



M U L T I S T A T E

[ComEd to pay \\$200 million fine in alleged bribery scheme as feds say Illinois speaker's allies got jobs, contracts](#)

ComEd is paying a \$200 million criminal fine as part of a federal investigation into a "years-long bribery scheme" involving jobs, contracts and payments to allies of Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan, the U.S. Attorney's office in Chicago announced Friday.

Madigan, a Southwest Side Democrat and the nation's long-serving speaker, has not been charged with any wrongdoing. Madigan confirmed in a statement that on Friday morning, his offices were served subpoenas asking for documents related to his job recommendations, among other things.

"(The speaker) has never made a legislative decision with improper motives and has engaged in no wrongdoing here. Any claim to the contrary is unfounded," read a statement from Madigan's political operation.

Madigan plans to cooperate with the request for documents. "The speaker has never helped someone find a job with the expectation that the person would not be asked to perform work by their employer, nor did he ever expect to provide anything to a prospective employer if it should choose to hire a person he recommended" the statement read.

Prosecutors alleged that ComEd "admitted that its efforts to influence and reward the high-level elected official" included legislation that affected the regulatory process used to determine the electricity rates ComEd charged its customers.

At a news conference, U.S. Attorney John Lausch said the filing "speaks volumes about the nature of the very stubborn public corruption problem we have here in Illinois."

"The admitted facts detail a nearly decade-long corruption scheme involving top management at a large public utility, leaders of state government, consultants and several others inside and outside of government. In two words, it's not good," he added.

Prosecutors described the alleged scheme.

"The company admitted that it arranged for jobs and vendor subcontracts for Public Official A's political allies and workers even in instances where those people performed little or no work that they were purportedly hired by ComEd to perform," the U.S. Attorney's office said in a statement.

In a criminal filing, prosecutors say Public Official A was the House speaker, which is Madigan. The veteran 13th Ward politician's associates received \$1.32 million from 2011-2019, prosecutors said.

Politicians reacted Friday after the major federal announcement. At an unrelated news conference in Waukegan, Democratic Gov. J.B. Pritzker said he was "deeply troubled and frankly I'm furious" about the reports of the federal case involving ComEd and Madigan.

"The speaker has a lot that he needs to answer for - to authorities, to investigators and most importantly to the people of Illinois," Pritzker said. "If these allegations of wrongdoing by the speaker are true, there is no question that he will have betrayed the public trust and he must resign."

Pritzker urged Madigan "to fully cooperate with the investigation and answer all questions as quickly as possible."

"When I think about the possibility of people committing these kinds of wrongdoings, I think people who are in public service need to live up to the integrity of the job they were asked to do," he said.

A criminal complaint filed Friday charges ComEd with one count of bribery. Under a deferred prosecution agreement, prosecutors will drop the charge if the utility cooperates with authorities and abides by certain practices.

Prosecutors put a value of \$150 million on the legislative benefits ComEd received. That included a 2011 bill in which "ComEd was able to more reliably determine rates it could charge customers" and a 2016 renewal of a regulatory law that governs how ComEd does business.

U.S. Attorney John Lausch called the \$200 million penalty the largest criminal fine in the history of the Northern District of Illinois.

In a statement, ComEd's parent company, Exelon, said it said it had cleaned up its lobbying practices and noted it had pledged to fully cooperate with the investigation.

In an interview with the Tribune, Exelon CEO Christopher M. Crane added, "We take this seriously and we corrected it. It should never have happened and it won't happen again." He said that he believed that everyone who "orchestrated any of that behavior" had left ComEd.

The agreement with federal prosecutors says ComEd can't seek a tax deduction in relation to the fine and can't recoup it through "surcharges, fees or any other charges to customers." Crane said the Exelon would give ComEd the money to pay the fine, and then ComEd would pay Exelon back from its profits.

The federal filing says authorities could have fined ComEd between \$240 million and \$480 million, but the utility got a "discount" off the bottom of that range for "substantial remediation and cooperation." Half the money is due in a month and the other half in three months.

The ComEd charge and fine come more than a year after federal authorities raided the homes of several Madigan allies.

The Tribune first reported last December that federal authorities have asked questions about Madigan and his political operation as part of an ongoing investigation, according to four people who have been interviewed.

The sources, all of whom requested anonymity, said FBI agents and prosecutors asked about connections between Commonwealth Edison lobbyists and Madigan, lobbyists giving contracts to people tied to the speaker, and city, state and suburban government jobs held by his associates.

They also said authorities had numerous questions about the speaker's relationship and dealings with longtime confidant Michael McClain, a former ComEd lobbyist.

In October, the Tribune reported that the federal investigation into ComEd's lobbying activities centers on whether the utility giant hired politically connected lobbyists to curry favor with lawmakers in exchange for favorable action at the Illinois Capitol.

