



M U L T I S T A T E

[The Tropical Conclave Where Politicians and Lobbyists Go to Make Deals](#)

It was 11 p.m. on the Friday after Election Day, and two likely candidates to be New York City's next mayor — Corey Johnson, the Council speaker, and Ruben Diaz Jr., the Bronx borough president — were deep in conversation under purple-lit palms outside a beachfront hotel.

Inside, the New York attorney general, Letitia James, danced atop a platform in a roped-off club at an exclusive party hosted by a New York City public employee union. Lobbyists for various clients swayed to the beat, mingling near the State Assembly speaker and Brooklyn's district attorney.

It is perhaps the most unusual gathering in New York politics, held 1,600 miles away: the annual exodus of the state's political class to Puerto Rico.

The vibe is something like a spring break pilgrimage for public officials and the lobbyists who woo them, where mojitos accompany talk of prevailing wages and the traditional "talk to my staff" culture melts away.

[The event](#) is staged by a nonprofit known as Somos, whose stated purpose, according to tax filings, is to "address problems of the Hispanic community" through grants and scholarships. But the San Juan conference and another in Albany are the main endeavors of the group, whose chair is appointed by the Assembly speaker, Carl E. Heastie.

This year's top sponsors, listed as paying between \$5,000 and \$40,000, were a who's who of companies and groups with pending struggles in Albany.

There was Airbnb, embroiled in a bitter fight with a powerful hotel workers' union, and the cigarette company Altria, which is battling bans on flavored e-cigarettes. Education Equity, a group opposed to changing New York City's standardized test for high school, had at least two representatives stalking the main hotel bar.

“It’s basically Albany transplanted to San Juan except with, remarkably, more lobbyists,” said Julia Salazar, a first-term state senator from Brooklyn. “The experience for me was just being bombarded by lobbyists and feeling pressure to party with them, which I wasn’t thrilled to do.”

Making the trip this year were Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, Mayor Bill de Blasio, at least 13 state senators, 28 Assembly members, about half of the New York City Council, both the city and the state comptrollers, Mr. Cuomo’s budget director, union officials, and scores and scores of lobbyists.

Some elected officials who attend Somos use campaign funds to pay for the conference, including airfare, hotel and event registration; others pay their own way. And some, including Mr. de Blasio and Mr. Johnson, used taxpayer money for the trip.

Unions sponsored events at the conference, as did the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Elected officials could accept one free drink from a lobbyist, but no more: The state’s limit on gifts is \$15. (That was, coincidentally, the cost of the hotel’s “handcrafted cocktails.”)

For both officials and the lobbyists that followed them around, the appeal of the conference was the easy access to decision makers.

“You’re not being handled and there is no staff,” said David Greenfield, chief executive of a Jewish charity called the Met Council and a former City Council member from Brooklyn. “Around here, it’s 10 o’clock at night and you’re like, ‘Look senator, what’s the deal? You want to get this done or not?’ And they’ll say yes or no.”

Wearing a suit near the pool, Mr. Greenfield added that the flowing alcohol and the dress code that can turn quickly to cabana wear and shorts helps almost everyone feel relaxed.

“I would say probably more business happens here in one weekend than in three months in City Hall or in Albany,” he said. “That’s how significant it is.”

The relaxed atmosphere can begin on the way to the island: On one Thursday flight, more than a dozen top officials and a handful of lobbyists piled into the same plane, including Ms. James; the State Senate leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins; and the New York City comptroller, Scott M. Stringer, another likely mayoral candidate. Officials visited one another in the aisles or turned around in their seats for conversation, like children on a field trip.

The conference included workshops on serious topics, such as the Puerto Rican debt crisis and the post-Hurricane Maria education system. “We’re there to generate revenue for Puerto Rico,

and to learn,” said Assemblywoman Maritza Davila of Brooklyn, who helped lead the event this year.

She said that she did not handle the sponsorships and could not provide the cost of the conference this year. “I don’t get involved in the money piece,” she said, adding that contributions to the event do not have any effect on legislation.

Larry Fernandez, chair of the Somos board, declined to say how much had been raised or spent at this year’s conference. He said in an email that the conferences in San Juan and Albany were the “sole purpose” of the nonprofit.

The nonprofit, formed in 1987 by members of the State Assembly’s Puerto Rican and Hispanic task force, has reported contributions of about \$1 million a year in recent years, and put an average of 6 percent of the contributions to grants or scholarships from 2004 to 2016. (In 2017, Hurricane Maria forced the cancellation of the conference in San Juan, and the nonprofit reported \$337,000 in grants.)

The scheduled events at the conference in Puerto Rico, which began the day after Election Day and ended Sunday morning, were mostly an afterthought for the elected officials who attended. They opted instead for a string of meetings, meals and extracurricular activities.

“There’s a whole conference here and nobody goes,” said one Council member. “They come for this,” he added, indicating the crowded main bar of the El San Juan Hotel, where the conference was based.

Most of the more than 30 lobbyists, union officials and elected leaders interviewed for this article did so in various stages of inebriation and on the condition of anonymity. Two lobbyists threatened a reporter with murder — jokingly, it seemed — should their gossipy bar talk make it into print.

Other allowances are made: With cellphone cameras all around, legislators mostly avoid swimwear. One said she could not imagine putting on a bathing suit. A councilman said he made it a practice of never taking off his shirt.

Those who flew down on Thursday, including Mr. Cuomo, missed the “day of service” that included tree planting and coastal cleaning. The governor’s speech at a dinner that evening lasted less than 12 minutes.

The usual dynamics of New York politics traveled down as well: Mr. de Blasio skipped the dinner where Mr. Cuomo, his frequent political rival, made his remarks. (Mr. de Blasio held his own events and meetings in Puerto Rico over several days.)

After the governor's speech, a crush of people attempted to talk with Mr. Cuomo as he exited. New York City's schools chancellor, Richard A. Carranza, was among those pushing valiantly through the crowd, but he failed to get the governor's attention. Mr. Cuomo flew home that night.

For lobbyists, the conference offered a chance to make a direct case on policies — like single-payer health care or casinos or charter schools — that are likely to be taken up in Albany next year.

Several health care officials, including those from the powerful Greater New York Hospital Association, could be seen milling around, as could the chair of the State Senate health committee, Gustavo Rivera of the Bronx, who is sponsoring a bill to create a single-payer health care plan for the state.

American Israel Public Affairs Committee had a presence, as did the real estate lobby. Representative Hakeem Jeffries of Brooklyn showed up at the bar one night, joining Mr. Johnson, the speaker, and Mr. Diaz, the Bronx borough president.

