



M U L T I S T A T E

[Over 100 state lawmakers accused of misconduct in 3 years](#)

State lawmakers across the U.S. have reached a troubling milestone for allegations of sexual misconduct, even as they have taken significant steps to try to prevent and investigate such behavior.

Recent complaints filed against Michigan state Sen. Peter Lucido mean at least 101 state legislators now have been publicly accused of sexual harassment or misconduct since the start of 2017, according to an Associated Press review.

That tally has continued to grow, despite the fact that the vast majority of state legislative chambers now require lawmakers to undergo training about sexual harassment, the AP review found.

“Training doesn’t guarantee that harassment will stop,” said Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

The AP review found mixed indications of progress and problems as the #MeToo movement enters its third legislative year. Over the past two years, states have enacted more than 75 laws and resolutions targeting sexual harassment, abuse and assault within government or the private sector.

Some of those laws have required regular training intended prevent harassment, established clear channels for reporting allegations, granted greater legal protections to whistle blowers, shed public light on secretive settlements and extended the deadline for prosecuting or suing over past instances of sexual abuse. At least two-thirds of all states have enacted some sort of new law in the #MeToo era.

The AP review found that at least 43 state Senate chambers and 45 House or Assembly chambers require sexual harassment training for their members. That’s up significantly from January 2018, when [the AP’s initial survey](#) found that about a third of all legislative chambers

did not require lawmakers to receive training about what constitutes sexual harassment, how to report it and what consequences it carries.

Two years ago, the AP found that only a minority of legislative bodies conducted external investigations into complaints, with most others entrusting lawmakers or staff to look into allegations against colleagues. Today, the AP found that about half of all state legislative chambers have procedures for external investigators to look into sexual misconduct complaints involving lawmakers— a process that experts say can instill greater confidence for people to come forward with complaints.

Some states don't require the use of external investigators but allow it as an option.

Michigan's Republican Senate majority leader is hiring outside lawyers to assist the nonpartisan Senate Business Office in its investigation of Lucido, who faces two separate complaints.

Lucido, a Republican, was accused last week of making a sexist remark to a female reporter seeking an interview. After that incident was publicized, Democratic state Sen. Mallory McMorrow came forward this week to allege that she had been sexually harassed by Lucido during a Senate orientation session shortly after the November 2018 elections. She said Lucido held his hand on her lower back, near her rear, during a conversation about how she won election and looked her up and down while commenting: "I can see why."

Lucido issued a brief apology for the "misunderstanding" with the reporter but later said he was misquoted. He denied McMorrow's allegations as "completely untrue and politically motivated."

Michigan Senate policy requires members to receive training regarding sexual harassment. That training occurred at the same orientation in which McMorrow alleges she was harassed during a break by Lucido. During the training session, McMorrow said, Lucido raised various scenarios in which sexual harassment could occur and commented: "The culture is what it (is) around here. We can't change that."

Experts agree that cultural change in an institution takes much more than basic training about what constitutes harassment.

"The reality is that people who sexually harass, they know — they already know what this is," said Debbie S. Dougherty, a communications professor at the University of Missouri who has researched sexual harassment policies. "That's why we find that these kind of informational, first-order trainings are almost always a failure."

The AP's review identified at least 39 lawmakers who resigned or were expelled from office since January 2017 following sexual misconduct allegations and an additional 37 who faced other forms of repercussions, such as the loss of committee leadership positions. A few were cleared. Investigations are ongoing against others, such as Lucido. The list of 101 accused lawmakers includes at least one person from three-fourths of the states.

One of the most recent to be penalized was Wisconsin state Rep. Staush Gruszynski, who in December was removed from committee assignments and the Democratic caucus after an investigation determined he "verbally sexually harassed" a legislative employee at an offsite location after work hours. Gruszynski has rejected calls to resign.

The fact that sexual harassment complaints have continued mounting against lawmakers shows that the problem remains, but it also suggests that victims feel more confident in filing reports, said Walsh, of the Center for American Women and Politics.

"That's a sign in some ways of the progress of having sort of a clearer, cleaner path that women can take if they have faced harassment," she said, "and that will lead to people feeling that they empowered enough to step forward."

[Lobby firm tied to licensing director lobbies her staff on marijuana](#)

When Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's administration launched the Marijuana Regulatory Agency, officials said the new bureau would be "autonomous" from the Michigan licensing department headed by a new director married to a major lobbyist.

Almost a year later, concerns continue to linger about the connection of Orlene Hawks, director of the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, and Michael Hawks, an owner of Governmental Consultant Services Inc., one of the state's largest lobbying firms.

An email obtained by The Detroit News through Michigan's open records law shows an employee of GCSI recently lobbied Hawks' deputy on marijuana policies, which were supposed to be primarily handled by the "autonomous" agency.

"Might you be open to, at minimum, a standing monthly call to discuss industry challenges and/or areas of opportunity?" Ken Cole, who was lobbying on behalf of the marijuana business Pharmaco, asked in a Nov. 13 message to Adam Sandoval, Hawks' deputy director.

"We're happy to maintain the open line of communication with Pharmaco," Sandoval responded, adding "Andrew (Brisbo, the director of the Marijuana Regulatory Agency), has indicated that he'll add me to existing standing calls between Pharmaco and the MRA."

The licensing department's executive office has "no policy-making authority regarding" the Marijuana Regulatory Agency, said LARA spokesman David Harns.

"The meeting in question was simply a meet and greet," Harns said. "We have continued to abide by the conflict avoidance plan that was put in place last spring."

Hawks, whose appointment was announced in December 2018, signed a "non-participation" document on March 6. In the document, Hawks said she has no financial interest in GCSI. The document also says Hawks will refrain from participating in decisions relating to GCSI or "any business entity that employs GCSI as its lobbyist agent."

Over the first seven months of 2019, GCSI disclosed spending more money on lobbying than any other multi-client firm in Michigan, \$913,343, according to the nonprofit [Michigan Campaign Finance Network](#). GCSI's Michael Hawks didn't respond to a request for comment.

The reason the Marijuana Regulatory Agency was severed from the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs "was to avoid the impression of impropriety," said Rick Thompson, board member for the Michigan affiliate of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws.

The email exchange between a GCSI lobbyist and the department's deputy director cut against the idea, Thompson said. But he added that he's seen no evidence of wrongdoing among state regulators and that he respects Brisbo's "integrity."

The conflict between having a department director married to the head of a major lobbying firm "can't be denied," said Don Bailey, a member of the Medical Marijuana Licensing Board, which Whitmer discontinued in favor of the Marijuana Regulatory Agency.

"Even if she tried her hardest not to be influenced, she's going to be influenced by virtue of her personal relationship with her husband," Bailey said.

Pharmaco operates one grow facility and eight provisioning centers, according to Cole's email to Sandoval, which referenced a Nov. 6 meeting.

In the message, Cole described how state regulators can "hasten" Pharmaco's performance. He suggested regulators "more aggressively" enforce "laws prohibiting black market marijuana sales" and "authorize product transfers between provisioning centers owned by the same licensee."

Sandoval responded to each of Cole's points six days later, saying that the department recognizes that "the illicit market is the biggest threat to the regulated market."

As for product transfers between provisioning centers selling medical marijuana, Sandoval highlighted a controversial Nov. 13 bulletin that allowed businesses in the medical marijuana market to transfer a portion of their product to the recreational market if they held equivalent licenses.

[The Nov. 13 announcement](#) surprised and frustrated some marijuana advocates, who argued it shifted needed medical marijuana away from patients. It also allowed some businesses to [begin selling recreational marijuana in Michigan on Dec. 1](#).

The transfer decision is an example of why some in the marijuana industry are concerned about businesses' access to state officials. A business that knew that transfers would be allowed on Dec. 1 could have stockpiled product to prepare for the change.

It's not clear any business had that inside information early, and no documents obtained by The News indicated it happened.

A small number of decisions a company makes in the burgeoning marijuana industry can determine if the company sinks or swims, said Thompson, board member of Michigan's NORML affiliate.

"You have to be concerned that there is information transfer happening at some point," he said.

While there have been private allegations that GCSI clients have done well in licensing for the new recreational market, a review of lobbying disclosures and licensing information doesn't appear to show GCSI clients doing noticeably better than other firms' clients.

But GCSI does represent the first safety compliance facility to be licensed, PSI Labs in Ann Arbor, and multiple businesses that have been pre-qualified for licenses.

