



M U L T I S T A T E

[Seattle Foundation cops to eight campaign finance violations, pays a fine](#)

(Washington)

The [Seattle Foundation](#) – the oldest community foundation serving the Pacific Northwest – acknowledged a total of eight violations of campaign disclosure and contribution laws and paid a fine of \$1,000.

According to the [Public Disclosure Commission](#), the complaint alleged the foundation failed to register and report in timely fashion as an incidental committee during the calendar years 2019 and 2020 regarding a \$50,000 contribution by Yes for Transit, a \$50,000 contribution from the Washington Fairness Coalition, and a \$50,000 contribution from Keep Washington Rolling.

Complainant Stefan Sharkansky, a statistician and previously a Washington gadfly for good government, said he thought it was an important victory in that to his knowledge this was the first time the PDC had engaged in an enforcement action per new transparency requirements under the DISCLOSE Act.

[Senate Bill 5991](#) – known as the Democracy Is Strengthened by Casting Light On Spending in Elections Act – went into effect at the beginning of 2019.

Under the law, which is meant to combat so-called dark money in politics, a nonprofit entity may be required to register with the state as an “incidental committee” and disclose the top 10 donors whose contributions aggregate to \$10,000 or more in the calendar year.

Registration is required if the nonprofit expects to make contributions or expenditures that aggregate to at least \$25,000 in any calendar year in Washington state election campaigns, including ballot initiatives.

Sharkansky didn't see any nefarious intent by the Seattle Foundation, which was founded in 1946 and has more than \$1.3 billion in assets.

“I assume they weren’t paying attention,” he said.

The Seattle Foundation agreed to pay the money in April. The Center Square reached out to the organization for a comment on these admitted campaign finance violations, but received no response.

“A small fine is the norm from what I can tell,” Sharkansky said. “That’s how the PDC deals with violators when it’s a first-time violation, and they’re dealing with a new law.”

He surmised Seattle Foundation officials figured staff time and legal fees would be better spent on other things, rather than fighting the PDC, adding this would act as a deterrent to future violations.

“The process is the punishment,” Sharkansky added.

House Minority Leader J.T. Wilcox, who voted against the DISCLOSE Act, spoke to the complex and complicated nature of campaign disclosure and contribution laws.

“There are only a handful of people on each side who understand the rules,” the Yelm Republican said. “It doesn’t stop, obviously, people doing what they want.”

He went on to add, “It only hurts people who want to do good but don’t want to devote their lives to government.”

[City could ban convicted criminals from lobbying as commissioners implement more changes to ordinance](#) (Tallahassee, FL)

The city is poised to make two changes to its lobbyist regulations that could eliminate registration fees and bar convicted criminals from advocating on behalf of clients.

Commissioners will decide whether to repeal the \$25, per client lobbyist registration fee, a cost unique to Tallahassee but used sparingly at the county level across the state, at their next meeting Wednesday.

At an earlier meeting, City Commissioner Dianne Williams-Cox said she would like to see the fee amount increased.

The Tallahassee City Commission meets Wednesday at 3 p.m. on the 2nd floor of City Hall.

Commissioners will also discuss whether to introduce an ordinance that would enact a permanent ban on lobbying for anyone convicted of a corruption-related crime including bribery, theft and honest services fraud.

The potential action Wednesday is the latest in efforts at the city to shore up regulations on lobbying in the hopes of expanding transparency about who is looking to influence elected officials.

The ban on individuals convicted of public corruption related crimes is a wish high on the list of Erwin Jackson.

Jackson, a frequent City Hall critic, [has repeatedly asked commissioners to look at the issue in the wake of an FBI corruption investigation](#) that led to the conviction of former City Commissioner Scott Maddox, local businessman and hotelier J.T. Burnette and the arrest last month of former Tallahassee Mayor Andrew Gillum and his close associate Sharon Lettman-Hicks on charges they funneled campaign contributions to themselves.

Jackson has long contended that Maddox could get out of prison and register as a lobbyist with the city.