Tough political questions — such as Puerto Rican statehood, a divisive topic on the island — did not come up in public discussions. Nor did Israeli internal politics, even as the conference honored Dani Dayan, the consul general of Israel in New York whose support for settlements has made him [a complicated figure](#).

Most people were content to gather a little intelligence on the next legislative session, get a window on how various political players are thinking, and — crucially — use the atmosphere to establish relationships and advance agendas.

“Somos is where I get my work done,” said Assemblyman Michael Blake, who is running for Congress in the Bronx, as he grabbed a quick bite on a hotel patio.

Nearby, Councilman Antonio Reynoso of Brooklyn passed by wearing a T-shirt with his name on it, white against a red background.

“You get way more people coming up to you,” he said of his shirt. “People are like, ‘Is that Antonio Reynoso?’ Yup!”

Keith Powers, a Manhattan councilman, stopped to admire the shirt. "Can I take a picture?" he asked, and then he did.

"Everyone is in the same place," said Mr. Blake, finishing his meal. "The question is, what do you do when you leave from here?"

Lawmakers OK greater lobbyist disclosure over GOP complaints

Illinois lawmakers approved requiring more public disclosure about lobbyists Thursday in response to a federal bribery charge against a since-disgraced representative but pushed heavy ethics-reform lifting off to a newly created commission that will report recommendations next spring.

Overwhelming votes in both the House and the Senate on the year's last scheduled day of work in Springfield belied the dissatisfaction House Republicans had with what one lawmaker called a "milquetoast" measure and criticism over the makeup of the commission they fear will be stacked with Democrats .

The six-day fall session also ended with no agreement on restructuring taxes on a proposed Chicago casino which, in their current form, could potentially devour profits. Democratic Gov. J.B. Pritzker did win approval of his plan to pool assets of hundreds of local police and firefighters' pension systems into two statewide accounts to boost investment returns and save local administrative costs.

The ethics legislation was a speedy response to charges last month against ex-Rep. Luis Arroyo , who allegedly offered a bribe to a senator to support legislation Arroyo planned to introduce at the same time Arroyo was lobbying the Chicago City Council on the same issue. Outside lobbying by sitting legislators is legal in Illinois. Few states restrict it.

Earlier Thursday, Pritzker dismissed any notion that officials were rushing through a bill to have something to point to.

"We are taking it very seriously. We're not going to tolerate people who engage in the kind of corruption and self-dealing that we've seen," Pritzker said. "The bill that is being considered today ..., it's just a beginning. There isn't a lot of time to go after the big things that need to be addressed."

The legislation requires the secretary of state to combine existing online databases of lobbyists, campaign contributions and statements of economic interest. Lobbyists would have to disclose more detail about the interests they're representing and ties to state or local government.

House Republicans were particularly irked that Democrats scuttled a plan to strengthen disclosures in statements of economic interest. They're designed to list the financial interests a lawmaker or policymaker has that might raise conflicts when it comes to official action. But they're widely derided as "None Sheets" because the form's broadly worded questions invariably allow respondents to answer "None" or "N/A."

"I'm a little disappointed with the fact that we are not bringing resolution to this part of ethics reform, considering the world that we are existing in, in Illinois," House Republican Leader Jim Durkin of Western Springs said. "When this building is burning down, we're going to punt this section."

The bill's sponsor, Majority Leader Greg Harris of Chicago, said there were questions by members of both parties about the forms and that the commission should take it up. It is to report its recommendations by March 31, 2020.

A resolution to create the ethics commission drew GOP derision as well. Its 16 members would be appointed by the governor, House and Senate Democrats and Republicans, and the attorney general's and secretary of state's office, both of which Democrats control. Republicans said that meant 10 members could be Democrats.

"Corruption and ethics are not partisan, the integrity of this chamber is not partisan," said Senate Republican Leader Bill Brady of Bloomington. "This is an unbalanced, partisan commission, though, and if you support that you are not voting in the interest of the people."

[Chicago aldermen propose their own changes to city lobbying rules](#)

As state legislators weigh ethics changes in response to federal investigations into elected officials, businesses and lobbyists, aldermen are lining up behind their [own changes to city lobbying rules](#).

Ald. Michele Smith, 43rd, who chairs the Committee on Ethics and Government Oversight, and Ald. Matt O'Shea, 19th, have introduced a ban on aldermen acting as paid lobbyists and on outside elected officials lobbying on Chicago matters. So far, they've convinced a majority of the City Council to support the change.

“No elected official or employee may lobby the State, the County, or any other local unit of government in the State, or derive any income or compensation from lobbying the State, the County, or any other local unit of government in the State, on behalf of any person,” the ordinance reads, and “No elected official of a unit of government in the State may lobby the city, the city council, or any city agency, department, board or commission.”

Luis Arroyo, who resigned from his seat in the Illinois House after being charged with bribery, was registered to lobby the city for a company he owned with his wife. The bribe allegedly involved sweepstakes legislation, an issue he'd lobbied the City Council on.

Other elected officials are registered to lobby the city, including Senate President John Cullerton, state Rep. Jaime Andrade and Cook County Commissioner Larry Suffredin. Ald. Mike Zalewski, 23rd, was also registered to lobby the state before his retirement from the City Council.

“We know that paid lobbying by Chicago, State of Illinois, and Cook County elected officials has long been a problem here. It's time to end that practice so that taxpayers can have confidence that their public servants are acting in the public's interest, rather than in the interest of private clients,” Smith said in a release.

“While elected officials should always assert their positions on legislation and other matters, they should not be making money from interests that could pose a conflict to their fiduciary duties as an elected official,” O'Shea said in the same release. “Our elected officials should not be paid lobbyists to other governments, and other elected officials should not be paid to lobby the Chicago government.”

Other co-sponsors include aldermen Matt Martin, 47th; Scott Waguespack, 32nd; Gilbert Villegas, 36th; Brendan Reilly, 42nd; and Byron Sigcho-Lopez, 25th.

Steve Berlin, the executive director of the Chicago Board of Ethics, said he'd been consulted on the ordinance and "believe it is a good and necessary measure. We are also carefully watching the goings on in Springfield to see whether the General Assembly might consider and enact something analogous."

If passed, the ordinance would take effect within 90 days. The proposal would [build on recent ethics changes](#) adopted in the early days of Lightfoot's administration regarding outside employment by aldermen and the power of the city's inspector general.

