly elected members of Congress when they come to Washington for orientation next month.

A victory by Democratic nominee [Joe Biden](#) would make that task even harder given the influx of new aides and administration officials.

In all, lobbyists could find themselves navigating the challenges of trying to meet new leadership, committee, agency and administration staffers in a pandemic without in-person meetings or the fundraisers that typically populate K Street's calendar shortly after a general election.

“Like in any new Congress, there will be a rush to meet newly elected members and their staff starting as soon as the election is over through the first part of the year. The pandemic will certainly make this more challenging,” said Stu Van Scoyoc, CEO of Van Scoyoc Associates.

Newly elected members typically come to Washington in mid-November for a few frantic days of orientation, when lobbyists have the opportunity to hold events to meet them in person. There has been no final word yet on what orientation this year will look like.

“I expect, very much so in the coming months following the Nov. 3 election, that Zoom and the video conferencing will continue even though folks are very much Zoomed out,” said Andrew Kauders, managing director at Cogent Strategies. “We used to have meet-and-greets at the firm with members and new members. We are likely to transition that to Zoom so clients can meet new members virtually.”

Mary Beth Stanton, a lobbyist at Invariant, said flexibility will be key to navigating this new normal.

“Connectivity is really important — on multiple levels — in the virtual environment. Connecting new members to experts, employees and employers in their district and state is the best way to form relationships virtually. We all need to be flexible on the ‘how’ to connect,” she said in an email.

Focusing on policy is the best way to be memorable to newly elected members in the virtual advocacy space, other lobbyists said.

“I traditionally found that the best way to get to know new members of Congress and their staff, and to maintain my own network, is to just focus on the policy. The Democrats that were elected to serve in Congress are focused on policy,” said David Thomas, a partner at Mehlman Castagnetti Rosen & Thomas.

Patrick Martin, principal at Cozen O’Connor Public Strategies, added, “whether it’s in person or at home on your computer, the best way to introduce yourself is to bring them issues they have reasons to care about. If you are credible, the relationship will develop naturally.”

In an era of anti-lobbyist sentiment among liberals, a blue sweep would mean lobbyists must be creative in getting to know new Democratic lawmakers who don’t want to associate with them. Typically, the busy K Street event calendar allows for casual interactions with these members who avoid formal meetings with lobbyists.

“A blue sweep means working harder and making sure you’re always adding value by connecting relevant members to issues or constituencies they care about,” Stanton said.

Kauders said that anti-lobbyist rhetoric is sometimes more of a campaign message that gets discarded to some extent once members are sworn in.

“As they find out, a lot of their local businesses are impacted by legislation and policy in D.C. and a lot of those businesses have representation in D.C.,” he said. “If you say you’re not going to meet with a registered lobbyist, you’re going to have a rather empty calendar.”

From K Street's perspective, even though Biden has said he won't accept donations from lobbyists, his tenure in Washington and long-standing connections make a Biden administration accessible.

“While any winning presidential campaign always brings new energetic and talented people to Washington, with around 4,000 political appointees in an administration, many of the people

we expect would go to work in a Biden-Harris administration will have worked in Washington before,” Van Scoyoc said.

Thomas added that knowing former Democratic administration officials will open the door for new relationships in a Biden administration.

“For those of us who have been in D.C. for a long time, we are likely to know many of the people who would potentially serve in a Biden administration. Some of them will have worked in the Obama White House, others would have worked in the Clinton administration like myself, or have come off the Hill,” he said.

The Democratic and Republican conventions in August were the first major events for lobbyists that went from in-person to virtual. But before that, that had already scaled back from facilitating client engagement with party officials due to the pandemic.

Lobbyists, though, say they have found that virtual advocacy can lead to more efficiency and sometimes more accessibility.

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“With this new virtual world we're living in, there are efficiencies that have never existed before. People are spending less time in security lines and more time in one-on-one face time over Zoom calls,” Kauders said.

Clients who are outside the Beltway are also given more opportunities to access a member without spending on travel.

“A virtual Congress will continue to breed virtual fly-ins and opportunities for those outside of Washington to get to know newly elected members of Congress in some ways,” Kauders added.

Former Obama administration officials tried to avoid the perception of being close with lobbyists, prompting many meetings, particularly at the beginning of his first term, to be conducted outside the White House. Obama also placed limitations on former lobbyists joining the administration and created hurdles to aides becoming lobbyists after leaving.

