



M U L T I S T A T E

## [Vincent Orange Is Running For D.C. Council Again, But Still Owes Money From His Past Races](#) (District of Columbia)

Vincent Orange has been around D.C. politics for a long time — and there’s money he owes to prove it.

The former D.C. councilmember, one-time mayoral hopeful, and current Ward 5 candidate still owes tens of thousands of dollars to vendors and businesses for services they provided to his past campaigns, debts that under a new D.C. law would become a personal liability if incurred today.

The debts come from political campaigns stretching back to 2010, amounting to almost \$108,000, according to campaign finance reports. Of that amount, \$81,734 comes from his [unsuccessful 2016 re-election bid](#) for his at-large seat alone.

The debts include almost \$8,000 to American Express; \$4,800 to longtime D.C. Democratic Party attorney Don Dinan; \$8,000 to Bob King, a longtime campaign consultant in Ward 5 who is best known for his outreach to seniors; \$4,700 to Studio202DC, a graphic design firm; and others.

Over the years Orange has also loaned his own campaigns significant amounts of money: He loaned his failed 2006 mayoral campaign \$97,500.

According to his campaign finance reports, the single biggest debt Orange’s campaign has is to Kennedy Communications, a D.C.-based political consultancy. Orange owes the firm \$13,711 from an unsuccessful 2010 run for council chair and another \$40,524 from his 2016 bid to keep his at-large seat on the council. (He lost to sitting Councilmember Robert White.)

“He basically promised that the money would be paid prior to us doing the last mailing [in the race], which was for \$40,000,” said Andrew Kennedy, the firm’s founder. “But then he just stiffed us. He started avoiding our calls. I don’t have any love for the guy. I found it reprehensible.”

King was similarly stiffed to the tune of \$8,000 when he helped organize bus trips to take seniors to the polls on Orange's behalf in 2016. "He never paid it," he said.

Orange did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Orange has repeatedly run for office in D.C. over the last three decades and served on the council during two stints — representing Ward 5 from 1998 to 2006, and as an at-large member from 2011 to 2016. The debts are included in the regular campaign finance reports that Orange, who often introduces himself as an attorney and certified public accountant, is still required to file for his almost half-dozen runs for office over the last 12 years.

Usually campaign finance accounts — which candidates use to raise and spend money for specific races — are closed out at the end of a campaign. Some of Orange's accounts have stayed open, though, largely because of the unpaid debts he owes.

And [this isn't necessarily rare in politics](#). As of last October, for example, Newt Gingrich's 2012 presidential campaign was [still reporting some \\$4.6 million in unpaid bills](#). In D.C., a few former elected officials and candidates other than Orange still have unpaid campaign debts: One-time at-large candidate Dionne Reeder's 2018 campaign owes vendors almost \$30,000; one of former council Chairman Kwame Brown's campaigns still reports \$35,000 in debts, and former Ward 7 Councilmember Yvette Alexander's two campaigns owe more than \$20,000.

Chuck Thies, who has run multiple D.C. campaigns over the years, says that Orange's failure to pay vendors reflects poorly on him. "Decent people who run campaigns and decent candidates make sure everyone gets paid, period," he said. "[Orange] gets to spend more money than he has because he screws people." (Thies' résumé includes running former Mayor Vincent Gray's 2014 re-election bid, where he ran against Orange.)

That's less likely to happen with Orange's current run, though.

Since he ran for council in 2016, D.C. law has changed in a significant way. A sweeping rewrite of the city's campaign finance laws in 2018 gives campaigns only 12 months after an election to settle any outstanding debts and close their accounts. After that, the debt becomes the candidate's personal liability. (The law is not retroactive, so it doesn't apply to Orange's past campaigns.) Candidates can fundraise to pay off debts.

In his current run for the Ward 5 council seat, Orange is using the city's public financing program, which gives candidates matching funds for small-dollar contributions from D.C.

residents. (He similarly used it for an unsuccessful council bid in 2020.) According to a May 10 report, Orange has raised just over \$23,000 from D.C. residents and received \$117,000 in public funds. As of that report, he had just over \$57,000 left in the bank. The Democratic primary is on June 21.