GCSI's lobbying hasn't only focused on Sandoval, according to emails obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. On Oct. 9, Gary Owen, another GCSI lobbyist, sent a list of policy ideas on the home delivery of marijuana to Brisbo, the agency's director.

"Permit deliveries by licensed retailers only," Owen wrote of one of his suggestions.

Bailey, a retired State Police sergeant who has criticized the state's handling of marijuana issues, alleged that the former department director, Shelly Edgerton, appointed by former Gov. Rick Snyder, was too favorable to marijuana interests. Edgerton went on to lobby on behalf of marijuana clients for the Dykema firm after Snyder left office.

"Then, Gretchen Whitmer said, 'Hold my beer,'" Bailey said of the decision to make Hawks the department's director.

But the circumstances surrounding LARA don't suggest the potential conflicts involving GCSI were so fraught that the department couldn't do its job, said Kathleen Clark, professor at Washington University's School of Law in St. Louis.

Still, the public has a legitimate interest in knowing more about the director's financial connections to businesses that may come before her department, said Clark, who has studied legal and government ethics.

Michigan doesn't require public financial disclosures from administration officials or state lawmakers. It's one of only two states with no such requirement for legislators.

Clark called the situation involving Orlene and Michael Hawks "complicated."

"I think this raises a legitimate interest in knowing more about the arrangement between the head of the lobbying firm and these clients," Clark explained. "There may not be a statutory right. There's a legitimate question about what kind of financial stake the head of the lobbying firm has in these matters."

[Fundraising for legislators' charity spiked after hiring top lobbyist](#)

An embattled nonprofit with close ties to top state lawmakers, the NYS Association of Black & Puerto Rican Legislators, in 2017 hired a prominent Albany lobbyist to boost its fundraising capabilities, according to newly released tax records.

The hiring of Patrick B. Jenkins and Associates paid off, as the nonprofit, which is the focus of an investigation by the state attorney general's office, raised substantially more revenue and gave out almost as much scholarship money to needy youth as it had for the three previous years combined.

Even before Jenkins' hiring, questions had been raised about the lawmakers' charity receiving significant funding from interests with business before the state Legislature. Jenkins, meanwhile, in the past has raised significant campaign dollars for lawmakers by soliciting donations from its own roster of influential clients, then lobbying some of those same state lawmakers for the clients.

The filings also reveal several inconsistencies in the charity's previous filings submitted to Attorney General Letitia James' office, and raises more questions about the charity's spending for that year and those prior, including how much money it was giving to students in need.

The group's new filing, which covers the 2017-18 tax year, is a focus of the state attorney general's probe, according to a source with knowledge of the matter. The tax documents apparently were posted to the attorney general's website within the last two days.

A spokeswoman for the attorney general's office declined to comment, citing its ongoing investigation. Assemblywoman Latrice Walker and Assemblyman Gary Pretlow, the nonprofit's chairwoman and treasurer, respectively, did not return calls for comment.

A spokesman for the association, Hank Sheinkopf, said Walker restructured the organization when she took over as chair in 2017.

"A new accounting and auditing team has been hired and the attempt is to ensure that everything is being complied with and all filings are being brought up to date," he said.

Jenkins is a longtime close friend of Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie and has seen his lobbying business explode since Heastie became that chamber's majority leader.

Last year, the Times Union reported on Jenkins doing unpaid political campaign fundraising for several members of the state Senate and Assembly. The free campaign work could ingratiate Jenkins to lawmakers that he also lobbies.

That included unpaid campaign fundraising by Jenkins for Walker, the current chairwoman of the association. Jenkins said last May unpaid contracts would indeed be repaid, though several lawmakers including Walker still have not done so.

Jenkins' work for the association could raise similar questions. According to the association's tax filing, between October 2017 and September 2018, Jenkins' firm was to be paid \$15,000 for a year's fundraising, or only a little more than \$1,000 a month. According to the tax filing, Jenkins' responsibilities for the association included "identifying potential donors," meeting with them, and preparation and distribution of "sponsorship packages."

Like campaign clients, Jenkins' firm also again went unpaid for fundraising for the association. According to their tax filing, the nonprofit still owes Jenkins' firm \$5,000 as of the end of 2019.

In 2018, a Jenkins lobbying client, charter school group Education Reform Now Advocacy, donated \$7,500 to the association, according to tax records.

Jenkins didn't return a call for comment on Thursday, and it's not clear if he still works for the charity.

The association is the nonprofit arm of the state Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus. Each winter in Albany, it hosts a weekend-long gathering with various events, panels and parties funded by expensive sponsorships — which are regularly paid for by entities with business before the Legislature. The annual event draws dozens of lawmakers, including top state officials.

The stated goal of the nonprofit's annual gala dinner, which caps off the weekend-long event, is to raise scholarship money for minority youth. But for several years, the group has not disclosed awarding any scholarships despite raising over \$1 million in donations. It has also failed to file required tax paperwork on time with the state and the federal Internal Revenue Service in recent years.

The Times Union reported earlier this week that the group's 2017-18 paperwork was overdue. However, it was filed with the state on Dec. 31.

In it, the association says it approved \$21,500 in scholarships to 12 students for the 2017-18 tax year, but says those scholarships weren't given out until early 2019. The tax filing does not explain why the association didn't hand out the money sooner — but in late 2018 and early 2019 the Times Union and other media outlets were questioning the group's failure to provide scholarships to students.

Nowhere on the nonprofit's paperwork or its website does it state who received the scholarship money, when it was awarded, who picks the scholarship recipients, or the criteria used to award the money.

The scholarship amount also falls well short of the 33 percent of revenue that charity experts recommend as a minimum for nonprofits to spend on their stated purpose.

The lack of scholarships wasn't for a lack of revenue. In 2017-18, the charity took in \$751,448, a jump of 33 percent over the previous year's \$502,820 in revenue. That would mean over \$250,000 in scholarships for needy students, if the organization was following nonprofit industry standards.

But more money left the group's coffers than came in. The nonprofit's expenses jumped from \$509,030 to \$750,187, totaling a loss of \$5,339. The vast majority of that money appeared to go to the caucus weekend, which includes more than \$200,000 spent on catering.

The new filing also contradicts the amount of scholarship money recorded in previous audits attached to its past tax filings. Those audits claimed scholarship amounts of \$35,745 in 2015 and \$17,078 in 2017. The new paperwork says the nonprofit awarded just \$5,250 for the 2016-17 fiscal year and a combined \$20,950 for the previous two years.

One other major change deals with the group's mission which qualifies it for nonprofit status. In previous years' tax filings, the charity stated some variation of the idea that its mission was "providing opportunity to higher education, as the leader for success for African-American, Puerto Rican and other minority New Yorkers."

The latest filing gives a much broader mission, with an emphasis on "engaging New York state residents in dialogue about issues and policies that are having an impact ... on their communities," rather than scholarships and education.

The state attorney general's probe is focused on the 2017-18 tax filing and the general governance of the charity, according to a source. James' office issued subpoenas last week to one of the charities former executive directors and the accounting firm that handled the return, Mitchell & Titus LLP.

The firm did not immediately return a phone call seeking comment.

In 2019, the group filed two years of financial documents after receiving a letter from James' office noting it was delinquent in its filings.

A 2017 Times Union investigation questioned the group's spending and highlighted the nonprofit's ongoing failure to fund scholarships. When the group's leadership was asked last February about its lack of scholarships and repeated failure to file IRS paperwork, most either refused to comment or declined to return calls.

Inclusion drives this Virginia lobbyist: 'I want this to be a fully-inclusive world'

Matthew Shapiro is most comfortable surrounding himself with sports memorabilia in his "man cave." From baseball to football, the Henrico man thrives on competition.

But Matthew found it difficult to play on a traditional team at J.R. Tucker High School in Henrico County.

"I was diagnosed with cerebral palsy," Matthew said. "I was so small, my dad's wedding ring fit on my wrist like a bracelet. And my head was the size of an orange."

His condition, however, does not stop him from competing in an entirely different arena. The game of politics.

During the General Assembly session, the 29-year-old self-proclaimed "political nerd" rolls out legislation that he hopes will benefit disabled Virginians.

"To be down here, where the magic happens, as they say, is fantastic," Matthew said.

The lobbyist wants to be the vehicle for progress.

"Some of the other lobbyists say, 'You can get around here very very quickly.' There are definitely some perks for sure," Matthew said.

During his long days, Matthew covers a lot of territory at the State Capitol.