Republicans in the Illinois House have proposed a slew of ethics changes in this veto session, including a mandate that lawmakers provide more detailed information about financial

interests, a call for special elections to fill vacant seats in the Legislature rather than having party officials choose replacements, and banning lawmakers and close family members from working as lobbyists in other cities and counties, [according to the Chicago Tribune](#).

[Donor to de Blasio ‘slush’ fund pays \\$10K to settle ethics case](#)

A major contributor to Mayor Bill de Blasio’s shuttered nonprofit — which [critics labeled a “slush” fund](#) to boost Hizzoner’s ambitions — has agreed to pay \$10,000 to settle charges it violated state ethics laws.

The firm, Douglaston Development LLC, snagged more than \$12 million in taxpayer funds and scored city-owned land in The Bronx’s Mott Haven neighborhood in December 2014 for a new development.

Two months later, de Blasio spoke to one of the firm’s executives about donating to his nonprofit, the Campaign for One New York.

CONY was run by top de Blasio allies and spent lavishly to bolster Hizzoner and his top priorities — like universal pre-kindergarten.

A then-top de Blasio campaign adviser and CONY’s treasurer, Ross Offinger, followed up and asked for a \$50,000 donation. The company ultimately gave \$25,000.

At the time, the company had a second proposal before the city concerning plans for a West Chelsea project, [according to a separate city Department of Investigation report](#) on CONY’s pay-to-pay fundraising tactics.

The City Council approved that 1,200 unit development south of Hudson Yards in 2018.

The state’s ethics watchdog, the Joint Commission on Public Ethics, announced the settlement on Wednesday and Douglaston did not admit any wrongdoing.

“Fundraising for the now-defunct Campaign for One New York has been thoroughly investigated by JCOPE,” said City Hall’s top spokeswoman, Freddi Goldstein. “JCOPE has never found that the Mayor violated the law.”

JCOPE’s rules prohibit lobbyists and their clients from giving gifts to a public official — or to third parties on behalf of or upon the recommendation of a public official, de Blasio in this case.

Douglaston Development chairman Jeff Levine signed the settlement papers.

“The mission of the Campaign for One New York (CONY) to seek the expansion of affordable housing and creation of universal pre-K aligned with our company’s values. Therefore, when asked by a representative of CONY for a contribution, the company obliged, after performing due diligence on CONY and its mission,” said a company spokesperson.

“We made this charitable contribution unaware of recent regulatory modifications that, according to the Joint Commission on Public Ethics, could prohibit such contributions,” the spokesperson added. “We fully cooperated with the Commission and we are pleased to have settled this matter without any finding or admission to a violation of law.”

Douglaston is the latest in a line of CONY donors with business before the de Blasio administration that reached similar financial settlements with JCOPE.

Other JCOPE settlements were [reached with three other developers](#), Brookfield Financial Properties, LP, Toll Brothers, Inc., and Greenpoint Landing Developers, [lobbyist James Capalino](#) and the anti-horse carriage group NYCLASS.

CONY disbanded in 2016 amid fundraising probes by DOI, JCOPE, the Manhattan DA and US Attorney’s office.

In an unusual joint statement issued in 2017, Manhattan DA Cy Vance Jr. and then Acting Manhattan US Attorney Joon Kim [said they would not prosecute de Blasio](#) for his role in the fundraising shenanigans but criticized the mayor’s conduct for appearing to violate the “intent and spirit” of state campaign finance laws. De Blasio disputed the characterization and maintained he acted lawfully.

[Goodell Opposed To Public Financing Of Campaigns](#)

Count State Assemblyman Andrew Goodell, R-Jamestown, among those opposed to public financing of election campaigns.

Goodell issued his concerns during a recent public hearing by the Public Finance Reform Commission. The commission was created as part of the 2019-20 state budget to create a way for public financing of state elections. Most public campaign finance systems match a candidate’s private fundraising once it reaches a pre-determined threshold.

New York's commission is scheduled to release a report the day after Thanksgiving with its recommendations. If no changes are approved by state lawmakers before the end of the year, the commission's recommendations will become law. The commission has met several times over the past few months and seems likely to recommend public financing of electoral campaigns for state and local offices while possibly recommending changes to the state's fusion voting system, potentially rendering decreasing the voice of parties like the Green Party, Conservative Party, Independence Party and Libertarian Party.

One of Goodell's concerns is that a public campaign finance system that matches campaign donors for incumbents gives incumbents an even greater advantage over challengers for public office. Incumbents typically have a well-developed list of donors, Goodell said, which allows them to raise more money than their challengers while doing less legwork. Incumbents are also allowed to carry over unspent money from one campaign cycle to another.

"Incumbents will also likely meet participation thresholds much quicker than their opponents because of their existing donor lists," Goodell said. "This means that an incumbent will likely enjoy a substantial financial advantage much earlier in the campaign, which is incredibly important in framing the campaign issues, building campaign momentum and raising even more money. The importance of raising substantial funds early in the campaign is even more critical as the result of recent Election Law changes that moved the primary date more than 10 weeks earlier, from the second Tuesday in September to the fourth Tuesday in June. The implementation of early voting two weeks before the general election also forces campaigns to spend more money earlier in the campaign season."

Goodell said it would be easy to scam a public campaign finance system, including doubling the public match by splitting a household's donations between the heads of household while also noting that giving state money to an individual or private undertaking may be unconstitutional under a 1995 state Court of Appeals decision in *Schultz v. New York state*.

The assemblyman also said it is a conflict of interest for state legislators to vote on spending public money on campaigns since public financing of campaigns would create financial advantages for incumbents. Other constitutional concerns included unlawful delegation of lawmaking authority, a claim made during legal challenges of legislative pay raises and bans on outside legislative income, and a claim that the state Constitution prohibits non-budget legislation to be passed as part of a budget bill.

Goodell also advocated for the commission to ban "pay to play" behavior in which state legislators or others running for office receive campaign donations from lobbyists, contractors or advocates who want to be considered for state contracts or ask legislators to vote a certain way on legislation. Legislators can't accept gifts or gratuity exceeding \$15 in value, but can accept thousands of dollars in campaign contributions. Pay to play scandals in recent memory listed by

Goodell include awarding of contracts to donors as part of the Buffalo Billion program, awarding \$25.4 million to Crystal Run after its executives donated \$400,000 to state officials in campaign contributions and the recent approval of a \$140 million Medicaid reimbursement rate increase days after a donation by the Greater New York Hospital Association.

“The solution is relatively simple,” Goodell said. “It involves banning campaign contributions from lobbyists, those seeking grants or rate hikes or similar compensation from state government, including the top executives of such organizations, and those seeking legislation that would provide them with unique pecuniary or other benefits.”