Earlier this year, Orange [sued the Washington Business Journal and a former reporter](#) for \$25 million, claiming that an article about financial challenges during his leadership of the D.C. Chamber of Commerce was false and defamatory. The publication has [asked a court to dismiss the lawsuit](#), saying that Orange hasn't made the case that the reporting was false and that the lawsuit was filed as a "campaign tactic."

King doesn't hold a grudge over the unpaid debt; he says it's "part of the game" of politics — especially when a candidate loses. But he says his experience with Orange made him change his own way of operating.

"It's lost money. I wrote it off on my taxes," he said. "I learned a lesson. It's my fault because I should have gotten my money upfront. If they lose, you ain't going to get it. Going forward with [Orange], everything would have to be paid before."

Kennedy, who says he isn't working on any particular D.C. campaigns currently, is less forgiving than King about the money Orange owes him.

"He could have set up a payment plan. It's amazing to me that, even with the little guys, he's leaving them in the dust," he said. "I wouldn't trust him with D.C. finances when he can't even manage his own."

### [State lobbyists have record-setting spending at \\$11 million](#) (Kentucky)

After COVID-19 led to a lower spending total for the previous even-year legislative session in 2020, employers and lobbyists spent a record-setting \$11,130,780 to lobby the Kentucky General Assembly this year, according to the Legislative Branch Ethics Commission.

The previous record for spending during a legislative session was set in 2018, with \$10.67 million spent to influence legislators regarding legislative issues. Breaking it down another way, if that \$11.1 million was divided equally among the 138 legislators, a little more than \$80,000 would have been spent on each of them in lobbying efforts.

The top 10 spending organizations for the 2022 regular session were led by the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, which spent \$183,949.

In second place was the Kentucky Hospital Association with \$149,046. The American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky spent \$128,258; Altria Client Services LLC (Philip Morris), \$126,793; Pace-O-Matic of Kentucky, \$106,150; Kentucky League of Cities, Inc., \$102,195; Pharmaceutical Care Management Association, \$86,168; Greater Louisville, Inc., \$82,290; Kentucky Retail Federation, Inc., \$82,118; while Anthem Inc. and its affiliates finished 10th at \$70,597.

The end of the 2022 legislative session also brought several terminations of lobbying activity reported to the Commission, as well as some new ones.

Terminated employers include: 23andMe; AdventFS; American Kidney Fund, Inc.; Ancestry; Bamboo Health FKA Appriss Health; Broadus Capital; Consumer Energy Alliance; Finseca; Frankfort Independent Schools; Hewlett-Packard Enterprise Company; KY Animal Action; National Association of Social Workers KY Chapter; Ovid Ventures; Owl's Head Alloys, Inc.; Purdue Pharma LP; RB Seelbach LLC; Recording Industry Association of America, Inc.; and Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill.

New employers registering with the Legislative Ethics Commission after the end of the 2022 session were: The Coalition for Genetic Data Protection, Kentucky Hemp Works, and Students for Life Action.

The Kentucky Baptist Convention, of which Kentucky Today is a part, spent \$5,500 in lobbying efforts during the 2022 session, which went to lobbyist and former state representative Dwight Butler. His efforts involved lobbying against the passage of House Bill 136, a measure to legalize medical marijuana; as well as HB 606, setting up the framework for legalized sports wagering in Kentucky. Both bills received passage in the House, but no final action was taken in the Senate before the session ended.

### **Digital currencies flow to campaigns, but state rules vary** (United States)

For congressional candidate Shrina Kurani, cryptocurrency is not only the future of money, it's a transformative technology that could revolutionize campaign funding and attract a new generation of voters.

She is among a vanguard of candidates courting campaign contributions in digital currencies such as Bitcoin.