Biden is [under pressure](#) from some progressive groups to not appoint any corporate lobbyists to his transition team, Cabinet or as top aides.

“As a Democrat, I want to do everything I can to help [the Biden team] as they transition in to advance their own goals. I expect from a lobbying perspective they will have very similar rules as the Obama administration as they deal with registered lobbyists so obviously, we'll comply with what they say,” Thomas said.

Campaign finance reports point to disparate strategies

Joshua Terenzini has outraised every other candidate in the Rutland County Vt. Senate race.

Ten people are competing for the county's six seats and Terenzini, a Rutland Town selectman making his first bid for the Legislature, led the fundraising field at the reporting deadline Thursday with more than \$13,000. While Terenzini did get money from a handful of corporations and PACs, most of his haul comes from individual contributors.

"There's a lot of momentum and a lot of support in my corner," Terenzini said. "I think it reflects my hard work and my effort to get elected."

The second-largest war chest — not too far behind Terenzini's at \$11,958 — belongs to independent candidate Michael Shank, of Brandon. Shank's reports differed from the others in that almost all of his named donors — only contributors who give more than \$100 are listed on the forms — are from outside Vermont.

"I have worked in Washington, D.C., for nine years and New York City for several years, and people all along my career path have encouraged me to run for office," he said. "That's a show of support from all the people I've met along the way and worked with along the way."

None of the other three independent candidates showed any fundraising as of Thursday evening. Brittany Cavacas' last available report was for Oct. 1, at which time she showed no contributions and \$678 of expenditures. No reports at all were found for Richard Lenchus and Casey Jennings.

Sen. Brian Collamore, R-Rutland County, started with \$353 left over from his last re-election campaign, and his total fundraising stood at \$3,845. The third member of the GOP slate, Poultney Selectman Terry Williams, had a more robust collection at \$7,100. Several of Williams' donors were slate companies, and together they accounted for 27% of his contributions.

"These people are all friends of mine," Williams said. "They're all people that think it would be beneficial to have me in the state house. ... They talked at one time about hiring me as a lobbyist. I don't like lobbyists."

Williams said he did not solicit donations, but that he accepted one of the few contributions from special interest groups in the race — \$500 from the NRA Political Victory Fund.

“I’ve been an NRA member for 40 years,” he said. “I believe in the organization and I donate to them. I can see maybe where they figured it was time to pay me back.”

Sen. Cheryl Hooker, D-Rutland County, led the Democratic slate with roughly \$5,000. Hopefuls Larry Courcelle and Greg Cox showed \$3,105 and \$2,290, respectively.

“It’s always a concern, but I’ve always hoped it’s votes, not money, that wins elections,” Hooker said. “We’ve talked about a coordinated effort, but we didn’t have the votes, I guess. Everybody wanted to do their own.”

Similarly, Terenzini said that while Republicans coordinated on some ad buys, it was every man for himself on fundraising.

The money — depending on how much of it candidates have — has gone for printing signs at a bare minimum to increasingly robust advertising campaigns. Terenzini’s strategy has included mass mailings, online ads and a video ad.

“As a first-time candidate, it’s a big county I have to get out to, and with the pandemic it’s hard to do that,” he said.

While not foregoing old media, Shank has pursued an aggressive online strategy, spending \$1,300 on Facebook and \$624 on Front Porch Forum as well as several hundred with NationBuilder, a California tech start-up that supplies online tools to political campaigns.

“We just don’t have the in-person opportunities to meet people,” he said. “I’ve had a lot of Rutland County residents reach out in response (to online ads) with lengthy questions. It’s led to some in-depth conversations. ... It’s also afforded me inroads to conversations that would’ve otherwise emerged at an event.”

Statehouse Beat: Pandemic hasn't slowed lobbyist spending

Sitting down to peruse the Ethic Commission’s lobbyist spending disclosures for the May-August spending period, I wasn’t expecting to find much.

Summer normally is the slowest period for lobbying activity, usually with a few better-financed lobbyists following legislators to conferences around the state and country to pick up their meal tabs or to host receptions.

Likewise during this period, influential groups and associations invite legislative leaders to speak at their conventions and meetings, providing them with meals, beverages and often, lodging, in return. And, of course, during election years, overall campaign contributions show up in the disclosures.