At last month's City Commission meeting, Jackson brought the issue up while also handing out T-shirts emblazoned with a photo of Maddox and an adult entertainer that he was pictured with on a [trip to Las Vegas with undercover FBI agents](#). The words "Tallahassee's Next Registered Lobbyist" were written above the photo.

Commissioners will weigh an ordinance that institutes an outright lobbyist registration ban or one with a set timeframe for someone convicted of certain crimes.

The City Attorney's office noted in agenda materials that lobbying is protected under the First Amendment as a redress of grievances, an issue that means any attempt to limit it needed to be narrowly tailored. It also noted that of 15 cities and 10 counties in Florida that were reviewed, none had lobbying bans on the books.

Florida, however, does sets limits on when someone can register as a state lobbyist after being convicted of a felony. Florida requires a person to be released from incarceration and satisfy all court-imposed fines and restitutions and to have his or her civil rights restored before they can register.

In April, commissioners approved changes that allow the city's Independent Ethics Board to quickly dispose of complaints involving unintentional violations or for the board to coordinate an informal disposition to a complaint through a settlement agreement and updates language about misuse of public position. The measure also bars contingency fees – compensation that is dependent on official action – and makes paying or accepting them a first-degree misdemeanor.

Last month, commissioners approved a set of changes to their lobbying ordinance, including eliminating quarterly compensation reports, allowing electronic filings and requiring lobbyists to identify a specific area of interest.

[Georgia Democrats maximize new era of campaign finance](#) (Georgia)

Georgia has entered a new "Wild West" era of campaign finance, and [Stacey Abrams](#) has proven herself to be its most effective user.

Driving the news: Georgia's new "leadership committees" – fundraising entities that aren't subject to limits on state campaign donations – were created by Republicans.

- But Abrams' leadership committee, [One Georgia, has pulled in \\$18.5 million](#), or 3.5x more money than Gov. [Brian Kemp's Georgians First](#), even though hers has been active for less time.

Why it matters: The state [law](#), which Kemp signed last summer, heralded a new era for Georgia campaign strategy. Now, campaign fundraising from wealthy donors is essentially free of traditional constraints.

- Crucially, these limit-free leadership committees are able to coordinate directly with campaigns.

By the numbers: The largest contributors to [Abrams' committee](#) include \$2.5 million from a George Soros-backed group and \$1.5 million from the PAC of the voting rights policy advocacy group Abrams founded, Fair Fight Action.

- In previous election cycles, when donations to campaigns from any committee were limited to \$7,600, a group like Fair Fight would not have been able to directly support an entity controlled by the campaign in an unlimited way.

Now, not only did Fair Fight's PAC make a contribution to One Georgia, but One Georgia is, in turn, [receiving tens of thousands](#) of dollars' worth of Fair Fight staff time for their work on the campaign's committee.

- [Contributors](#) include an array of Hollywood names, including Leonardo DiCaprio, Rita Wilson and Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg, as well as Melinda Gates and national unions including IBEW.

The other side: Kemp's leadership committee [received](#) its biggest contribution directly from Kemp's campaign account, followed by a Kemp-aligned Super PAC and national conservative donor Elizabeth Uihlein. The committee has spent much of its money on advertising and canvassing expenses.

 **Axios' politics reporter Lachlan Markay's thought bubble:** "Abrams' leadership committee success flips the script for political fundraising.

- Nationally, Republicans tend to rely on independent political groups bankrolled by high-dollar donors, while Democrats lean more heavily on "hard" money raised through a robust grassroots fundraising operation.
- The huge out-of-state contributions to Abrams' leadership committee underscore her — and the race's — high national profile."

What they're saying: Republican Senate Majority Leader Mike Dugan, who cosponsored the leadership committee bill, said the volume of Democratic funds isn't surprising. But now those contributions and the coordination between groups, he argues, are easier to see. As he told Axios: "Everybody can see what's in the pot."

- "But it's nice to know and look and see here's exactly what's going on. Here's how the money is flowing from one pot to another," he said.
- Alex Floyd, a spokesman for Abrams' campaign, told Axios in a statement they've known the campaign would "be an uphill battle running against an incumbent governor who gave himself unlimited money to run for reelection. But we are grateful to have supporters from all across our state who are committed to building One Georgia where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, no matter their background, zip code or access to power."