“We are a campaign that is speaking to a large part of the population, especially younger people,” said the American-born daughter of Indian immigrants, who is on Tuesday’s primary ballot as she seeks the Democratic nomination for a congressional seat east of Los Angeles.

Kurani’s foray into digital currency to help fund her campaign would not be possible if she were running for the California Legislature or some other office within the state. While the federal government allows political donations in cryptocurrency, California does not, having banned the practice four years ago.

The difference underscores not just the rising popularity of cryptocurrencies but also how regulation varies widely across the U.S.

Some states, including Arkansas and North Carolina, also don’t allow for cryptocurrency donations in state races under existing campaign finance laws. Others have followed federal rules for congressional candidates and allow donations with disclosure requirements and contribution caps, typically set at \$100. Still other states, including Hawaii, Idaho and South Dakota, have adopted no specific policies around digital currency donations.

Digital currencies offer an alternative that does not depend on banks. Instead, transactions are validated and recorded on a decentralized digital ledger called the blockchain.

Perianne Boring, founder and CEO of the Chamber of Digital Commerce, a trade association representing the blockchain industry, likened the use of cryptocurrency in politics to former presidents Barack Obama using smartphone technology and Donald Trump leveraging social media.

“Blockchain technology can increase participation in the political process in a very positive way,” Boring said, noting that is particularly true for younger people and members of minority groups who might be skeptical of traditional monetary methods.

Critics say the potential downside is lack of transparency — not knowing who is ultimately behind the donation.

Beth Rotman, director of the Money in Politics and Ethics Program for the nonpartisan watchdog group Common Cause, worries that traceability is more difficult with cryptocurrency.

“In campaign finance, you want disclosure. You need backup information,” Rotman said. “I know (cryptocurrency) is sexy and signals to people that you’re a hip new candidate, but there has to be a better way to do it than compromise the other parts of the campaign finance system.”

Timothy Massad, a former chairman of the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission, also is concerned about disclosures.

“The danger is that this is still, in my mind, a sector where there is insufficient regulation, particularly on the risk of illicit activity and money laundering,” said Massad, currently a research fellow at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government.

Cryptocurrency donations have been permitted in federal races for years, after the Federal Election Commission allowed their use in a 2014 opinion.

The commission said political committees should value digital currency contributions based on the market value at the time the donation is received. Candidates also must return contributions that come from prohibited sources or exceed contribution limits.

In the 2017-18 election cycle, cryptocurrency donations reported to the Federal Election Commission came to just over \$1.2 million. They have hit about \$500,000 so far in the current cycle, which has months to go before the general election.

Shortly after the Federal Election Commission allowed cryptocurrency donations, then-U.S. Rep. Jared Polis, a Democrat, began soliciting them. Now governor of Colorado, Polis is seeking similar contributions as he runs for reelection, with donations in cryptocurrency capped at \$100.

“Through campaigns accepting cryptocurrency donations, we can show the security, accessibility and the opportunity of using crypto in different types of transactions and also help send the message that Colorado is a home of innovation,” said Amber Miller, Polis’ campaign spokesperson.

As the popularity of digital currencies grows, some states that prohibited cryptocurrency contributions are reassessing.

Jay Wierenga, spokesperson for the California Fair Political Practices Commission, said the agency will reexamine its ban later this year.

“The commission is always seeking to keep up with and get ahead of the changing universe around political activity,” Wierenga said.

Oregon is one of the more innovative states in elections, having been the first to institute vote-by-mail. But in 2019, Oregon banned candidates campaigning for offices within the state from accepting cryptocurrency donations. That was despite former Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, a Republican, saying they should be considered as “a new and innovative way to expand participation.”

Two months after Richardson died of cancer in 2019, the Oregon Legislature closed the door to such donations. As the Senate prepared to vote, state Sen. Jeff Golden, a Democrat, said: “One of the widely shared objectives of this legislative session is to increase the transparency of money in politics, and cryptocurrency tends to go in the opposite direction.”