On this day Matthew meets with Senator Dave Marsden. The proposed bill would fund programs to help disabled teens find work.

"What I'm doing is being here trying to change your perspective of people like me," Matthew said.

Matthew doesn't view politics as a spectator sport.

“If I speak to 500 people and one person gets my message, I’ve done my job,” he said.

This team captain plays for those who can't.

“The lobbying game is really just a relationship game. And I love to talk to people,” he said.

But Matthew doesn't just talk the talk.

Six years ago, Matthew launched 6 Wheels Consulting. The organization helps able-bodied people understand the barriers facing people like Matthew and how to reach common-sense solutions.

“I hope one day that I can be a national voice for disability,” Matthew said.

Matthew is even toying with the idea of running for office.

“How great would it be to be on the inside, to make the change that can help the 56 million Americans who live with disabilities,” Matthew said.

“Matthew has blossomed,” his mother Eve said. “He wants to make sure that everyone is seen on an even playing field.”

Matthew's parents said their thoughtful son always showed a knack for helping others.

“I’m just so proud of the way he has taken this on and made it his life,” his father Barry said.

Matthew's organization and work at the General Assembly has kept the political junkie motivated and hungry to win.

“I’m just a dude who lobbies at the General Assembly in a wheelchair who started his own business,” Matthew said. “I want this to be a fully-inclusive world where everything is accessible. Everything is inclusive. And people like me can go everywhere and do everything.”

[**Proposal aims to restrict lobbyist influence on state legislature**](#)

A progressive advocacy group filed ballot language to reform lobbying laws that would include a two-year “cooling off” period between lawmakers becoming paid lobbyists and prohibit “contingency pay” dependent on lobbying success.

The Coalition to Close Lansing Loopholes aims to make state government more accountable and transparent, Progress Michigan Executive Director Lonnie Scott told The Center Square.

“Right now, lobbyists run the show in Lansing. They spend millions of dollars to influence and wine and dine elected officials with little oversight or transparency,” Scott said in an email. “What we’re proposing will make Michigan’s government more transparent, accountable and ensure elected officials are doing what’s best for the people, not the lobbyist who gave them the best concert tickets.”

Scott said the group expects broad support.

“This is not about one political party or one issue area,” Scott said. “We need to hold lawmakers and lobbyists, on both sides of the aisle and across the state to a high standard of trust and transparency.”

The proposal would require reporting from lawmakers and lobbyists, ban gifts from lobbyists and their clients to elected officials, and more.

Here’s the list of people who would be impacted.

Lobbyists reported spending \$23.2 million over seven months of 2019, according to the Michigan Campaign Finance Network.

Rich Studley, president and CEO of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, told The Center Square that the proposal paints lawmakers and lobbyists with a broad brush and suggests they are all corrupt.

Studley said that Scott seemed to suggest that people like Senate Minority Leader Jim Ananich, D-Flint, and Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey, R-Clark Lake, would abandon their principles and vote against their district if someone bought them a cup of coffee or a meal.

“I know them well enough to know that’s not true,” Studley said.

Lobbyists work with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, Studley said, and represent people who can't be in the Capitol every day, such as teachers, farmers and small business owners.

“Our members are busy working in their office, in their store, in their factory, working hard with their employees to meet customer demands and to create world-class products and services,” Studley said.

Most of the over 5,000 employers the chamber represents are small business owners, Studley said.

Bill aims to end appearance of lobbying 'impropriety'

To slow what state Attorney General Bob Ferguson calls a “revolving door” of state officials and employees becoming lobbyists when they leave state employment, lawmakers have reintroduced a bill to impose a two-year “cooling off” period.

Southwest Washington lawmakers this week said they support the intended goal, calling it necessary to reduce the “perception of impropriety.”

Rep. Jim Walsh, an Aberdeen Republican, is the ranking minority member of the House Committee on State Government and Tribal Relations, which passed the bill out of committee this week. The committee passed the legislation last session, but the bill stalled. The bill now needs to pass the Rules Committee before getting a vote of the full House.

“Partly, (the bill) is to prevent any shady business,” Walsh said Thursday. Under current practice, “you can resign as a legislator on Friday and show up as a lobbyist on Monday. ... That’s not great. It’s not that it necessarily leads to any prosecutable corruption, but it’s not a good look.”

The legislation would restrict statewide elected officials, legislators and heads of agencies in the governor’s executive cabinet, among others, from lobbying for two years after their former state employment.

There are some exceptions, such as working in another government position, testifying in legislative committee sessions and participating in rulemaking at the request of an agency.

The legislation would apply to state officers and employees who are employed by the state on or after July 1, 2021.

State Rep. Brian Blake, an Aberdeen Democrat, said he wasn't very familiar with the bill yet because it hasn't reached the floor for a vote, "but my gut reaction is I would support it. I think that some kind of separation is reasonable."

Blake said doesn't think a large number of lobbyists formerly were state officials, but the public perceives it as a problem, and that carries weight with him.

"I am a little torn because these folks do tend to have a lot of knowledge and skills about the issues we're dealing with up here, but I think the perception of the public is there should be some separation of time, and I would support that," he said.

Centralia Sen. John Braun, a Republican, said he also isn't very familiar with the House Bill because it hasn't come before him in the Senate yet, but he also supports the reasoning behind it. (A companion bill is moving through the Senate and passed to the Rules Committee on Thursday.)

Braun said it's not as common for state elected officials to become lobbyists in Washington as it is at the federal and congressional level.

"If you look around the whole lobbying community, you could count all the former legislators on one hand. So I don't know that it is a big problem," he said Thursday. "But the philosophical idea of a 'cooling off' period to make sure we have a balanced approach makes sense to me."

Walsh said he doesn't expect much opposition to what he called a "transparency and good governance bill," but he is concerned it could get lost in the shuffle of other business, like it did last session.

Lobbyist meals give voters something to chew on

A story in The Oklahoman about lobbyist spending on meals in 2019 provides an interesting look at legislators' views on the longstanding practice, and should give voters something to chew on, too.

Reporter Chris Casteel reviewed the books and found that lobbyists spent more than \$600,000 on meals for legislators and other public officials. That total exceeded the amount spent the prior four years, and most of the spending occurred during the four months the Legislature was in session.

Neither should be a surprise — the session is when most of the work gets done, after all, and 2019 saw a large influx of new legislators, along with a new governor and staff and some new secondary office-holders.

Thus, lobbyists had a lot of educating and influencing to do. As usual, some members of the Legislature were more willing than others to give lobbyists their time.

Sen. John Montgomery, R-Lawton, ate \$3,693 worth of meals paid for by lobbyists, the most of any legislator. Rounding out the top five were Rep. Chris Kannady, R-Oklahoma City (\$3,647), Sen. Casey Murdock, R-Felt (\$3,416), Sen. Roger Thompson, R-Okemah (\$3,368) and Rep. Kevin Wallace, R-Wellston (\$3,255).

At the other end of the spectrum was Rep. Tom Gann, R-Inola, who accepted no meals paid for by lobbyists. Sen. Ron Sharp, R-Shawnee, ate just \$103 in lobbyist-funded meals, followed by Reps. Mickey Dollens, D-Oklahoma City (\$122), Tommy Hardin, R-Madill (\$266) and David Perryman, R-Chickasha (\$290).

Gann said he is following through on his campaign pledge not to accept money from lobbyists. Constituents, he argued, “see you’re influenced by outside interests and that you will support them.” Rejecting all overtures, Gann said, provides him the freedom to “say no” to a lobbyist’s pitch.

Dollens and Perryman were among the lawmakers who said they don’t begrudge colleagues who eat frequently with lobbyists, but simply prefer the opposite approach.

A few years ago, in a letter to the editor about lobbyist spending, former Republican state Rep. Ed Apple argued that legislators “receive per diem that is sufficient for them to go ‘Dutch treat’ when dining.” Many would probably agree — per diem is \$154 per day for legislators who live outside the Oklahoma City area.

Montgomery, Murdock, Thompson and Wallace receive that yet — like many others — chose to eat often on lobbyists’ dime. Casteel found one day last session when Murdock did so three times, including a \$116 dinner.

Murdock acknowledged that his per diem was “an option,” but said he uses the meals to glean information. “It’s at these dinners, you get informed on issues,” he said. “And that’s why I try to go to as many as I can.”

Members of the GOP leadership team were among those high on the list of meals paid for by lobbyists. Again, no surprise — the more clout you have, the more you're going to hear from lobbyists.