Meanwhile, other new leadership committees, including for the lieutenant governor candidates and the state majority and minority caucuses, have been created as well. But none has raised near as much money as Abrams or Kemp.

[Anaheim Might Reform Campaign Finance to Curb ‘Significant Influence’ From Special Interests](#) (Anaheim, CA)

Tonight, Anaheim City Council members will once again discuss how to limit the influence of special interest groups on policy decisions they make as they face increased public scrutiny following an FBI corruption probe into city hall.

But how strong will those limitations be exactly?

City council members will meet at 5 p.m. today to vote on a proposed campaign finance reform ordinance, which some residents have dubbed the “Clean Up Anaheim Act.”

Council members have discussed the impact of special interests for hours at various meetings following the wake of revelations of an FBI probe that found special interests, like the Chamber of Commerce, heavily influenced the city council’s policy decisions.

In a [criminal complaint](#), FBI agent Brian Adkins described a “covert group of individuals that wielded significant influence over the inner workings of Anaheim’s Government.”

The FBI alleges in a separate [written affidavit](#) the city’s former mayor, Harry Sidhu, rammed through the now canned Angel Stadium land sale and tried to score at least a \$1 million in campaign contributions from the Angels.

Former Anaheim Chamber of Commerce CEO Todd Ament could face up to 73 years in prison after pleading guilty July 1 to two counts of wire fraud, one count of mortgage fraud and cheating on his taxes.

Throughout the criminal complaint, Adkins alleged Ament helped orchestrate policymaking at city hall.

At last month’s meeting, city council members deadlocked 3-3 on a proposal that would have put a 12-month recusal period from voting on an item that benefits a campaign contributor – the proposal also included independent expenditures.

Councilman Steve Faessel called for the proposal to come back with support from Councilmembers Jose Moreno and Avelino Valencia.

But it’s been watered down.

Moreno, who has spearheaded efforts for campaign finance reform, criticized the changes to the proposed ordinance after a reporter asked him about them on Monday.

“This is disappointing and certainly reflective of, in many ways, why the public is very suspect of how the city council and the former mayor were working,” he said. “This certainly needs to be strengthened.”

Moreno also expressed disappointment in Faessel for not informing him of the changes to the proposal.

Faessel did not respond to a request for comment Monday.

Now, much of the proposal doesn't apply to independent expenditures, according to a [city staff report](#).

Independent expenditures typically fund political advertising like mailers and digital marketing, including YouTube ads. It's where millions of special interest dollars are routinely spent by political action committees in Anaheim elections to promote Disneyland area resort-friendly candidates.

“That undermines the entire initiative,” Moreno said in a Monday phone interview. “The big money that influences Anaheim's politics is independent expenditures and PAC dollars that are often promised to campaign candidates and or incumbents for reelection in return for support on certain policies.”

Moreno said it is not the \$2,000 contributions that have undue influence on politics in Anaheim.

“It's the ability of the Chamber of Commerce and Disney and SOAR and the Orange County Business Council and other corporate special interest lobbies that pull their money together to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars that then gets promised to candidates if they support their agenda,” he said.

In the 2020 elections, the Disney-funded Support Our Anaheim Resort (SOAR) political action committee spent \$1.5 million through independent expenditures to help promote Jose Diaz, Faessel and Valencia.

All three easily won their elections.

It followed a similar spending pattern seen in 2016 and 2018, where SOAR heavily backed resort-friendly candidates who eventually became the City Council majority after 2018.

Council members would also not be allowed to accept contributions within a three month time period from people that have been impacted by a decision elected officials made on the dais under the proposed ordinance.

A previous version of the ordinance made the blackout period a year long instead of three months.

Moreno said he agreed with Faessel's suggestion to drop it to six months at the previous meeting and criticized the newly proposed three month time period.

"This, again, does not seem to fulfill the intent, the spirit and the actual efforts to deal with how campaign finance dollars have an undue influence on our city council members' decision making process," he said.