As part of the investigation, authorities were scrutinizing certain ComEd executives and have zeroed in on payments through the company's vast network of consultants to some individuals

to seemingly circumvent lobbying disclosure rules, a source said. Some of the people who wound up being paid seemed to have done little actual work, the source added.

The federal investigation into ComEd's lobbying efforts put a spotlight on one of the most exclusive rites of passage in Springfield: Democratic lawmakers and top staffers to Speaker Madigan leaving state government to push the utility giant's agenda in the halls of the Capitol.

In 2019 alone, the lobbying team for ComEd and parent company Exelon included nine former Democratic lawmakers, including two recent members of Madigan's leadership team and the daughter of a former Cook County Democratic chairman. Also on the list was a former Madigan political director and two of the speaker's former legal counsels.

ComEd and Exelon enjoyed considerable success at the Capitol during the last decade, persuading the General Assembly to approve a smart-grid overhaul and a bailout of the nuclear power plants in downstate Clinton and the Quad Cities with consumers helping foot the bill.

Those wins took place under Pramaggiore, who led ComEd and was elevated to CEO of Exelon Utilities. The utility employed an army of lobbyists and sprinkled millions of dollars in campaign contributions to legislators, with the companies consistently among the top corporate donors in Illinois.

Pramaggiore spokesman Bryan Locke declined to comment on whether she is cooperating with federal authorities. "Ms. Pramaggiore has done nothing wrong and any inference to the contrary is misguided and false," Locke said in a statement.

"During her tenure, she and other current and former ComEd and Exelon executives received, evaluated and granted many requests to provide appropriate and valuable services to the companies, none of which constitute unlawful activity," Locke wrote.

Madigan, 78, is the nation's longest-serving state House speaker, a post he has held since 1983 with the exception of two years when Republicans took control of the House in the mid-1990s. Known as the "Velvet Hammer," the Southwest Side lawmaker has been in the legislature since 1971 and is regarded as one of, if not the, most powerful politicians in the state with the single-handed ability to control the fate of legislation in the General Assembly.

Moreover, Madigan serves as the chairman of the Illinois Democratic Party and was recently named as a four-year member of the Democratic National Committee.

In early November last year, Madigan was asked about the federal investigation and its ties to current and former allies and operatives and declared: "I am not the target of anything."

The nexus of the federal investigation into ComEd and Madigan's operation is McClain, a close friend and adviser to the House speaker and a former lawmaker and Quincy attorney who retired as a high-profile lobbyist from the utility in 2016 but continued collecting six-figure payments from the company.

Federal agents raided McClain's home in Quincy in mid-May of last year, which turned out to be the same month ComEd said his payments stopped. The Tribune also first reported in November that authorities secretly recorded McClain's phone calls.

The federal filing also refers to "CEO-1," which is Pramaggiore. The former Exelon Utilities CEO abruptly retired in October as the probe went on. Her exit came less than a week after the company acknowledged receiving a second subpoena linked to the investigation.

Pramaggiore was key to ComEd's success over the years in Springfield. Exelon and ComEd have one of the largest lobbying contingents at the Capitol and historically have been among the biggest campaign contributors to state lawmakers. An attempt to reach Pramaggiore's attorney was unsuccessful Friday.

She herself has been a prolific donor to Illinois politicians, giving more than \$240,000 dating back to 2005. State campaign finance records show Pramaggiore's giving included \$16,500 to funds controlled by embattled Alderman Edward Burke and \$20,250 to Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle.

Pramaggiore also gave \$10,000 to the campaign of former Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who invited Pramaggiore and her husband, Michael Harrington, on a junket to Rome for the elevation of then-Chicago Archbishop Blase Cupich to cardinal. At the time, employees of ComEd and Exelon had made more than \$183,000 in contributions supporting Emanuel, the Tribune reported.

The federal paperwork involving Madigan threatens to roil the fall election season in Illinois, which has become a reliably blue state where the veteran House speaker has used his fundraising power and map-making ability to generate veto-proof Democratic majorities in the state House and Senate.

For years, Illinois Republicans have sought to put their focus on Madigan to try to blame him for decades of state ills but have largely been unsuccessful in using it to motivate voters.

Only days ago, House Republican leader Jim Durkin of Western Springs led GOP colleagues in attacking Madigan for failing to include ethics legislation as part of the pandemic-shortened legislative session in May.

Madigan told reporters in Springfield that ethics reforms were under discussion but sought to turn the tables on Republicans.

"I would suggest that the Republicans that want to pursue ethics reform go out to Washington, follow up on President Trump's promise to drain the swamp," Madigan said Wednesday, according to the State Journal-Register of Springfield.

Illinois Republican Chair Tim Schneider issued a statement saying, "Our hearts go out to the people of Illinois who are once again left yearning for elected leaders who work for them, not for themselves. The Democratic culture of corruption in Illinois must come to an end."