Smaller political parties should be protected from possible takeover by major party officials as part of any recommendations, Goodell said. There are instances in which ballot lines have been provided under the state law that gives a statewide ballot line to a political party that has at least 50,000 votes cast for its candidate for governor regardless of the number of registered party members. Some parties have ballot lines throughout the state despite having few party members enrolled in specific counties, meaning major parties can have family or friends register as members of the new party and control its local endorsements.

“One solution to this issue might be to require local endorsements to be made by the new party’s statewide committee until such time as the new party has a threshold number of registered voters in the local political subdivision who have been registered in the new party for at least one year,” Goodell said. “In this manner, it would be much more difficult for a major party to ‘take over’ the local minor party endorsements.”

[Jon Lender: Get elected to the legislature. Form your own PAC. Solicit checks from lobbyists who are paid to influence you. Cash and repeat.](#)

“Please join us for a fall happy hour,” said the Connecticut General Assembly House Democrats’ invitation to a fundraiser this past Wednesday night at the Polish National Home in Hartford.

On Monday, House Republicans will host their “End of the Year Fundraiser” at the Officers’ Club, in the State Armory across the parking lot from the Legislative Office Building in Hartford.

Senate Republicans are holding their own end-of-year fundraiser Dec. 11 at Zandri’s Stillwood Inn in Wallingford. The invitation email said: “We look forward to seeing you on the 11th.”

It all sounds so festive. And the invitations are so, well, inviting.

But those invitations also feel a little like ransom notes to many lobbyists at the state Capitol, who make their living by influencing state legislators to approve or kill bills according to the interests of the clients who pay them.

The lobbyists say privately — always on condition of anonymity — that they feel like they need to show up, or at least donate, and they hope this might get them a break from a legislator or powerful caucus leader; or, conversely, they worry that they'll get frozen out if they don't.

So they donate.

Your typical lobbyist at the Capitol has received at least a half-dozen invitations to fundraisers since the end of the summer. Sometimes they're invited to more than one fundraiser on the same day — and even at the same place.

Take, for example, a fundraiser by three Democratic legislators' PACs from 5 to 7 p.m. on Oct. 10 at the Red Rock Tavern at 369 Capitol Ave. in Hartford.

One of the three PACs collecting contributions, the McCarthy Vahey PAC — headed by Rep. Cristin McCarthy Vahey, D-Fairfield — filed a financial report Oct. 28 saying it had received \$100 donations that evening from individuals including Anthony Camilliere, Brian Sullivan, Carroll Hughes, Hilary Fentin-Reid, James Paolino, Jean Cronin Hughes, Julie Cammarata, Michael Doyle, Michael Dugan, Peter Smith and Ryan Bingham.

Their occupations were listed, respectively, as lobbyist, lobbyist and lobbyist. Get the picture?

Some of those same lobbyists gave to one or both of the other two PACs represented at the Red Rock that evening.

Cost of doing business

None of this should make you feel too sorry for the lobbyists.

This is a classic “cost-of-doing-business” situation and won't break most of them financially. By law, they can only give a maximum of \$100 a year to any one PAC or candidate, and many of them have clients willing to pay them thousands, or tens of thousands of dollars a year to influence the legislature or executive branch to take favorable actions or not take unfavorable ones.

The \$100 contributions do mount up, because the number of PACs holding fundraisers has proliferated in recent years, so it can cost a lobbyist thousands of dollars to show up to all or most of the fundraising events to which he or she is invited.

But lobbyists know that this is how the system works. It's a symbiotic relationship: The lawmakers, whose attention they need, depend on lobbyists' contributions for their PACs, which help to fund Republican or Democratic campaigns for legislative or municipal offices.

Another fundraiser where lobbyists were solicited to write as many as three \$100 checks was the House Democrats' fall happy hour at the Polish club this past Wednesday. Donations there were solicited for the House Democrats' three "leadership PACs" for Speaker Joe Aresimowicz and Majority Leader Matt Ritter: CT Majority Team PAC, House Majority Committee and House Democrats Campaign Committee.

Beyond that, at virtually all of these fundraisers, lobbyists and their corporate clients are solicited to purchase an "advertisement" for up to \$250 in an "ad book" full of messages of "congratulations" or "best wishes" to whatever caucus or PAC or leader is sponsoring the event. Hardly anyone ever looks at the advertisements, except perhaps to note which lobbyists and clients ponied up more than others.

[This subject has been covered before in this column](#), but it never hurts to restate the way things work in and around the government every so often. The limits on lobbyists' donations are part of the clean elections laws established in the 15 years since the corruption scandal that chased Gov. John Rowland from office. The clean elections system includes grants of public money to candidates to run their campaigns with less special interest influence.

A PAC with your name on it

Every few years, there's a new wrinkle to all of this — and this time it's that, more and more, individual legislators are forming their own PACs whose funds aren't authorized by law toward their reelection, but to support other candidates and causes of their choice.

Three examples of such PACs that have been formed since July are:

- the above-mentioned McCarthy Vahey PAC that held the Oct. 10 fundraiser at the Red Rock in Hartford;
- Currey PAC, formed by Rep. Jeff Currey, D-East Hartford, which held a fundraiser Oct. 22 at the Arch Street Tavern in Hartford with Aresimowicz and Ritter as "special guests";
- and the Valley Forward PAC formed by first-term Rep. Kara Rochelle, D-Ansonia. On Tuesday evening, Rochelle's Valley Forward PAC will hold a joint fundraiser with

Aresimowicz's 30 PAC (named for the number of his House district) at the Red Rock in Hartford. Contributions are being solicited for both PACs.

Any legislator who controls a pool of PAC money can use it to increase his or her standing with caucus leaders or local political allies by donating funds to, or spending money to benefit, candidates for municipal, legislative or statewide offices. They can also give money to the caucus leadership PACs, which raises the issue of whether such transfers undermine clean election limits on how much those larger leadership PACs can receive from donors including lobbyists.

McCarthy Vahey said in an interview Thursday that she knew of no initiative or suggestion by Democratic House leaders for members of her caucus to form PACs like her new one, and that she decided to do it because she wants to expand her efforts to promote candidacies by women — who represent a little more than half the general population but only about 30% of the legislature.

She said it doesn't matter to her whether a lobbyist donates to her PAC or not, and it won't affect her decision-making. "It's not just one conversation that's going to make a decision on how I vote," she said. "The reality is that there's a limit on the funds that [lobbyists] are able to give. I think that helps from an appearance standpoint too. ... The way I approach it is to try to be open and listen to all perspective's no matter what."

