



M U L T I S T A T E

[Four Former ComEd Execs & Lobbyists Plead Not Guilty In Patronage & Bribery Scheme](#)

Four former Commonwealth Edison executives and lobbyists plead not guilty yesterday in a long-running federal dragnet into bribery and patronage hiring to curry favor with Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan.

Former ComEd President and CEO Anne Pramaggiore — who arguably once was Chicago’s most powerful female business executive — and top Madigan adviser and former Quincy State Representative Michael McClain were arraigned on charges of bribery conspiracy, bribery and willfully falsifying ComEd books and records. Also appearing in federal court via video conference to answer those charges were ComEd’s former top in-house lobbyist, John Hooker, and former company lobbyist Jay Doherty, the one-time head of the City Club of Chicago public affairs organization.

Federal investigators have charged the 4 of them in their roles to allegedly orchestrate a bribery-filled lobbying effort between 2011 and 2019 aimed at influencing Michael Madigan to help pass legislation that would financially support the energy company. The company was able to pass a Smart Grid bill in 2011 that has cost 4 million northern Illinois electric rate customers more than 30% on their bills, amounting to approximately \$2.3 billion in revenue [according to a WBEZ investigation](#). The utility has admitted in court documents that it funneled consulting payments to a litany of the powerful speaker’s allies for doing little or no work for the state-regulated, public utility giant. The company also acknowledged engaging in the illicit bribery scheme that involved paying about \$1.3 million to members of Madigan’s vaunted 13th Ward political organization on Chicago’s Southwest Side.

[At Wednesday’s hearing](#), U.S. District Court Judge Harry Leinenweber began the proceeding by acknowledging that he served in the Illinois General Assembly at the same time as McClain — albeit as a Republican. Leinenweber said he didn’t associate with the defendant much during that time period, and they haven’t seen each other in the four decades since then. Leinenweber also said his wife served on the board of Constellation Energy before they merged with ComEd’s parent company, Exelon.

McClain and Pramaggiore each face a total of nine criminal counts. Prosecutors charged Hooker and Doherty with six counts. When combined, each defendant faces a maximum penalty of decades in prison if convicted. In the 50-page indictment involving Pramaggiore and the three others, federal prosecutors made clear their belief that Madigan himself — repeatedly identified in court papers as “Public Official A” — played a role in the wrongdoing, though he has not been charged.

Calls for Madigan to step down as House Speaker continue to grow. [State Representative Kathleen Willis became the 19th House Democrat on Tuesday](#) saying she would not support another term for Madigan in the chair. Willis, a one-time political ally of Madigan's, is the House Democratic Caucus Chair. Willis' Tuesday announcement makes her the first House Democratic leader to say publicly she won't vote for Madigan to remain speaker.

[Michigan AG reviewing whether lawmakers can lobby out of state](#)

The Michigan Attorney General's Office is reviewing whether legislators serving in the state can legally be registered lobbyists outside its borders, and regardless, Republican lawmakers are planning to change the policy.

The Detroit News [first reported on Nov. 17 that Rep. Rebekah Warren, D-Ann Arbor, had been hired by the interest group National Popular Vote](#) and filed a lobbying disclosure on behalf of the organization in Pennsylvania. She's also [registered to lobby](#) in North Carolina.

Warren, who leaves the House because of term limits at the end of the year, confirmed in an interview last month that she began working with National Popular Vote in March. The organization has targeted Michigan in the past as it tries to get states to agree, through a compact, to give their Electoral College votes to the winner of the popular vote.

A [current state law bars legislators](#) and other state officials from accepting pay for "personally engaging in lobbying." However, it's unclear whether that prohibition refers specifically to only lobbying in Michigan, which is what the rest of the law is focused on. Violations bring a misdemeanor penalty of not more than \$1,000 or 90 days behind bars or both.

Warren didn't immediately respond Wednesday to a request for comment. Previously, the Ann Arbor Democrat said she was advised by a lawyer that the current state restriction affects only paid lobbying in Michigan — something she says she's not going to do while she's in office.

However, on Nov. 14, she did pen a pro-popular vote column in the Lansing State Journal without disclosing that she's being paid by the organization championing the reform.