That feeling isn’t unanimous. One of the few state lawmakers who opposed prohibiting cryptocurrency donations was Republican Rep. Bill Post. He said a lot of people in the Legislature simply didn’t understand it.

“I don’t want (us) to sound like a bunch of old fuddy-duddies here,” he said. “Let’s get up to speed on the 21st century.”

Jesse Grushack, 30, is one of those voters fond of cryptocurrencies and who supports using them for political contributions. The New Yorker donated to the campaign of Democrat Matt West, a fellow cryptocurrency enthusiast who had a failed bid for an Oregon congressional seat this year.

“At this point in American politics, anyone who’s pro-crypto is someone I want to support,” Grushack said.

Kurani, 29, said her embrace of cryptocurrency is more than just a chance to display her tech credentials. It’s also a way to reach those for whom the digital alternatives to U.S. dollars are becoming their legal tender of choice.

She downplays concerns about donor secrecy, saying her campaign converts crypto donations into dollars and pursues the same information — name, address, employer, occupation — that it would for any donor.

“We are really making sure that we can represent American people who are participating with new kinds of digital currency,” she said.

[Michigan attorney general looking into spending by political funds with ties to GOP \(Michigan\)](#)

The state attorney general's office has opened an investigation into whether campaign finance laws were broken by two political funds with ties to Michigan Senate Republicans. The case was referred to the attorney general's office by campaign finance officials over donations made to the ballot campaign to repeal the law that allows Michigan's health director to declare a public health emergency.

The complaint alleges "Michigan! My Michigan!" and "Michigan Citizens for Fiscal Responsibility" were collecting nearly \$2.5 million in donations that were then shared with the Unlock Michigan campaign without making required financial disclosures.

Secretary of State spokesperson Tracy Wimmer said election officials launched an initial investigation after that complaint was filed.

"And in this case the determination was made that, yes, there was likely a Campaign Finance Act violation," Wimmer said. "The department is statutorily obligated to attempt to settle that via a conciliatory agreement. In this case, the parties involved refused to participate in one."

She said that could easily have settled the dispute.

The Michigan Senate's top Republican, Majority Leader Mike Shirkey, [told](#) The Detroit News he is the wrong target. "Though I don't own, manage or control this account, it is pretty clear from my seat this is 100 percent politically motivated," he said. "Surprise!"

Republican election attorney Robert LaBrandt is one of the people who filed the complaint.

He told Michigan Radio a criminal investigation changes the stakes and would allow investigators to trace donations.

"What the Attorney General has the power to do is subpoena the bank records of both these organizations, and I think they'll find that they support the inferences that the Department of State made," he said.

**[Senate leader Shirkey facing campaign finance investigation](#)** (Michigan)

Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey is being accused of collecting campaign contributions for one cause, but then funneling those dollars into other organizations.

The Secretary of State's office has referred this matter to Attorney General Dana Nessel's office, while a spokesperson for Shirkey has denied any wrong doing.

In May of 2021, long time Michigan political insider Robert LaBrant filed an 11 page complaint with the state election bureau in which he accused Shirkey of violating the state campaign finance laws by allegedly funneling money for the 'Unlock Michigan' ballot proposal into other organization.

In the filing, LaBrant alleges that the Shirkey scheme involved the illegal use of dark money on a scale never before seen.

Dark money contributions do not have to be reported to the state and contributors names are not filed either.

A whole host of documents were filed with state election officials, and Michigan Director of Elections Jonathan Brater investigated the complaints and determined there was a violation, and asked the defendants to enter a conciliatory agreement, but the state says the parties "refused to participate."

With that, the Secretary of State's office has now referred the allegations to the Attorney General's office.

A spokesperson for Shirkey dismisses the charges as "baseless accusations" and said they have always complied with the Michigan campaign finance laws.

The attorney involved in the case says Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson is putting politics ahead of the law, and adds there is no reason at all to believe there are any violations.

Backers of Shirkey contend that similar allegations in the past have been dismissed.