Currey said in a separate interview Thursday that he formed Currey PAC on his own, without any encouragement from Democratic caucus leaders. He added: "Having been here now for a few years it just seemed as though it was kind of natural progression" for him to create a committee "to help support those who are fighting for issues that I personally care about, whether that's LGBTQ issues, education reform, youth empowerment, those types of things — but also to be able to support candidates and committees that are going to join in those fights with me."

Asked if lobbyists' contributions affect his decisions, Currey said, "Absolutely not. And I think I've developed a reputation ... that I am willing and able to have a conversation and hear anybody's point of view, and make a decision based on the facts. Anybody who knows me, knows I nerd out on all of this sort of stuff. I love the policy piece of things. It's all about the details to me. It doesn't matter who's giving me money or who's not giving me money."

Rochelle couldn't be reached for comment Thursday about her new PAC, Valley Forward.

The fundraising events mentioned in this column are by no means the only ones that have happened or are planned. For example, Senate Democrats have carried on continual efforts to

build their bank balances just like the other three legislative caucuses whose invitations are featured here.

And not all of the fundraising invitations sent out lately to lobbyists have been for the PACs of caucus leaders or individual legislators like McCarthy Vahey, Currey and Rochelle.

For example, on Oct. 16, the reelection committee of Deputy Senate Republican Leader Kevin Witkos held a fundraiser at the Salute restaurant on Trumbull Street in Hartford at which lobbyists' donations were solicited, getting an early jump toward realizing his 2020 vision of winning a sixth Senate term.

[Oregon Supreme Court Considers Whether To Overturn Landmark Campaign Finance Ruling](#)

The Oregon Supreme Court on Thursday considered whether it will overturn one of its more notable rulings – the two-decade-old decision that struck down the state's voter-approved campaign finance limits.

And after 90 minutes of spirited debate with the attorneys in the case, it seems clear the justices were animated by the issue of whether they should do exactly that.

The court is considering the [constitutionality of a 2016 ordinance](#) passed by Multnomah County voters that places a \$500-per-person limit on campaign donations. But the stakes are larger than that. If the justices revisit their 1997 ruling, it could also open the door to the imposition of strict limits at the state level.

Currently, Oregon is one of only a handful of states with no limits on contributions to state and local races. That's produced some of the most expensive campaigns in the country on a per-voter basis and stirred controversy about the influence of big donors. In the last major election, for example, Nike co-founder Phil [Knight gave GOP gubernatorial candidate Knute Buehler \\$2.5 million](#).

In Thursday's hearing, several of the justices peppered attorneys on both sides with questions.

Chief Justice Martha Walters expressed wariness about overturning the court's 1997 ruling, which found that limiting campaign contributions limits the free-speech rights of donors and candidates.

"What gives us the right to go back and dispute that?" she asked.

But later on, Walters was equally quick to challenge Greg Chaimov, a Portland attorney representing business groups opposed to the Multnomah County limits.

She pointed out that state and local laws place limits on outdoor advertising.

“If you can limit the number of signs someone can have,” she said, “why can’t you limit the amount of dollar contributions someone can make?”

Justice Lynn Nakamoto chimed in with a similar question.

“If one person can donate \$100,000 versus the many who can maybe donate \$40,” she said, “isn’t that sort of the ill that’s being addressed by the measure – that sort of outsized influence of the big contributor?”

Dan Meek, a Portland attorney representing several supporters of the Multnomah County ordinance, argued that the writers of Oregon’s Constitution didn’t intend for the free-speech protections to prevent campaign money prohibitions.

Meek said several other states with similar free-speech clauses had already adopted restrictions. And he said this historical record hadn’t been considered when the court struck down campaign-finance limits in 1997.

Katherine Thomas, a Multnomah County assistant attorney, argued that the court had previously opened the door to rethinking its 1997 ruling. She noted that the court later upheld a 2007 law that placed curbs on gifts – such as meals and travel – that lobbyists and others could give to legislators.

That makes it clear, she said, that some limits on political-oriented donations are acceptable.

Chaimov said the limit on lobbyist gift-giving is fundamentally different from campaign contributions. He said donations are an inherent form of free speech.

Justice Chris Garrett expressed some interest in that point.

“Isn’t the problem that once a person caps out at the limit, they’re not allowed to express anymore,” he said, adding, “We don’t say, ‘After you speak once, you don’t get to speak again.’”

While the justices are concerned with upholding precedent, none of them were on the court when the 1997 ruling was handed down. And five of the seven justice have been appointed to the court by Gov. Kate Brown, starting in 2016.

Brown supports a proposed constitutional amendment passed by the Legislature that would make it clear the Oregon Constitution doesn't prohibit limits on the flow of political money. That measure will go to voters for their approval at the November 2020 election.

If the justices were to uphold the Multnomah County ordinance, that could open the way for the imposition of statewide campaign finance limits that were approved by voters in 2006. So far, that law has not taken effect because of the court's 1997 ruling.

Portland voters have also adopted similar limits to the Multnomah County ordinance that would also be affected by the court's decision.

The justices don't have a time limit on issuing any ruling in this case.

Who are Kansas lobbyists taking to dinner?

Lobbyists have spent more than \$435,000 treating Kansas lawmakers and legislative staffers to dinner, drinks and basketball games during the first three months of 2017.

And their choices of who to take to dinner reflect the political shift that took place in November. Democrats, who gained seats in November, have seen their share of lobbyist spending increase this year.

The money spent through March surpasses the total lobbyist spending during the first three months of last year's legislative session, which stood at about \$366,000 after three months, and nearly equals the \$472,000 lobbyists spent in Kansas for all 12 months of 2016, according to .

The increased spending by lobbyists likely .

Lawmakers are still grappling with how to close a roughly \$900 million budget gap for the next two years and how to satisfy a Kansas Supreme Court order for more funding for K-12 education, two challenges that necessitate some combination of tax increases or cuts to other areas of the state's budget.

Republicans, who hold majorities in both the House and Senate, continue to be the primary beneficiaries of lobbyist spending, but the gap has narrowed and several Democrats are among the top recipients of lobbyist gifts this session.

Lobbyists spent \$2,044 treating Rep. Adam Lusker, a Frontenac Democrat, to meals and other niceties through March. That's nearly twice what Lusker received from lobbyists during the first three months of 2016 and \$556 more than he received during the whole of the calendar year.

for 2016, but Lusker is second among all 165 lawmakers after the first three months of the legislative session. House Minority Leader Jim Ward, a Wichita Democrat, ranks No. 12 and Rep. Tim Hodge, a North Newton Democrat and freshman lawmaker, ranks No. 14.