The practice is perfectly legal, though some will find it off-putting. Voters who find it disqualifying can make that point at the next election.

Indiana Casino Operator Embroiled in Illegal Political Contributions Scandal

Spectacle Entertainment, the operator of two Lake Michigan riverboat casinos, is facing scrutiny from the Indiana Gaming Commission after a Maryland political consultant pleaded guilty to illegally directing funds from an Indiana casino company to a state lawmaker who ran for the US Congress in 2015.

While the company involved in the illegal corporate contributions made to the congressional candidate was identified as “Company A” in papers in the federal case in Virginia, the Indiana Gaming Commission said Friday that the case involved executives of Centaur Gaming.

Centaur's CEO and General Counsel founded Spectacle. In the fall of 2017, Centaur sold Indiana's two racinos in Anderson and Shelbyville to casino giant Caesars Entertainment Corp. in a [\\$1.7 billion deal](#).

CEO Rod Racliff and General Counsel John Keeler then formed Spectacle. They have been occupying the same positions in the new company, which purchased the two Majestic Star riverboat casinos shortly after it was established.

The Indiana Gaming Commission's investigation into Spectacle was initiated after Charles O'Neil, Vice President of Virginia-based political consultancy firm Strategic Campaign Group, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to make illegal campaign contributions, which included \$15,000 being funneled in corporate funds from Centaur.

There have been indications that the congressional candidate who received the illegal contributions was former Indiana Senator Brent Waltz of Greenwood. The former Senator ran for the US House of Representatives in 2015.

Terre Haute Casino Bid Might Be in Danger

As mentioned earlier, Spectacle purchased the two Lake Michigan Majestic Star riverboat casinos not long after it was founded. As part of a sweeping gambling reform that was passed in

Indiana last summer, the company was authorized to move one of the casinos onto dry land not far from its original location. Spectacle announced at the time that the relocation of the facility would be part of a larger plan for the development of a [\\$400 million casino resort](#) in Gary.

The company surrendered the other riverboat casino license to the Indiana Gaming Commission. Under the gambling expansion legislation approved last summer, that vacant license was supposed to be used for a casino in Terre Haute. Spectacle was the only company to submit a bid for the license.

The Indiana gambling regulator was expected to grant the company permission to build a casino in [Terre Haute](#) during its scheduled February 7 meeting. However, Gaming Commission canceled the meeting on Friday, following news about Spectacle's involvement in the illegal political contributions case in Virginia.

Commission Deputy Director Jennifer Reske said in a statement that "the information we received is concerning and the Commission has begun a review pursuant to its statutory responsibilities into this matter."

Spectacle's executives have not commented on the matter yet. Indiana news outlets reported last March that the company's CEO had treated state Gov. Eric Holcomb and his wife to private jet flights in 2018 as they all traveled together for meetings hosted by the Republican Governors Association in Colorado and Arizona.

Gov. Holcomb faced state ethics review for his dealings with Spectacle's management, but the state's inspector general established that Indiana's top official committed no wrongdoing as the flights were provided to his group rather than his office.

Spectacle's executives were active lobbyists for the expansion of the state's gambling industry and the authorization of the relocation of riverboat casinos onto dry land.

[Some lawmakers work, travel at the expense of entities with lobbyists](#)

Same as it ever was.

Rhode Island's part-time lawmakers got paid last year by some of the big players in the Smith Hill lobbying world, from the largest teachers union to the law firm that represents the Rhode Island Convention Center.

Sen. Valarie Lawson, who made headlines last year as champion of a long-sought victory for the National Education Association of Rhode Island, was paid \$2,513.29 a month (\$30,159.48 a year) last year as vice president of that union, on top of her teaching salary.

Perhaps less well-known, though certainly no secret: Sen. Ryan Pearson was paid \$178,536 by Citizens Financial Group during the same 2019 calendar year. His biography on the General Assembly website describes him as “vice president at a financial institution.”

For most of last year, Rep. Stephen Ucci, the senior deputy majority leader, was paid \$20,833 a month as a lawyer at Adler Pollock & Sheehan, a Providence firm that counted among its State House lobbying clients Tufts Associated Health Maintenance (lobbying fees: \$4,500 a month), the Credit Union Association of Rhode Island (fees: \$25,000 annually), Riverfront Development Corp. (\$275 hourly) and the Rhode Island Convention Center Authority (\$350 hourly). Ucci’s online biography indicates he is currently general counsel to Hypertherm Inc.

More than half of the state lawmakers representing the city of Providence in the House and Senate last year — 11 of 21 — were on the city’s payroll, at the same time the city had seven registered lobbyists and/or lobbying firms. Altogether, they represented a small army with a shared mission of safeguarding the city’s state dollars, which totaled \$361,444,578.52 in fiscal year 2019.

The city paid these lawmakers anywhere from \$34,104 last year for their part-time roles as municipal court judges to the \$132,388 paid a Providence police sergeant, according to reports the city and other entities that employ lobbyists filed with the secretary of state.

The filings with the secretary of state’s office reflect “anything of value” given a legislator or “major decision-maker” during 2019. That includes a paycheck, gift, loan, financial favor or special discount valued at more than \$250. The disclosure requirement evolved out of the influence-peddling scandal that landed former state Sen. John Celona in prison more than a decade ago for taking undisclosed payments from major health-care companies.

The numbers in most cases reflect the day jobs of Rhode Island’s part-time legislators who, as a rule, meet late afternoons and nights three days a week, six months a year.

The lawmakers working for the city and the city school system then (and now) included: Reps. Grace Diaz, Deborah Fellela, Raymond Hull, John J. Lombardi, Daniel McKiernan, William O’Brien, Marcia Ranglin-Vassell, Scott Slater and Anastasia Williams; and Sens. Maryellen Goodwin and Ana Quezada.

That includes these annual payments by the city of Providence and its School Department: Goodwin, \$49,291 and Quezada, \$53,189; Diaz, \$63,926, Williams, \$65,465; McKiernan, \$34,104; Fellela, \$50,289; Lombardi, \$34,104; Slater, \$106,710; O'Brien, \$83,775 and Ranglin-Vassell, \$80,678; Municipal Court Judges Lombardi and McKiernan, \$34,104 each; and Providence Police Sergeant Hull, \$132,388

O'Brien is an attendance officer in the city school system. Fellela is a secretary to the principal of the Robert F. Kennedy Elementary School; Hull is a city police sergeant; Slater is a longtime budget analyst for the city; Quezada is listed as a Renewal Inspector in the city's Department of Inspection and Standards; Williams is a compliance officer in the Office of Economic Opportunity; Goodwin, the Senate majority whip, is the chief clerk in the city's Planning and Development Department. Ranglin-Vassell is described by the city as "secretary of special education and inclusion."

Diaz, who is also vice chairwoman of the state Democratic Party, is the "MWBE Outreach Director" in the city Office of Economic Opportunity. McKiernan and Lombardi are part-time Providence Municipal Court judges.

The reports also reflect:

- \$81,718 in payments by Brown University to Sen. Sam Bell, who is a data scientist there.
- Payments by the workers compensation insurance provider, Beacon Mutual Insurance, to Senate Majority Leader Michael McCaffrey's Warwick law firm (\$3,300); Sen. Mark McKenney's law firm (\$12,948); and Sen. Frank Lombardi's law firm (\$174,455); and to a fourth lawyer-legislator, Rep. Evan Shanley (\$42,257).
- Payments totaling \$7,998 by the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence to Rep. Deborah Ruggiero's firm, DR Communications.

The Laborers International Union has traditionally taken the position that it is not required to file the anything-of-value reports for Senate President Dominick Ruggiero and Senate Labor Chairman Frank Ciccone, who have, in recent years, retired from more active roles in the union. But in response to a Journal inquiry, the union's legal counsel Darren Corrente voluntarily provided this update: "As you know Senator Ruggiero retired from his position as Administrator of the New England Laborers' Labor-Management Cooperation Trust several years ago and is not employed nor retained in any capacity by LIUNA, its Local Unions or affiliated Funds.

"You may also recall Senator Frank Ciccone resigned a number of years ago from his positions with the Rhode Island Laborers District Council and Local 808. I am informed that Senator

Ciccione does provide consulting services to Local Union 808. His 2019 compensation for said services was \$18,000.”

The laborers union has been among the big winners at the State House since Gov. Gina Raimondo took office pushing huge publicly funded construction projects, including a massive, toll funded road and bridge repair program.