That's not all that has been changed in the proposed ordinance, according to a [city staff report](#).

Unlike previous versions, the ordinance would not change the city contribution limits or establish a limited fundraising period after elections are over.

"To remove the fundraising calendar — that you can fundraise year round, just sustains the culture of pay to play politics, which is at the heart of what this ordinance was trying to get at," Moreno said.

In 2019, Sidhu was able to pay off a \$100,000 debt to himself for his failed state Assembly bid through fundraisers held by Ament and the Chamber of Commerce.

Under the proposed ordinance, council members would still be required to recuse themselves from voting on any action that would impact a campaign contributor who donated more than \$250 to their campaign.

Now that [Sidhu has resigned](#) in light of the probe, the remaining council members who initially supported the Angel Stadium deal and often voted alongside the former mayor are facing increased criticism from residents for taking campaign money from the same people as Sidhu.

This includes groups like [Anaheim's Chamber of Commerce](#), [The Angels](#) and [SOAR](#).

But council members are having a hard time agreeing what changes and limitations they want to put on campaign contributions despite pressure from residents in support of reform.

At the same time, council members and officials are also struggling to conduct their own probe into city hall with outside investigators that still need to be hired in order to uncover the extent of the alleged corruption in Anaheim.

Councilmembers Gloria Ma'ae, O'Neil, and Diaz were the dissenting votes on the campaign finance reform proposal last month, with Diaz expressing reluctance to change a system that helped him win his election in 2020.

Diaz along with O'Neil, Faessel and Valencia were all heavily supported by resort-industry interests in their respective city council campaigns.

[Ma'ae](#), who was appointed, used to be part of the advisory committee for SOAR, Disney's main political spending vehicle in Anaheim.

On the same night Sidhu's resignation went into effect, [O'Neil announced that he's returned some campaign contributions](#) from entities like the chamber.

At the June 21 meeting, O'Neil said it was more of a transparency issue the city could address by strengthening the campaign finance reporting requirements.

Meanwhile, residents – many of whom had been calling out council well before the FBI revealed their investigation – have taken to the [streets](#) and shown up to council meetings in support of reform.

A news conference is scheduled to be held on the steps of Anaheim City Hall at 4 p.m. today, when The Clean Up Anaheim Coalition, a new nonpartisan group, plans to call on the city council to pass a campaign finance reform ordinance.

“The recent scandal and FBI investigation leading to the resignation of Mayor Sidhu, the collapse of the Angel Stadium Sale, and the plea deal of Chamber CEO Todd Ament, is just the tip of the iceberg showing this city's corruption and domination by special interests,” reads a news release from the group.

“Three Council Members remain resistant to reform, and hope the storm will blow over so they can continue with ‘business as usual.’”

The group also said it plans to show up at Disneyland’s gates every Saturday to call on Disney to stop funding council elections and support campaign finance reform.

“The idea now is to keep them on the ropes and perhaps take them down,” said Mike Robbins, whose group, the People Homeless Task Force, is part of the Coalition.

“We still have city council members that are sitting there that took a ton of money from the Chamber of Commerce and SOAR, which is one of the biggest contributors, which is yet to be indicted by the FBI, but they’re all tied together,” he said in a Monday phone interview.

Robbins said the goal is to get a new council that will act on issues like increasing affordable housing – something many residents have been fighting for.

“What it will change is that the special interest might say, well maybe we’re not going to put that much money into it,” said Robbins about an ordinance. “It certainly can make them think twice about putting up a million dollars or hundreds of thousands of dollars for each candidate.”

The Coalition also includes the Orange County Communities Organized for Responsible Development (OCCORD) as well as the Kennedy Commission, according to the news release.

Lupe Ramirez, a Rancho La Paz mobile home park resident and member of their homeowner association, is also expected to speak at the press conference.

Ramirez, along with other residents, had spearheaded an effort to get the Anaheim City Council to create a rent control policy for residents back in 2019 as park residents faced rent spikes after the park was bought but the council majority ignored them.