Kelly Rossman-McKinney, spokeswoman for Attorney General Dana Nessel, a Democrat, confirmed the review was ongoing Wednesday. The Lansing-based political news service MIRS News first reported the review was taking place.

While ethics experts say the arrangement raises concerns about her priorities, Warren has said she doesn't believe it poses a problem.

“This is an organization that I believe in and that I have known,” she said in a past interview.

Michigan House Republicans are planning to officially ban lobbying out of state while serving in the Legislature next term, said Rep. Steven Johnson, R-Wayland, a member of the House Oversight Committee.

He labeled Warren's arrangement a "huge conflict of interest" and referenced the fact that businesses and organizations, like National Popular Vote, can't make corporate contributions directly to lawmakers' campaigns but can write them personal checks to do lobbying work out of state.

"It is our intention that we do a number of ethics reforms next year, and this will be at the top of that list," said Johnson, who's co-chairman of the Republican Policy Action Plan Committee for the 2021-2022 legislative term.

[Despite pandemic, more than 40 state lawmakers to hold in-person fundraisers Wednesday in Austin](#)

Texas lawmakers, fresh off hard-fought elections in November, are dashing to refill campaign accounts before a moratorium on fundraising kicks in on Dec. 12.

More than 40 returning or recently-elected state lawmakers are holding in-person fundraising events in Austin this week, according to a list compiled by a lobbying group. The fundraisers come as [Texas continues to record thousands of new coronavirus cases](#), and dozens of deaths, each day.

“(Lawmakers) want to top off their gas tanks and this is where they’re doing it,” said veteran lobbyist Bill Miller, who planned to attend at least one of the events at the Austin Club on Tuesday. “The Austin Club is the place to get gassed up.”

The events are primarily taking place at the Austin Club and in the lobby at 919 Congress and are typical of the weeks leading up to the legislative session. State lawmakers are barred from raising campaign funds during the period beginning one month before the legislative session and continuing through the month after it concludes.

Austin-Travis County is currently in [Stage 4 of its COVID-19 risk assessment](#), which advises against gatherings of more than 10 people.

A manager for the Austin Club said masks are required during the events and that attendees are encouraged to socially distance. Capacity will not be capped, though the manager assured KXAN that the Austin Club has plenty of space to properly distance guests.

A representative for Moore Associates, which manages the Capitol Center at 919 Congress, said individual tenants are responsible for keeping guests safe. During a fundraising reception at the Lobby at 919 Congress Tuesday afternoon, KXAN observed masked attendees and a group that appeared to be smaller than 10 people.

Republicans and Democrats hold in-person fundraisers

The list of lawmakers holding in-person fundraising events in Austin this week includes both Democrats and Republicans.

Republican state Rep. Trent Ashby of Lufkin and Democrat state Rep. Senfronia Thompson had dueling events planned at the Austin Club on Tuesday afternoon.

Presumptive House Speaker Dade Phelan, a Republican, is participating in an in-person fundraiser at the Four Seasons Hotel Austin on Wednesday.

Some lawmakers, like Democrat state Rep. John Bucy of Cedar Park, are hosting outdoor fundraisers this week. Bucy's event is scheduled for Tuesday afternoon on the patio at Ranch 616. Guests will be socially distanced and masks will be required, according to a campaign official.

State Rep. James Talarico, a Round Rock Democrat, opted for a virtual fundraiser, knowing he likely won't pull in the same amount of money as an in-person event.

“There are rules for those that are influential and powerful and wealthy, and then there are rules for everyone else,” Talarico told KXAN. “I refuse to jeopardize the health of our community or set a bad example just to get a few more campaign checks.”

‘The gravy train doesn’t stop’

Brandon Rottinghaus, an author and political science professor at the University of Houston, isn’t surprised to see returning and incoming lawmakers fundraising in the same ways they have in the past.

Texas legislators receive a salary of \$7,200 per year for their part-time service, which is far-exceeded by living expenses in Austin for the 140-day legislative session.

Lawmakers often subsidize their official offices using campaign funds.

“Lawmakers know that there is a tremendous arms race in terms of the amount of money you need to raise to be able to compete in future elections, so they’ve got to put more hay in the barn when they can,” Rottinghaus told KXAN. “The gravy train doesn’t stop.”