The overall cost of the payments last year to lawmakers or their businesses, by entities with lobbyists, was \$1,465,922.

IGT-funded forum

International Game Technology, the company at the center of a months-long fight over a proposed 20-year Rhode Island Lottery contract worth a potential \$1 billion, [is one of the corporate sponsors of the Senate Presidents Forum which, once again last year, paid travel expenses for Senate President Dominick Ruggerio and Sen. Hanna Gallo of Cranston.](#)

Ruggerio spokesman Greg Pare reports: “In 2019, he attended their winter forum in January in Boca Raton, Florida; their summer forum in July in Berlin, Germany; and their Fall Forum in September in beautiful Santa Fe, New Mexico. Senate Education Committee Chairwoman Hanna Gallo also attended these three professional development seminars.

“In addition to the worthwhile professional development and networking that comes through the organization’s workshops,” Pare said, “President Ruggerio has an obligation to attend their seminars as a member of their Board of Directors. (He is one of seven directors.)”

Asked last spring how much IGT had contributed to the Senate Presidents Forum, the company’s current chairman Robert Vincent told The Journal: “Approximately the same corporate membership dues as previous years — \$34,500 for 2019.”

The Senate Presidents Forum lists among its financial backers other big companies and organizations with lobbyists at the Rhode Island State House, including the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, AT&T, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, and Walmart Inc.

Millions spent

The high rollers at IGT and Twin River spent a combined \$2.7 million in their skirmish over Rhode Island's lottery contract last year, according to the latest filings with the secretary of state's office.

Although it became clear last fall that lawmakers were not going to return in the legislative offseason to vote on IGT's proposed 20-year extension, both rivals spent handsomely through the fourth quarter of the year.

Especially IGT, which, along with an affiliated group, ended the year having paid \$430,750 in lobbying fees, plus another \$1.6 million in expenses on the public-relations campaign in support of the deal. (Of those totals, \$1.2 million in PR-related expenses was directly from IGT and \$444,000 from the group it established, Keeping Jobs in Rhode Island.)

Former IGT Chairman and Democratic Governors Association Chairman Donald Sweitzer made at least \$82,500 in lobbying fees on the IGT contract last year, the most of any of the roughly two dozen lobbyists who worked on the issue.

Twin River spent \$334,500 on lobbying last year and another \$326,000 on its public-relations campaign.

The two rival gambling companies are still in talks over a way to settle their differences. The House is awaiting a consultant's report on the proposed deal.

Assembly budget surplus

Governor Raimondo's proposed budget for next year topped \$10 billion for the first time. Buried within the document was another record-breaker: a proposed mid-year tweaking by the governor of the General Assembly's own budget from \$45.6 million to close to \$52.8 million.

According to the governor's executive summary, \$9.7 million that was "unspent" last year was rolled over into this year's legislative budget, giving the lawmakers millions more than they are currently authorized to spend.

What's up with that?

While some of the leftover money from last year "will revert to the State as surplus," House spokesman Larry Berman said the rest will be "used on various projects, such as: HVAC repairs, data upgrades, parking lot refurbishment, redistricting project, equipment purchases for print

shop & Capitol TV, revamping and modernization of the building wiring, and various technological upgrades (computers, telecommunication, virtual servers & website etc.).”

Court Rebuffs Attempt To Make Politically Engaged Missourian Register As A Lobbyist

Nobody likes lobbyists, except maybe their families. Whether associated with self-interested men bending an irritated President Grant’s ear at the Willard Hotel, or Big Tobacco’s operatives in Washington, the term “lobbyist” does not connote “public-minded.”

There’s a reason candidates don’t brag about the number of lobbyists who gave them money or tout the endorsements of lobbyists when advocating for specific legislation. Perhaps that distaste is why a man named Ron Calzone was so surprised when the state of Missouri ordered him to register as a lobbyist.

Ron doesn’t look or act the part of a “lobbyist.” A rancher from Dixon, Missouri, Ron is a devout believer in limited government. He often takes up the post of a citizen’s “watchmen on the walls” in the capitol at Jefferson City. He talks to legislators, volunteers to testify in committees, and has even won pro se lawsuits against the state.

This behavior upset some folks. Specifically, some powerful legislators who didn’t care for Ron. To punish him for speaking his mind, they engineered an ethics complaint that accused Ron of flouting lobbyist registration and reporting laws. The government eventually told Ron he had to pay a \$1,000 fine and submit to the state’s arcane lobbyist registration regime if he wished to continue his civic engagement.

Ron is an unpaid volunteer. He doesn’t give gifts to lawmakers. He simply advocates. But the government argued that didn’t matter, because Ron publicly associated himself with an organization called Missouri First. Missouri First is a group Ron created nearly 20 years ago. Its bank account was closed for a lack of funds, and it has made no expenditures of any kind—let alone to Ron or legislators—in years.

That’s where my organization, the Institute for Free Speech, along with another pro bono constitutional shop, the Freedom Center of Missouri, came in. As the federal appellate court for the District of Columbia once recognized, “[l]obbying is of course a pejorative term, but another name for it is petitioning for the redress of grievances. It is under the express protection of the First Amendment.”

For the last four years, before the state's ethics commission and in state and federal court, we consistently argued that Ron could not be forced to bear the burdens of paying a fee and filing reports as a "lobbyist" in order to talk to lawmakers. Ron would suffer more than improper labeling as a lobbyist: his activism would also require that his address become a permanent public presence in an online government database. For his public-spirited actions, he would be required to file 14 reports a year, 12 under penalty of perjury.

Through the course of our litigation, three different Missouri attorneys general, including now-Sen. Josh Hawley, kept the pressure on. In federal court, they argued that monitoring anyone "who is operating in the political arena is a valid governmental interest regardless" of whether financial power or mere words are at work.

Missouri held firm even though this theory would render every Planned Parenthood, National Rifle Association, or American Civil Liberties activist who joins a "lobby day"—where a nonprofit group gets active citizens to meet with their representatives in the capitol—as registered lobbyists. In fact, the state argued that without the surveillance of people like Ron, "a democratic government structure would not exist." We politely suggested that the opposite was the case.

It took a while for the Constitution to be vindicated. Ron first lost his case in both federal district court and the court of appeals. But after a three-judge panel of the Eighth Circuit sided with the state by a 2-1 margin over a vigorous dissent, the entire court—all 11 judges—took the unusual step of rehearing the case.

Almost five years to the day after this all started, the full Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals handed down its ruling. The court declared that because "Calzone's political activities do not involve the transfer of money or anything of value, either to him or to anyone else," Missouri's efforts to regulate Ron like a professional lobbyist were unconstitutional.

Not all the judges agreed. One dissenting opinion sneered that we were "casting Calzone as a modern-day folk hero who wants nothing more than to be free to petition his government" and should be ignored. Well, anyone who thinks legislators should listen to their constituents, rather than ignore or punish them for speaking their mind, ought to be singing along with us to "The Ballad of Ron Calzone."

It starts like this: "Congress shall make no law...abridging the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

[Missouri donation limits rise for legislative candidates](#)

Candidates running for the Missouri Legislature will be able to accept a few more dollars from their donors.

The Missouri Ethics Commission said the campaign contribution limit for state Senate candidates is rising from \$2,500 per election to \$2,559, and the limit for House candidates is rising from \$2,000 per election to \$2,046.

The increases are the first under a constitutional amendment approved by voters in 2018, which set the original limits and called for an inflationary adjustment every two years.

The new limits will be in effect for the August primary election. Winning candidates also will be able to accept the maximum amount for the November general election.

The 2018 measure also prohibited lobbyists gifts worth more than \$5 to state lawmakers, with an inflationary adjustment. The Ethics Commission said inflation was not significant enough to warrant a change to that limit for 2020.

Some Missouri lawmakers want to readjust those limits for future elections. Republican proposals pending in the House and Senate would lower the Senate contribution limits to match those for House candidates. They also would ban lobbyist gifts to lawmakers. Those changes are included in broader proposals that also would ask voters to undo key portions of a state legislative redistricting model approved by voters in 2018.

[Youngest Wyoming Lobbyist Attends University of Wyoming](#)

Associated Students of the University of Wyoming (ASUW) Senator Kevin Milburn becomes the youngest lobbyist in Wyoming, and he plans to advocate for the students and the common citizens of Wyoming.