"That means we have a little bit of a better voice than we once did," Lusker said. "At least we're getting talked to."

Only one lawmaker, Rep. Erin Davis, an Olathe Republican, received more overall during the first three months with \$2,105 in lobbyist spending.

Jason Watkins, the lobbyist for the Kansas Beer Wholesalers Association and Wichita Metro Chamber of Commerce, said the increased spending on Democrats reflects their greater level of legislative influence this session.

"I also don't think it's any secret that the Democrats and the moderate Republicans have a majority voting bloc in both chambers. And so you're going to talk to the folks who can form a majority bloc," said Watkins, who has spent more than any other lobbyist through March with \$20,656 going toward gifts and meals for lawmakers.

Watkins' total spending through March is more than twice what he spent all last year. Watkins said that most of that money was used to educate lawmakers — at meals and lunches — as they considered whether to allow beer with higher alcohol content to be sold in Kansas grocery stores.

The bulk of lobbyist spending — roughly \$305,000 — is unitemized and cannot be tied to a specific lawmaker, reflecting spending on banquets and cocktail hours where all lawmakers are invited.

Democrats received roughly 15 percent of the itemized spending during both the first three months and whole of 2016. Three months into 2017, their share of the itemized spending has increased to 25 percent after the party gained 13 seats in the Legislature in November.

Lawmakers' ranking on the itemized spending list "is indicative of influence," according to Rep. Stephanie Clayton, an Overland Park Republican.

Lusker joked that Rep. Jarrod Ousley, an Overland Park Democrat, beat him in lobbyist spending one month and he swore that would never happen again. Lusker, who owns a construction company, is the lone Democrat with a chairmanship, having been elected as chair of the Joint Committee on State Building Construction in January.

The top recipients on the list tend to hold leadership positions — House Speaker Ron Ryckman, an Olathe Republican, ranks No. 5 and Senate Majority Leader Jim Denning, an Overland Park Republican, ranks No. 6 after three months — or hold large sway over a number of votes in the Legislature.

Asked why she was at the top of the spending list, Davis answered, "I have no idea, you'd have to ask the lobbyists."

She said that her spots on three high-profile committees, the House budget, tax and commerce panels, may be the reason. Davis also said "there's very little time during the work day to get stuff accomplished and talk about different issues," and that dinners and lunches were "the nature of this business."

"I would guess that the lobbyists are interested in, you know, having a good relationship with you," Davis said. "This is a relationship business."

Kansas limits the amount of money that lobbyists can spend on gifts to lawmakers at \$100, but places or alcohol for lawmakers, which makes up the bulk of the spending.

Congress passed ethics reforms in 2007 that placed restrictions on lobbyist spending on meals for lawmakers at the federal level after the Jack Abramoff scandal brought scrutiny to lavish free meals for legislators.

"Wining and dining has proven to be one of the more effective means of buying influence and it is a means that is only available to those who can afford it," said Craig Holman, a government affairs lobbyist for Public Citizen, a group that advocates for greater ethics and transparency in government and helped craft the 2007 federal law.

“It’s a very effective means of influence-peddling,” Holman said. “You and I don’t have those means...The only people who do are the full-time well-paid lobbyists who throw money at the feet of lawmakers.”

Davis called lobbyist spending a non-story.

“I think I’d prefer my time in the media be spent on actual substantive issues than on, you know, how much has been spent on me,” she said

Lusker attributed his high ranking on the list to his role as the Democratic caucus’ policy chair.

Lusker called lobbyist dinners a chance for Democrats to “expand our influence” and present their agenda to influential GOP colleagues who are also present at the meal.

“The more we’re in front of folks, the more the needs of my constituents will be heard,” Lusker said. “That’s one thing. You sit back in the corner, nobody hears you. And nobody listens to you. And nobody wants to work with you.”

[‘I put their power right up there with the NRA’: Dental lobbyists bare their teeth](#)

Little in politics has surprised Richard Malaby as much as the power of dentists.

For years, local dentists held four Christmas parties at Malaby’s 19th-century country inn in the picturesque town of Hancock. But in 2014, Malaby, a Republican lawmaker in the Maine state legislature, voted to create a new type of dental provider to perform basic services in poor and rural areas.

The Maine Dental Association, which opposed the bill, was furious. And the dentists took their Christmas parties elsewhere, costing Malaby \$6,000 that December and every Yuletide since.

Among the general public, dentists tend to have a Norman Rockwell appeal – solo practitioners who clean your teeth, tell your kids to cut down on the candy, and put their seal of approval on a range of minty toothpastes and mouthwashes. But lawmakers from Maine to Alaska see a different side of dentists and their lobby, the American Dental Association, describing a political force so unified, so relentless and so thoroughly woven into American communities that its clout rivals that of the gun lobby.

“I put their power right up there with the NRA,” Malaby said. “Dentists do everything they can to protect their interests – and they have money.”

Richard Malaby, a Republican lawmaker in the Maine state legislature, says, “Dentists do everything they can to protect their interests – and they have money.” Sarah Rice For The Washington Post

As the cost of dental care rises beyond the reach of millions of Americans, the dental lobby is coming under increasing scrutiny. Critics say the ADA has worked to scuttle competition that could improve access to dental care in underserved areas and make routine checkups and fillings more affordable.

The Federal Trade Commission has battled dentists in state after state over anti-competitive conduct. In 2007, the FTC successfully settled a complaint over a South Carolina dental board requirement that dentists examine children in school clinics before hygienists can clean their teeth, adding greatly to the cost. In 2015, the FTC won a Supreme Court ruling against the North Carolina dental board, which tried to block teeth-whitening businesses from operating in malls.

This year, the FTC publicly commented on a growing campaign to improve access to dental care by creating a category of mid-level practitioners, or “dental therapists,” to provide some routine services. In a letter to the Ohio lawmakers considering such a measure, FTC officials said therapists “could benefit consumers by increasing choice, competition, and access to care, especially for the underserved.”

More than a dozen states are considering similar proposals, despite fierce resistance from the ADA and its state affiliates. During the Maine debate, so many dentists flooded the statehouse in Augusta that besieged lawmakers taped up signs declaring their offices a “Dental Free Zone.”

The dentists had a unique way to get around the blockade: the regular checkup. While the bill was pending, some lawmakers found themselves getting an earful when they stretched out and opened wide for an oral exam.