With the pandemic putting the kibosh on all in-person conventions and conferences, I expected to see only primary campaign contributions showing up on the disclosures. In other words, meager pickings for one “scanning and scanning” for column items regarding which legislators got wined and dined and by whom.

So imagine my surprise when I took a gander at the Ethics Commission’s summary for the reporting period, and the total spending was a whopping \$222,504. By my count, that blows away the May-August spending record of \$75,059 set in 2015, a year when lobbyists were particularly generous in making sure the new Republican majorities in the Legislature felt appreciated.

Turns out West Virginia Auto and Truck Dealers Association president Jared Wyrick accounted for \$135,590 of that total, with \$135,300 of that being campaign contributions.

Presuming he was reporting contributions by the association’s WVCAR political action committee and not his own personal expenditures, I went to the Secretary of State’s website to verify.

I first went through all the political action committees listed on the website. No WVCAR PAC. No West Virginia Auto and Truck Dealers Association.

Maybe, I thought, it’s under independent expenditure committees. Nope, nothing.

The last possible category would be electioneering communications committees. Nada.

Aha! Wyrick must not have filed a spending disclosure for the PAC with the Secretary of State’s Office. There’s my lede.

Checking with Wyrick, he said, no, “All our reports for our PAC have been filed timely with the Secretary of State.”

After inquiring with the office about where the report might be, I got a call from Missi Kinder, campaign finance specialist, who walked me through the process of finding it on the website, which turned out to be no simple feat.

Seems you have to use the search mechanism, and you have to enter, “West Virginia Auto and Truck Dealers,” not “WVCAR” or any variant thereof, to pull up the disclosure.

I admit I’m a tech luddite, but I think I probably know my way around financial disclosures better than the average Joe, and I have to say this is about as user-unfriendly an experience as I’ve had with a state agency website.

Auto dealers spending \$135,000 in an election cycle is a substantial chunk of change — and may help explain why you can’t buy Teslas in West Virginia.

Voters shouldn’t need to have ESP or an IT degree to find data showing that a particular PAC is exerting significant influence in an election — and it wasn’t always this way.

Before the current administration “upgraded” the website, the Secretary of State’s campaign finance reporting site was very straightforward and easy to navigate. All PACs were listed onscreen, in alphabetical order.

One could argue that after Secretary of State Mac Warner did his purge of 16 staffers (15 Dems, one independent) as he took office, the office instantly lost more than 200 years of experience and institutional history, and that none of those purged employees were around to point out the new campaign finance site is dysfunctional.

(Have to say, I had forgotten that Ben Salango was one of the attorneys who were able to get \$3.2 million in wrongful termination settlements for 14 of the purged workers.)

Of course, as a party, Republicans aren’t big on transparency, from the president who won’t release his tax returns on down.

(Full disclosure: Warner got a \$2,800 maximum contribution from the auto and truck dealers.)

[Lobbyists begin to prepare for a potential Biden presidency](#)

Lobbyists are preparing for a potential Joe Biden presidency as he leads President Donald Trump in national and several swing state polls.

In recent weeks, some lobbyists have started meeting with Biden advisors, including Rhett Buttle, the campaign's national business advisor, according to people familiar with the discussions.

These lobbyists have participated in Zoom meetings with questions on how a possible Biden administration plans to work with Congress on many of the campaign's policy proposals, such as tax and infrastructure reform, the people noted. The answers to these questions could give lobbyists insight into how their clients may see a benefit or a downturn in a Biden White House.

Though Biden's advisors have privately waved off lobbyists asking policy-related questions, they have encouraged them to help Biden through get-out-the-vote efforts and raising money for the Democratic National Committee, they added. It's notable Biden's advisors have not told lobbyists to give directly to the campaign, as the Democratic nominee has sworn off contributions from those in the influence industry.

Still, these meetings and sometimes informal conversations are examples of how lobbyists are angling themselves for what could be a Biden victory. The people who declined to be named in this story did so in order to speak freely.

Many lobbyists have been telling their clients that they expect a strong relationship with a potential Biden administration. Reasons include: Steve Ricchetti, himself a former lobbyist, is Biden's campaign chairman and has been mentioned as a potential candidate for White House chief of staff; and the campaign's [transition team](#) allows the inclusion of lobbyists.

Also, Biden would likely surround himself with administration officials who have built relationships with lobbyists and industry chiefs over the years.