Kevin Milburn, age 20, became a ASUW Senator in the spring of 2019, during his freshman year at the University of Wyoming. His interest in politics however has greatly surpassed that.

“My interest in politics started when I was 10 years old. I started campaigning for Bunky Loucks, a member of the Republican Party, when I was 13 years old,” Milburn said.

He campaigned at the state legislative level through the Natrona County Republican Party in 2015 and 2016, and for Donald Trump in the 2016 election. With future plans of being a United States Senator and one day the President of the United States, Milburn said he is a politician for the people.

His philosophy is to help a fellow neighbor and wants other young people to know “you can put an age on a body, but you can never put an age on intelligence.” Even though he is young, he said it does not discredit a person’s ability to make a difference.

The purpose of a lobbyist is to make an organized attempt at influencing legislators. Milburn said his goal is to do exactly that as a representative of common citizens and students in Wyoming.

The first topic he wants to lobby for is to have more resources for scholarship education throughout the state. This includes developing a website with a list of scholarships available to Wyoming college students and high schools, informing their students on the resources already provided.

Milburn said he also wants to focus on having guidance counselors meet with students to not only go over future plans, but help students with understanding the cost of room and board, tuition and other fees associated with going to college in addition to helping them find scholarships and other financial help.

The estimated cost of attendance for incoming freshmen at UW is \$21,362 for the 2020-2021 academic year for in-state students. The top Hathaway only covers \$3,360 a year, leaving \$18,002 for the student to pay in order to cover the rest of the academic costs.

UW does have a website listing the scholarships provided by the institution itself, however, its accessibility to apply for scholarships is only available to university students and are only advertised to students as well. It is because of the lack of resource knowledge given to Wyoming students at the high school and collegiate level that Milburn wants to focus on helping educate them.

Aside from being a lobbyist and ASUW senator, Milburn is also active in the campus’s Fraternity Sorority Life community. As a member of Alpha Sigma Phi, Milburn said he believes greek life has helped him connect with other students on campus.

“You don’t have to be in a club to be involved with your community,” Milburn said about being involved, “all you have to do is talk to people.”

He also said he believes in listening to his constituents before talking to lawmakers. Due to this, Milburn said he wants people to contact him with any questions, concerns or comments about issues with UW, or concerns as a citizen at 307-259-6778 or kevinmilburn36@gmail.com.

“We’re all in this together and no matter the differences between us, we are all students at the University of Wyoming,” Milburn said.

Guilty plea lays bare ex-state Sen. Martin Sandoval’s greed in red-light camera bribery scheme. ‘So why don’t I get that offer?’

State Sen. Martin Sandoval had already taken tens of thousands of dollars in bribes from a clout-heavy red-light camera company when he complained to one of its representatives in 2018 that he was getting stiffed.

After all, as the head of the Senate’s Transportation Committee, Sandoval was the one sticking out his neck on behalf of the company in Springfield, the senator told the executive during a meeting at a Burr Ridge restaurant, according to federal prosecutors.

Yet the company, SafeSpeed LLC, was giving far more lucrative deals to other politically connected “consultants,” cutting them in on a percentage of the camera revenue that kept cash rolling every month, Sandoval told the representative, who was secretly recording the conversation for the FBI.

“So why don’t I get that offer?” Sandoval griped. “Cause you know I’ll go balls to the walls for anything you ask me. ... It’s hard for me to swallow how (people) make so much off of you. Right? And I gotta do the work.”

That conversation was one of several revealing moments made public as Sandoval pleaded guilty Tuesday to bribery and tax charges, and agreed to cooperate in a burgeoning, widespread probe of public corruption that has sent shock waves from Chicago’s City Hall to Springfield.

Sandoval’s 27-page plea agreement laid bare a striking level of greed, even in a state accustomed to elected officials going off to prison for trading political power for cash.

During the lengthy hearing in federal court, Sandoval admitted taking more than a combined quarter of a million dollars in bribes in exchange for his political influence or official action, including at least \$70,000 from clout-heavy SafeSpeed for acting as its “protector” in the state Senate.

The agreement did not divulge how Sandoval pocketed the other \$180,000 other than saying he “engaged in corrupt activities with other public officials and accepted money from other people

in return for using his position to benefit those people and their business interests.” Sandoval’s criminal activity “involved more than five participants,” prosecutors said.

In pleading guilty, Sandoval became the first to be convicted in an ongoing corruption probe that has touched on a who’s who of state power players, including a handful of other elected officials; magnates in the construction, asphalt and casino industries; lobbyists; transportation officials; and Commonwealth Edison executives.

Speaking to reporters in the lobby of the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse, U.S. Attorney John Lausch said prosecutors’ work in the widespread probe was “far from over” but declined to discuss who else might be in their crosshairs.

Sandoval, who was released on his own recognizance, made a brief statement to reporters as he left the courthouse, saying he was “ashamed” and took “full responsibility” for his actions.

“I apologize to the people of Illinois and most importantly the constituents that I’ve served over the last 17 years,” he said. “... I intend to fully cooperate with the government, and because of that, I can no longer provide any further comments.”

Under preliminary sentencing guidelines, Sandoval, who resigned from office effective Jan. 1, faces up to about 12 ½ years in federal prison, according to his plea deal. But in exchange for his continued cooperation in the probe, prosecutors agreed to recommend a reduced sentence of unspecified length.

Dressed in a dark gray suit and blue tie, Sandoval chatted with his attorney before the hearing, smiling at reporters and spectators filing into U.S. District Judge Andrea Wood’s 19th-floor courtroom.

He was more subdued during the hourlong hearing, standing at the lectern with his hands folded in front of him and occasionally shoved in his pockets. His voice cracked a bit as he said, “I plead guilty, your honor,” to each of the two counts. At one point as the hearing neared the end, Sandoval appeared to wipe away a tear.

Wood set a status hearing for July. Sandoval won’t be sentenced until he completes his cooperation — a potentially lengthy period.

The plea deal did not identify the red-light camera business involved in the bribery scheme, referring to it only as “Company A.” But Sandoval slipped up by referring to Safe Speed LLC when Wood asked him in court to explain his misconduct in his own words.

“I used my office as state senator to help SafeSpeed — er, company A ... (and) be its protector in the Illinois Senate and influence other officials to roll out the red-light camera program in Illinois,” Sandoval said.

Prosecutors did not name the SafeSpeed representative who bribed Sandoval, referring to him in the plea agreement only as Cooperating Witness-1. Several sources familiar with the investigation identified the informant for the Tribune as Omar Maani, a Burr Ridge businessman who is one of SafeSpeed’s founders and biggest rainmakers.

SafeSpeed released a statement through a publicist Tuesday saying the company was “shocked and saddened” at the betrayal of public trust by Sandoval and CW-1, saying the bribe payments were not authorized by anyone at the company.

“It appears both individuals committed crimes without SafeSpeed’s knowledge and in violation not only of the law but of SafeSpeed’s culture,” the statement read.

SafeSpeed, however, declined to answer any questions from the Tribune about the extent of CEO Nikki Zollar’s awareness of the political donations being made on the company’s behalf.

Sandoval’s guilty plea at the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse in downtown Chicago came [just a day after he was charged](#). He also pleaded guilty to filing a false income tax return that underreported his 2017 income as \$125,905 when he, in fact, made more than double that, according to the plea deal. Sandoval failed to report more than \$10,000 stemming from criminal activity, prosecutors said.

Sandoval admitted in the plea agreement that he first agreed in 2016 to receive \$20,000 in annual campaign contributions from SafeSpeed in exchange for his official support in Springfield, including blocking any attempted legislation that would be harmful to the red-light camera industry.

Campaign finance records analyzed by the Tribune show that the \$20,000 was doled out in two separate payments in September 2016. The first \$10,000 donation came from a separate firm run by Zollar, Triad Consulting Services, followed three weeks later by a \$10,000 donation made by SafeSpeed itself, the records show.

In August 2017, Sandoval spoke with CW-1, the SafeSpeed representative, about splitting up the annual donation into smaller amounts, according to the plea deal. CW-1 told Sandoval it

wouldn't be a problem because the firm's president "did not want the contribution to 'shout out,' meaning raise a red flag," the plea agreement said.

Several months after that conversation, the Tribune published an investigation documenting how Sandoval intervened on behalf of SafeSpeed to push state transportation officials to change their stance and allow the company's cameras to be installed at the relatively safe intersection of Illinois Route 83 and 22nd Street in Oakbrook Terrace.