“I’m certainly a captive audience when I am in the dental chair,” said Brian Langley (R), a Maine state senator who also got calls from four other dentists in his district and ended up siding with them.

The bill establishing a new provider type ultimately passed, but “it was brutal, very brutal,” recalled David Burns, a Republican state senator who retired after supporting the measure.

Afterward, Burns said, he got a call from his dentist, who vowed never to treat him again, saying, “This relationship is over.”

Most of the 200,000 dentists in America work solo, in offices that are essentially small businesses. They are known for projecting a remarkably unified voice on issues relating to their livelihood. The ADA says 64 percent of dentists belong to the association. By comparison, only 25 percent of physicians belong to the American Medical Association.

Map of states that allow dental therapy [The Washington Post](#) [For The Washington Post](#)

The ADA agrees that too many Americans are getting inadequate dental care. They argue that the answer is not the creation of “lesser trained” therapists, but more government funding and “community dental health care coordinators” to educate people and get them to a dentist.

“Dentistry has a fundamental belief that dentists should be the only ones to do surgical, irreversible procedures,” said Michael Graham, senior vice president of the ADA’s Division of Government and Public Affairs. “A lot of things can happen when you cut into a tooth.”

Others argue that the American model of dentistry is badly in need of innovation and competition. The Pew Charitable Trusts and other foundations advocate therapists as a way to improve access and affordability.

Therapists cost less to train than dentists do, and states set the rules governing their training and scope of practice. Supporters say the idea is for the therapists to work in concert with a licensed dentist but be more mobile, visiting people in nursing homes and underserved rural areas to perform basic oral exams and fill and pull some teeth.

They would also treat people on Medicaid, the government health-care program for the poor. Two-thirds of licensed dentists do not accept Medicaid, and hospital emergency rooms are swamped with people with neglected teeth.

“Therapists are not a silver bullet but a significant way to begin addressing the problem,” said John Grant, director of the Pew Charitable Trusts’ dental campaign.

Louis Sullivan, a physician who served as secretary of health and human services under President George H.W. Bush, said dentists’ opposition to therapists is largely about money.

“They think dental therapists will be competing against them and therefore will compromise their income,” he said.

Sullivan noted that doctors strongly opposed the creation of nurse practitioners in the 1970s. Now doctors – and the health-care system – can't live without them, he said.

Jonathan Shenkin, right, a pediatric dentist, works on a patient at his offices in Augusta, Maine. Sarah Rice For The Washington Post

As in the nurse-doctor battle, there is a gender factor: More than 95 percent of dental hygienists are female. As a group, they support the idea of therapists and, with additional training, could join their ranks. Currently, hygienists work in small offices with licensed dentists, 70 percent of whom are male.

Dentistry has “been an old boys’ club,” said Ruth Ballweg, a professor and physician assistant at the University of Washington School of Medicine who has been involved in the fight for dental therapists. “But the model is changing.”

More than 50 countries, from Canada to New Zealand, have dental therapists. Alaska Native tribal areas first introduced dental therapists to the United States in 2004. Since then, Minnesota, Maine and Vermont have approved them. Ohio, Kansas, Massachusetts, North Dakota and several other states are now contemplating their authorization.

The ADA has spent millions of dollars trying to block the bills. It also filed multiple lawsuits trying without success to stop the Alaska program.

“They went after these Alaskan therapists like they were ISIS. It was embarrassing,” said Jack Dillenberg, a dentist who has taught at the Harvard School of Dental Medicine.

Dillenberg visited the Alaska program, where therapists working in consultation with a licensed dentist – sometimes by telemedicine – visit islands, remote villages and other underserved areas.

“I thought they were awesome,” said Dillenberg, one of few dentists to publicly support the therapist idea.

Of two dozen dentists interviewed, a handful said they liked the idea, with some arguing that the existence of therapists would let them concentrate on more complicated procedures. Another proponent, Maine dentist Aatif Ansari, posted pro-therapist comments on Facebook during the 2014 debate. He got hammered by his colleagues.

“It was very aggressive. Folks were upset,” Ansari said. “They said things like, ‘How could you? I spend this many years in school and how could you let someone with inferior training do this work?’ “

The ADA and its state associations often argue that therapists provide second-class care. Jonathan Shenkin, a Maine dentist who is active in the lobby, said the push for therapists is misplaced. He argues for more emphasis on prevention, including better nutrition and regular brushing.

The issue is “intensely debated and can be very emotional,” said Mary Otto, author of a new book, “Teeth: The Story of Beauty, Inequality, and the Struggle for Oral Health in America.” “It has to do with dentists’ identity and the professional autonomy they have fought to keep for generations.”

In Maine, the therapist bill turned out to be the most contentious issue of the 2014 legislative session. It passed only after opponents added multiple restrictions, including a requirement that therapists work only in the presence of a dentist. Supporters failed even to persuade lawmakers to let therapists travel to nursing homes alone.

Heather Sirocki, a Republican state representative and former dental hygienist, at the Maine State House in Augusta. Sarah Rice For The Washington Post

Three years later, resistance remains high. Dentists control the dental schools and the state licensing board, and not one therapist has yet been trained. Supporters of the legislation say restrictions and bureaucracy have made becoming a therapist less desirable.

Meanwhile, people who can’t pay continue to put off care. On a recent Friday, Michael Hanson, 54, a lobsterman who went 15 years without seeing a dentist, was sitting in the community health clinic near Maine’s Acadia National Park. Over time, lack of care and poor health ruined Hanson’s teeth. In February, they were all pulled. He sat toothless, talking about eating soft food for months while he awaits his dentures.

Hanson said his daughter, too, skips annual exams because it is hard to come up with the money.

The dental system is broken, he said. “You go to the hospital and they give you time to pay your bill. But you go to the dentist and they want you to pay right there, and people just don’t have the money.”

Heather Sirocki, a Maine lawmaker who backed the therapist bill, is a hygienist by training. She has seen the swollen jaws and blackened teeth of people who can't afford dental care. She's even heard of people driving to Canada to seek treatment.

People like Hanson "are not asking for a free handout," Sirocki said. "They are asking for a dental appointment."

Missouri pay-to-play allegations heat up over new links between lawmaker, megadonor

The relationship between the Missouri Senate's leader and an emissary for one of the state's most prolific political donors is raising eyebrows in the statehouse.

Senate President Ron Richard has over a bill he sponsored that would benefit a company owned by Republican megadonor David Humphreys. Both Richard and Humphreys are from Joplin.

Now, new details about Richard's association with Paul Mouton, widely considered to be Humphreys' eyes and ears in the Capitol, are rekindling the long-simmering accusations.