"The message is you will have a much more predictable and traditional policy making process," said Matthew Epperly, a managing director at lobbying firm Chartwell Strategy Group, in describing his conversations with clients. "So when you are making a domestic policy advocacy campaign you can do it more of a ground up approach through the agencies and make your way into the White House," he added.

"In the Trump White House, policy is more personality driven than through the agencies. It's moving conversations into social media and TV. It's conversations that happen on CNBC and Fox Business, that then create an echo chamber to create policy," he noted.

Biden has pledged to curb the ["improper influence of lobbyists"](#) and build upon the Obama administration's ethics pledge. Obama signed an executive order early on in his first term as president, which [said that appointees who were previously registered lobbyists](#) during the prior

two years should not participate in any government matters on which they had previously lobbied.

The Biden campaign did not respond to a request for comment on this story.

Biden priorities

Bob Crowe, a partner at lobbying shop Nelson Mullins, told CNBC that he is “excited” about the prospect of a Biden victory, noting the former vice president is an old friend of his. When asked how he could work with a Biden administration on issues such as health care, tax reform and trade disputes, Mullins said: “All those issues will play a role, but it looks like the first issue will be a major infrastructure bill.”

Biden’s campaign has proposed a \$1.3 trillion infrastructure bill that would invest in restoring highways, roads and bridges, while trying to spur further adoption of electric vehicles and trains. The former vice president’s plan also calls for replacing water pipes, building out rural broadband access and updating schools, among other measures.

Biden’s allies in the business community have already started lobbying members of Congress on what could be a massive infrastructure bill.

“We have targeted 50 swing districts around the country so when 2021 comes, Joe will have the votes to go big,” said a person familiar with the effort.

With Election Day just 15 days away, and a potential Democratic sweep on the horizon, other firms have been strategizing with their clients on who could join a Biden administration and the policies that could become law. At least nine Republican incumbent senators are fighting to keep their jobs in races that have been deemed either toss-ups or “lean Democrat.”

On calls with campaign advisors, lobbyists have heard a wide range of names being floated of those that could lead the Treasury Department, including Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., Fed Governor Lael Brainard and BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, a person familiar with the matter explained.

Lobbying giant Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck listed a wide range of possible Biden Cabinet members in a note last month.

For chief of staff, the firm said it could be either Ricchetti or Ron Klain, a campaign advisor and one of Biden’s former chiefs of staff when he was vice president. The firm believes Treasury

secretary could fall to Warren, former director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Richard Cordray, Minneapolis Fed President Neel Kashkari, or J.P. Morgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon. Brainard is listed as possible head of the National Economic Council.

For secretary of State, the firm lists former Obama national security advisor Susan Rice, Biden's foreign policy advisor Tony Blinken, and Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, as potential candidates.

Impact on Trump world

The impact of a potential Biden presidency might already be affecting lobbying shops with ties to Republicans.

Former longtime lobbyist Tony Podesta said in an email that he has heard Republican-led lobbying firms are already keeping a close eye on potential hires that have links to Biden but any official moves will largely depend on what takes place in the fight for the Senate.

"All or almost all Republican firms are looking desperately for Biden Democrats. Everyone is looking for Biden Democrats to add," he said.

Scott Mason, a lobbyist at Holland & Knight who worked on Trump's 2016 campaign and later his transition, said firms like his will be fine under a Biden presidency since they employ people from both sides of the aisle.

The future might not be so bright for other GOP-linked firms, including Ballard Partners, which is run by veteran Trump campaign bundler Brian Ballard.

"His revenues drop significantly if Trump loses," Mason recently told CNBC. Ballard's clients in 2020 have included corporate juggernauts such as Amazon, Boeing and Major League Baseball. The firm does employ Democrats.

In the third quarter, almost a dozen clients dropped Ballard's firm, lobbying disclosure reports show.

One of the groups to withdraw from the firm was Secure Democracy, a nonprofit that "works to educate policymakers and the public about secure and fair elections," according to its website.

A person with direct knowledge of the matter said the organization moved on from Ballard Partners because their values didn't align with Secure Democracy's. The group was also concerned after seeing news reports on the firm's dealings both domestically and abroad.

The person did not elaborate on what deals concerned them enough to cut ties with the firm.

A representative for Ballard Partners declined to comment both on the firm's plans and why Secure Democracy terminated its contract.