The push came even though the Illinois Department of Transportation's policies required that cameras target dangerous corners to improve safety, the Tribune found.

Details in the plea agreement seemed to indicate that Sandoval was worried about the Tribune's report, saying he "tore up" a check provided by CW-1 "following publicity regarding Sandoval's relationship with Company A."

To better disguise the money trail, Sandoval then arranged for an entity unrelated to SafeSpeed to make a \$10,000 contribution to a campaign associated with the senator while agreeing to "explore other ways for the company to make its annual campaign contribution," the plea agreement said.

In March 2018, Sandoval arranged to have a colleague — identified in the plea agreement only as "Co-Schemer A" — collect \$10,000 in cash from the SafeSpeed representative in exchange for blocking a proposed bill in Springfield to ban red-light cameras.

Despite the regular contributions, Sandoval was clearly unhappy with the amount he was being paid, especially since he knew SafeSpeed was paying a monthly percentage of camera revenue to "consultants" for helping convince suburbs to have them installed, according to the plea deal.

In the July 2018 meeting in Burr Ridge, Sandoval told the SafeSpeed representative that he was aware others were getting cash "on a monthly basis, infinitum," for providing essentially the same assistance he did in helping land the company the camera deal in Oakbrook Terrace.

Later in the same discussion, Sandoval discussed receiving regular "protection" money from SafeSpeed to help fend off legislation that would harm its business, the plea deal said.

"I'm not trying to be dramatic, but I'm telling you the vultures would be all over that s--- if you had the wrong person there," Sandoval allegedly told CW-1 of the Senate.

Sandoval initially insisted that CW-1 would have to decide how much to pay for protection, saying that naming figures was “just not my style,” according to the plea deal.

When the representative asked him to pick a figure “off the top of your head,” Sandoval responded, “Five,” meaning \$5,000 a month, prosecutors said.

The two also discussed how to disguise the payments as campaign contributions, with Sandoval at one point asking CW-1, “Do you have a bologna company or something innocuous?” to help funnel the cash, according to the plea agreement.

The next month, CW-1 again met Sandoval at a restaurant and handed over \$15,000 in cash — a transaction likely captured on video by federal authorities.

Ex-state Sen. Martin Sandoval charged with bribery in red-light camera scheme »

Sandoval was the fourth elected official to be charged in a series of sweeping political corruption investigations that first came to light 14 months ago when the FBI descended upon the City Hall offices of Ald. Edward Burke.

In pleading guilty to a felony related to his public duties, Sandoval is by law ineligible to collect his state pension. Unless the court directs the state pension system to garnish his contributions, however, Sandoval could apply for a refund of the \$142,575.22 he has paid into the system. He had not applied for a refund as of Tuesday.

The investigation of Sandoval went public in September when federal agents executed a high-profile search of his office in Springfield and his home on Chicago’s Southwest Side.

The warrant showed the FBI was looking for items related to so-called Asphalt King Michael Vondra, a major Sandoval political donor whose offices in Bartlett were also visited by agents that day. The warrant named Vondra and about 20 of his businesses and associates, including John Harris, former chief of staff to imprisoned ex-Gov. Rod Blagojevich. Sandoval’s connections to ComEd — where his daughter, Angie, works as a senior account representative — have also been probed.

Authorities have also sought evidence from Sandoval’s office about Rick Heidner, a major video gambling operator. Heidner had planned to build a southwest suburban horse track and casino, but the plan was scuttled in October after the Tribune reported that Heidner has long-standing business relationships with a mob-connected banker and a convicted bookie.

Three days later after hitting Sandoval's office, the FBI and Internal Revenue Service also raided government buildings in a number of suburbs in Sandoval's district, including Lyons and McCook. Authorities have also sought records on the towns of Cicero, Bridgeview and Summit.

Records show the FBI has sought information on Cook County Commissioner and McCook Mayor Jeff Tobolski and Lyons Mayor Christopher Getty as part of the probe.

Also under investigation is Oakbrook Terrace Mayor Tony Ragucci, who resigned earlier this month on the same day the Tribune reported that he'd recently paid \$30,000 from his campaign fund to a lawyer representing him in the probe.

None of the mayors has been charged with wrongdoing.

A separate probe delving into the lobbying practices of utility giant ComEd has led to FBI raids on current and former lawmakers and political operatives, including several who are close confidants of House Speaker Michael Madigan.

Florida lawmakers advance ban on lobbying and self-dealing

A law that will put teeth into the voter-approved ban on elected officials using their public office for private gain was unanimously approved by the Florida House on Wednesday and is headed to the state Senate.

There was no discussion. The measure puts penalties behind the ethics rules imposed by Amendment 12, the constitutional change overwhelmingly approved by voters in 2018 to end the revolving door between public office and private lobbying.

The constitutional amendment updates Florida law, which currently has no safeguards in place to stop state legislators from writing legislation that benefit their personal interests, and it extends the current two-year ban on legislators to six years.

Three components of the new law take effect at two different times:

- Starting Dec. 31, 2020, a prohibition takes effect on public officials and public employees using their public office to "disproportionately" benefit themselves, their spouse, children, employer or entities with which they have certain business interests.

- Starting Dec. 31, 2022, a six-year ban on lobbying exists for the following officials after they leave office: legislators and statewide elected officials, and local elected officials who serve on boards or commissions. State agency heads are prohibited from lobbying their former agencies. Judges and justices are barred from lobbying state government.

- Also taking effect Dec. 31, 2022, is a provision that bars public officers from lobbying while in office any political agency or governing body for anything related to policy, appropriations, or procurement (such as contracts).

The bills, HB 7009 and SB 7006, both impose penalties for violations. Penalties range from removing elected officials from office to fines and civil penalties on those no longer in office. It will be up to the state's attorney general to prosecute any violators.

The measure was promoted by former Senate President Don Gaetz, a Niceville Republican who presided over the chamber during the chaotic redistricting process in 2010-12. After the GOP-led Legislature's maps were challenged as being unconstitutional, a court concluded that political operatives had conducted a shadow redistricting process that was "making a mockery" of the claims by Gaetz and other legislative leaders that the process had been transparent.

Gaetz is the father of U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz.

Amendment 12

In 2013, before the redistricting challenge was resolved, Gaetz made ethics reform his top priority. He tried and failed to get his fellow legislators to adopt a bill to require legislators to wait two years after they retire before they can return to lobby the executive branch. Current law only bans them from lobbying the Legislature for two years.

Gaetz tried again as a member of the Constitution Revision Commission, the citizen panel given the extraordinary power to recommend amendments to the state constitution every 20 years.

In 2018, the CRC agreed to put the proposal before voters, and Amendment 12 received nearly 79% of the vote. Florida now has what Gaetz has called "the nation's highest, toughest ethical standards for public officers."

Several legislators have made a career out of serving the Legislature part of the time but working as a lobbyist for special interests and clients before county commissions and Congress. Beginning in 2023, that will be illegal.

Lobbying firms also like to hire former House and Senate leaders because of the power they wield in Florida's top-down legislative structure, which allows them to control the state's \$91 billion budget while in office and develop lasting relationships with lawmakers who remain in power after they leave.

Among the lawmakers who have joined the lobbying ranks after leaving office: former Miami Sen. Frank Artiles, who remains close to current House Speaker José Oliva; former House speakers Steve Crisafulli, Dean Cannon and Larry Cretul, and former Senate presidents Mike Haridopolos, Ken Pruitt, John Thrasher and Jim Scott.

Going out with a bang

Another provision in the law targets what Gaetz called “pay for play” and makes the practice of lawmakers using “their last year in office auditioning for lucrative landings in lobbying firms” now illegal. Gaetz explained in an op-ed in his hometown newspaper.

“County commissioners are being paid by private companies to lobby before other local governments that have interlocking interests with the commissions on which they, themselves, serve,” Gaetz explained.

“State legislators take money to lobby for contracts before local government bodies that depend on those same legislators for state appropriations to fund the contracts. State lawmakers sell themselves to lobby federal congressmen on behalf of private interests. It's pay for play and it ought to be against the law.

“You can be a paid lobbyist or you can be an elected official, but you can't be both at the same time — serve private interests or serve the public interest.”

Gaetz, a self-made millionaire who founded a for-profit chain of hospice care companies, said the provision that outlaws self-dealing is aimed at politicians who “use their offices to grab goodies for themselves and those close to them.”