Mouton is not a registered lobbyist, but he was routinely seen walking the Capitol corridors early in the 2017 legislative session. At the same time, Richard's office was regularly providing a parking space for Mouton in the Senate's private garage.

Richard's connection to Mouton goes beyond a parking spot. His campaign committee has paid Mouton \$24,000 since 2014 for consulting and research, including \$1,000 in January, February and March this year. No other candidate has reported any payments to Mouton in the last three years.

Mouton, who lives in Webb City in southwest Missouri, is one of Richard's constituents, and a spokeswoman for the senator says his office tries to accommodate any parking request it gets from people who live in his district.

But some lawmakers see more in the connections between Richard, Mouton and Humphreys.

"David Humphreys made a \$13 million investment in Missouri's government," said Rep. Mark Ellebracht, a Liberty Democrat, referring to the amount Humphreys and his family contributed to candidates during last year's election.

“He’s going to make sure he gets a return on his investment,” Ellebracht said. “And that’s what I fear is happening here.”

Richard declined to comment, although his office said there were no scheduled meetings with Mouton on the senator’s calendar this session and only one last session.

Neither Mouton nor Humphreys responded to requests for comment.

Allegations of corruption

Humphreys’ company, Joplin-based Tamko Building Products, is under the Missouri Merchandising Practices Act, a law that prohibits deceptive and unfair business practices. The lawsuit claims Tamko sold defective shingles, a charge the company denies.

Richard’s legislation would under the Missouri Merchandising Practices Act. He first filed the bill in 2015, after Humphreys’ company was sued. He’s filed similar legislation each year since.

This year’s version was filed Dec. 1, and six days later Humphreys cut Richard a \$100,000 check.

An attorney for Humphreys said previously that the donation given to Richard was one of many that he gave out that day because voter-imposed contribution limits were set to kick in the next day.

Richard’s bill cleared a Senate committee, but its momentum stalled under the weight of the pay-to-play accusations.

A liberal government watchdog organization requesting an investigation into whether Richard violated federal law by accepting a \$100,000 contribution. Both Richard and Humphreys have vehemently denied any wrongdoing.

Todd Graves, chairman of the Missouri Republican Party, penned , saying that “there is nothing within a country mile of a criminal act.”

“It is hardly surprising that a conservative businessman contributes to the campaign of the conservative Senate leader from the same small city,” Graves wrote at the time.

Senate parking

The Senate parking garage has 15 spots available for senators or their staff to reserve when individuals from their district visit Jefferson City. The Senate administrator's office maintains an electronic parking reservation database to record the information. That information is public record.

Last year, Richard's office reserved Mouton a spot in the Senate's private garage 19 times in April and early May.

This year, a spot was reserved by Richard's office for Mouton on 13 occasions between Jan. 9 and Feb. 21. Because the legislature works Monday-Thursday, lawmakers were in session 26 days during that period.

Among the dates Mouton had a spot reserved for him was Jan. 17, the day Gov. Eric Greitens delivered his first State of the State address. It was also the day before a public committee hearing on the legislation that Richard's critics contend he's carrying for Humphreys. Mouton returned Jan. 25, .

The final time Mouton had a spot reserved for him was Feb. 21. Two weeks later, the pay-to-play allegations against Richard were discussed during debate in the House. Richard was asked about the issue, and he said those making the accusations should “.”

Mouton's presence in the Capitol first began drawing attention last year, when several lobbyists quietly grumbled that he should.

State law defines a lobbyist as a person who or who spends more than \$50 on behalf of a public official. Those who fall under that category must register with the Ethics Commission and file monthly reports detailing any spending. Failure to register is a Class A misdemeanor.

“If he's in Jefferson City lobbying, then he's breaking the law,” Ellebracht said. “This is lobbying in the shadows, and it undermines the principle of transparent government.”

Humphreys vs. labor

Sen. Ryan Silvey, a Kansas City Republican who, said reserving a parking spot for a constituent is no big deal. He's done it several times, he said, including for Kansas City Mayor Sly James and for his parents.

But 13 times “is a lot for one individual,” he said. “We didn’t reserve a spot 13 times total for the whole session.”

Silvey said he’s had only one interaction directly with Mouton.

“Everybody knows the name and that he’s associated with David Humphreys,” Silvey said. “He approached me to talk about my votes on labor bills.”

Tougher regulations on labor unions are one of Humphreys’ top legislative priorities, and Silvey has regularly split with his party and opposed enacting new regulations.

Humphreys spent big last year funding primary challengers . He even .

On Feb. 6, one of Humphreys’ main policy goals was signed into law when a right-to-work bill that allows employees in unionized workplaces to stop paying unions for the cost of being represented.

Richard’s office reserved Mouton a parking spot the week the bill was signed. While he was in Jefferson City that week, the Senate also gave its initial approval to a bill banning local governments from giving preferential treatment to union contractors.

Silvey, who had previously called for federal authorities to investigate Richard’s relationship with Humphreys, said Mouton’s regular use of Senate parking is “another piece to the puzzle.”

“If there’s a perception of impropriety,” he said, “then this would probably contribute to that.”

[Stuart-Backed Efforts to Reform State Ethics, Lobbying Laws Pass House and Senate](#)

To address corruption in state government, state Rep. Katie Stuart, D-Edwardsville, supported legislation to examine and reform state ethics and lobbying laws.

“Unethical conflicts of interest have no place in our state political system, and we must implement measures to ensure transparency and integrity,” Stuart said. “Illinois is long overdue for these reforms, and we owe it to residents across Illinois to continue working to end corruption.”

Stuart backed a series of ethics reform measures, including Senate Bill 1639, which requires lobbyists to disclose each unit of government that they lobby, any elected or appointed offices they hold and any sub-lobbyists they hire to lobby on their behalf. This legislation also requires the Secretary of State to create a publicly searchable database to bring together information from lobbyist disclosures, lobbyist campaign contributions and statements of economic interest by state officials.

Stuart also supported House Joint Resolution 93, which creates the Joint Commission on Ethics and Lobbying Reform, a bipartisan and bicameral task force that will examine state ethics and lobbying laws. The task force will also provide recommendations on reforming laws that govern the actions of elected officials, state employees and lobbyists. Both measures passed the House with bipartisan support.

“By examining state ethics and lobbying laws, we can make necessary reforms to ensure that Illinois residents have a government they can trust,” Stuart said. “These measures take important first steps toward a better, more ethical government, but there is more work to be done. I look forward to continue working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to build a stronger Illinois.”