“What we tried to do was try to get Sidhu to help us when we first got our increases of \$300 and \$400 a month when a predatory buyer bought our mobile home park, and all the seniors in this park were on fixed income and he did absolutely nothing,” Ramirez said in a Monday phone interview.

They turned to state legislators and eventually ended up with a rent control law for their park.

She said had there been a strong campaign finance policy in place, the council would have passed a rent control ordinance.

Most council members received campaign contributions from John Saunders, who bought Rancho La Paz.

“The reason it’s important to have the campaign finance reform is that every single person except for Moreno took money from John Saunders, the same one who was making all the seniors in Anaheim homeless,” Ramirez said.

“It was a definite pay for play kind of thing that was going on.”

'Green energy' initiative leader gets 120 days in jail for false campaign finance report (Ohio)

A Franklin County judge described the [ongoing effort to put a "green energy" initiative on the Columbus ballot](#) as an illegitimate attempt to steal taxpayer money when he sentenced its leader Tuesday to 120 days in jail for filing a false campaign finance report in 2019.

Franklin County Common Pleas Judge Chris M. Brown also sentenced John A. Clark Jr., 50, of the Near East Side, to pay a \$2,500 fine, work 250 hours of community service and five years of probation.

"I'm specifically going to ask the community service be through the Columbus Parks Department so you can work with the people you were trying to steal money from. You'll work in programs that would've been shut down had you been successful," Brown said.

What were Columbus 'green energy' ballot initiatives about?

Clark has led multiple petition drives in recent years to get a "green energy" initiative put on the Columbus ballot that, if any had passed, would have diverted more than \$40 million of taxpayer money from the city budget toward ProEnergy Ohio LLC, a limited partnership group led by Clark.

After a back-and-forth with the city council and the courts, a version of the initiative that would have redirected \$87 million to ProEnergy Ohio made [it onto the ballot last November. It was soundly defeated.](#)

A Franklin County jury found Clark — who also has gone by John Clarke — [guilty on May 16 of one count of election falsification](#), a fifth-degree felony.

The jury found Clark not guilty on two other charges: a second count of election falsification and one count of tampering with government records, a third-degree felony. The jury was unable to reach a verdict on a second count of tampering with government records.

William Ireland II, one of Clark's defense attorneys, said they will appeal the sentence, which they feel was overly harsh.

"We are shocked at this sentence on a family man who has worked studiously for clean energy efforts here in Ohio," Ireland said. "The entire initiative had a blueprint. The prosecution repeatedly mischaracterized the nature of the clean energy initiative."

Clark's attorneys characterized the crime as an honest mistake for which Clark has taken responsibility.

The charge Clark was found guilty of relates to false information provided on a campaign finance report filed with the city of Columbus' campaign finance office on Aug. 18, 2019. This was in connection with a [2019 petition drive for a ballot measure](#) that would have redirected \$57 million of Columbus' budget to ProEnergy Ohio.

Prosecutors said investigators found that five people listed on the 2019 report — one who was listed as contributing \$13,000 and the other four listed as contributing \$10,000 each — gave nothing at all.

'This is theft,' judge says

"This was attempted theft of millions from the taxpayer," said Joseph Gibson Jr., a special prosecutor on the case.

Judge Brown agreed: "What you're trying to do is you're asking to have the city taxpayers finance this venture that is bare bones at best. And to do that, you're filing these false campaign reports to make it look like this was a serious issue. Intent does matter. ...This is clearly something that is not a legitimate political proposition. This is theft."

Before sentencing, Brown asked Clark to explain how the initiative would have worked if it passed. The group has never been very specific as to how exactly the money it wants the city to give it would be used, who would benefit, and who is behind the effort.

Clark, audibly nervous, attempted to explain how his group would have worked with the NY Green Bank, a New York state entity, to give subsidies to Columbus electricity customers who switch to a green-energy provider.

Brown called it an ineffective elevator pitch.

"You don't go into a bank and ask for \$57 million and then say, 'I don't have a plan yet. Just give me the money, I'll control it all,'" Brown said.

At this, Clark tried to interrupt the judge, saying, "I had agreements." Clark's lawyers shushed Clark.