Defining 'disproportionate'

The constitutional amendment now prohibits anyone from using his or her office for “disproportionate benefit” and the Florida Commission on Ethics has written a definition for what “disproportionate benefit” will mean.

“Sadly, each of us knows about the road that was paved, the contract that slid sideways into friendly hands, the job that went to a relative, the zoning decision that turned out favorable for someone close to the decision-maker or the extra slice of appropriations carved for the legislator’s employer,” Gaetz wrote.

Many current and former legislators don’t like the new law.

Rep. Joe Geller, R-Aventura, said he thinks the amendment is “constitutionally suspect.”

“I have no plans to challenge it, but I wouldn’t be surprised if someone does,” he said.

Former state Rep. Jose Felix Diaz, a Miami-Dade Republican, lawyer, and a member of the Constitution Revision Commission that put the proposal on the ballot, voted against the six-year lobbying ban when it came before the commission in 2018.

“Lobbying has been deemed as a constitutionally protected free speech,” said Diaz, who is now a lobbyist with Ballard Partners.

Sen. Dennis Baxley, R-Ocala, the chair of the Senate Ethics and Elections Committee, said he didn’t vote for the amendment in 2018 but on Wednesday he brought SB 7006 before the Senate Rules Committee, where it received a unanimous vote and no discussion.

“Whatever the voters decide, I’m totally committed to implementing what they ask,” he said. “I think it’s a big lesson in elections matter.”

[Pritzker slams political 'purveyors of greed and corruption'](#)

Gov. J.B. Pritzker today called for ethical and property tax reform in state government, saying both are needed if the state is to continue its turnaround.

But in an annual State of the State speech in which Pritzker took a victory lap of sorts after a solid first year, he provided only limited details on what should occur while largely ignoring another big problem: soaring pension bills.

The freshman governor was most animated, even angry in talking about political corruption and what needs to be done to curb it, this a day after a former senior state senator, Marty Sandoval, pleaded guilty in federal court to soliciting and accepting more than \$250,000 in bribes.

Labeling corruption "a scourge that has been plaguing our political system for far too long," Pritzker called on officials to "root out the purveyors of greed and corruption—in both parties—whose presence infects the bloodstream of government."

"Protecting that culture or tolerating it is no longer acceptable," the governor continued. "We must take urgent action to restore the public's trust."

Pritzker specifically called for a flat ban on legislators serving as paid lobbyists to local governments, and urged more detailed economic disclosures by officials to prevent conflicts of interest. Both have been widely discussed in recent weeks, but Pritzker also called for some sort of limit on ex-lawmakers immediately being paid as state lobbyists. He gave no figure on how long the ban on the practice of ex-lawmakers lobbying their former colleagues should be.

"Common sense and basic decency need to prevail," Pritzker said, adding that a more-detailed anti-corruption plan may be released after a legislative ethics commission report this spring.

The governor did not touch on remap reform, a subject that civic groups say needs to be raised as lawmakers prepare to reapportion legislative and congressional districts after this year's national census. But in one bit of an eyebrow-raiser, he said the patronage system "needs to die . . . finally and completely." He did not say how.

On property taxes, Pritzker declared them "too high." But he gave little indication how they should be limited, leaving that task to lawmakers.

"It's time to put the best ideas to work from both sides of the aisle," Pritzker said. "These changes . . . can make a serious dent in property taxes."

Some insiders believe that a budding property tax revolt could block passage of the governor's vaunted graduated income tax amendment this fall unless voters are convinced that property tax relief is coming for sure.

Pritzker did not mention pensions, beyond noting approval of a bill last year to allow non-Chicago police and fire pensions funds to be consolidated statewide into just two units, saving money and potentially boosting their return on investments.

The bulk of the speech focused on first-year accomplishments, including passage of a balanced budget, a huge capital program and more state funding for local schools.

"We stopped bad-mouthing the state and started passing laws that make Illinois more attractive for businesses and jobs," Pritzker declared. "Today, the Illinois economy supports 6.2 million jobs. This is the most on record for our state."

Pritzker did not mention that the state's overall population continues to decrease.

UPDATE—Reaction to the speech is coming in, from friendly to nasty. Most follows along ideological and partisan lines.

For instance, the Illinois Manufacturers' Association noted that it worked with Pritzker last year to pass an infrastructure bill and extend the research & development tax credit. The group says it "looks forward" to working on property tax relief, but said the graduated income tax is "the wrong approach."

The Illinois Chamber lauded "pro-growth initiatives" under Pritzker, such as greater funding for job training programs. But it slammed the \$15 minimum wage, and said a renewed focus on small business is needed "to balance the negative effects of 2019 policies."

But the Illinois AFL-CIO was laudatory. "Gov. Pritzker's address was about obtaining results for all Illinoisans," it said in its statement. "For far too long we've been subjected to finger-pointing, blame and political rhetoric—while the state sank under the weight of inaction. Gov. Pritzker and the General Assembly went to work last year and now our state is in a much better place. There is still a lot of work to do and issues to address, but the women and men of the Illinois AFL-CIO applaud the work accomplished."

Of particular note is what House Speaker Mike Madigan had to say after all of Pritzker's words about the need to change Springfield's culture of corruption.

"While we have seen major steps forward, we have also seen the good work of the many honest members of the Legislature be overshadowed too often by the wrongdoing of individuals who have sought to put themselves first," he said. "Let's be clear: bad actors will always try to game the system and break the law. We must commit to sending the clearest sign the game is over and every step will be taken to prosecute. House Democrats stand ready to work with Gov. Pritzker and our Republican colleagues."

[State Prosecutor Seeking More Tools to Probe Crooked Pols](#)

As Maryland policymakers attempt to combat political corruption, a Senate committee Wednesday considered legislation that would expand the state's definition of a public official and theoretically make it easier for the state prosecutor's office to initiate investigations.

[Senate Bill 200](#), proposed by the Office of the State Prosecutor (OSP), would potentially put more public officials under scrutiny for corruption investigations and would broaden the prosecutor's authority.

"We believe that recent events have shown that these adjustments are important," Charlton Howard III, who recently took over as state prosecutor, told the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee.

The OSP, a small agency created in the 1970's, was set up to investigate and prosecute corruption cases in state and local government and politics that do not rise to the level of federal crimes. The office investigates election law and campaign finance violations, ethics infractions, misconduct in office, and violations of state bribery laws, among other things.

Recent OSP actions include securing a guilty plea from a former police chief who sent misleading information to state authorities about an officer he planned to hire; an indictment of former Baltimore mayor Catherine E. Pugh (D) on perjury charges; the conviction of then-District Heights mayor Eddie Martin for misconduct in office; and a guilty plea from a Baltimore City school official for stealing school district funds.

This bill introduced on behalf of OSP would expand the meaning of "public official" to include all those defined as such under the Maryland Public Ethics Law — essentially, anyone who must file annual financial disclosure forms with the State Ethics Commission.

The bill would also create a new statute to mandate 10-year sentences for bribery and perjury, and perhaps most significantly, would lift a two-year statute of limitations on the OSP's ability to investigate allegations of public corruption.

"Currently, the two-year limitation is not effective," said Caroline County State's Attorney Joseph Riley (R), testifying in support of the legislation. He added that the proposed measures would "allow for effective and timely prosecutions."

Some senators questioned whether the proposals went too far and would enable the OSP to launch investigations of infractions it currently does not have jurisdiction over. Howard sought to provide assurances that his office was not looking to expand the scope of its activities.

“I’m not trying to expand into drug enforcement or any other critical areas,” he said.

Senator William C. Smith Jr., the chairman of judicial proceedings said he had received a written testimony from the Maryland chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, expressing opposition to lifting the statute of limitations for corruption investigations.

Sen. Justin Ready (R-Carroll) said he worried that using the State Ethics Commission’s definition of what constitutes a public official in Maryland could have “a chilling effect” on people who are otherwise willing to serve on state boards and commissions.

Bruce C. Bereano, one of the top-earning lobbyists in Annapolis, was the only person to publicly testify against the legislation. While he said the bill had admirable qualities, he also warned against using the ethics commission’s definition of public officials.

“There are tremendous unintended consequences with this bill,” Bereano said.

The veteran lobbyist said the legislation as proposed targeted “regular citizens who want to help the state.”

“These poor citizens are going to give their voluntary time to the state of Maryland, and now they’re under the jurisdiction of the state prosecutor?” Bereano asked.

“This needs to be tightened dramatically, rewritten...Just make a list of who you want to include.”