[K Street revenue jumps in second quarter on coronavirus lobbying](#)

Lobbying activity boomed in the second quarter of 2020 as the scramble for coronavirus relief prompted companies, trade associations and local governments to turn to K Street for help.

Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) reports released Monday showed that from April through June, Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck LLP was the highest grossing firm and reported a record \$12.9 million in revenue after bringing in just over \$11 million in the first quarter.

"There continues to be a significant increase in the business community on what Washington is doing. A lot of interest is implementation of the CARES Act and a lot of looking forward on what Congress and the government might do in terms of a next relief package. There still remains significant need for assistance for businesses," Marc Lampkin, Brownstein's government relations department chair, told The Hill.

Brownstein brought in roughly 29 percent more than the second quarter of 2019. Akin Gump brought in roughly 22 percent more than the second quarter of 2019.

"The level of activity that we have seen over the last six months is unprecedented, evidenced by back-to-back quarters of more than \$12 million in LDA revenue, which are our strongest-ever. A major driver of this work has of course been the ongoing pandemic, which continues to have an enormous effect on the economy and touches pretty much every sector and industry," said Hunter Bates, head of the public law and policy practice at Akin Gump, which was the highest grossing firm in the first quarter.

Akin Gump reported more than \$12.4 million in the second quarter, a slight decrease from \$12.6 million the previous three months. The firm has brought in \$10 million or more for the past five quarters.

Lobbying for coronavirus relief was just getting started in the first quarter and picked up steam in March during negotiations for the record \$2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. President Trump signed the legislation into law on March 27.

Since then, trade associations and governments have been lobbying Congress for changes to programs, extended relief and consideration of their priorities for the upcoming coronavirus relief package.

BGR Group reported just under \$8 million in revenue for the second quarter, up from over \$7.8 million. The firm has had a 9 percent increase in revenue since the second quarter of 2019.

“BGR’s strong LDA numbers are largely based on steady growth in our bipartisan health care and financial services practices. We are grateful for the confidence of our clients who are making difficult financial decisions during these turbulent times,” said Loren Monroe, principal at BGR.

Holland & Knight reported under \$7.2 million, up from \$6.4 million in the first quarter. Squire Patton Boggs reported just under \$6.7 million, the same as its revenue in the first quarter.

Midsize firms also saw an increase in revenue during the second quarter.

Ballard Partners, a Trump-connected firm, reported \$6.5 million, while Invariant, run by Democratic operative Heather Podesta, reported a little less than \$5.1 million.

K&L Gates reported \$5.1 million, up from nearly \$4.7 million in revenue in the first quarter.

“[Coronavirus] triggered an unprecedented level of activity not seen in modern history,” said Darrell Conner, government affairs counselor and co-leader of K&L Gates's policy practice. “It has been very robust thus far, the level of engagement during both periods has just been off the charts.”

Forbes Tate reported \$5 million in the second quarter, an increase from \$4.3 million in the previous three months. Mehlman Castagnetti Rosen & Thomas brought in nearly \$4.8 million, an increase from a little less than \$4.6 million in the first quarter.

Hogan Lovells reported more than \$3.1 million, up from just under \$3 million in the first quarter, and CGCN reported about \$2 million, another increase from just under \$1.8 million in the first quarter.

[If Texas Capitol remains closed, lobbyists say special interests will thrive away from public view](#)

Legislation is debated and voted on inside the Texas Capitol in Austin every other year. But it's two blocks down the road where the sausage is really made.

At the corner of Ninth Street and Congress Avenue, towering buildings house dozens of lobbyists who gladly welcome lawmakers to discuss their clients' policy and financial goals. With the state's biennial legislative session approaching, and the Texas Capitol still closed to the public due to the coronavirus pandemic, some lobbyists say special interests could have an even greater role in the coming year.

"Everything happens (at Ninth and Congress)," said Bill Miller, a veteran Austin lobbyist who represents professional sports franchises like the Houston Texans and Houston Astros in discussions with state health officials about returning to the field. "If I can't be there or you can't be there, we're still going to talk but it's going to be less evident."

"People are going to wonder more about what's going on and how it's working."

During a normal legislative session, lawmakers frequently collide with lobbyists, journalists, and members of the public in the halls of the Capitol, though that seems unlikely in the upcoming legislative session given the current risks associated with coronavirus.

KXAN requested statements from Gov. Greg Abbott and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick about plans for public participation in the upcoming legislative session but has not received a response.

A Shrinking Pie

The fight for funding among state agencies is expected to be fierce in the next legislative session.

Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar [released a revised budget estimate for the fiscal year 2021](#) on Friday which included a budget deficit of \$4.6 billion. The shortfall, he said, was caused by an economic slowdown from the coronavirus pandemic and struggling oil prices.

In May, state leaders directed many agencies to [slash budgets by 5%](#) with shortfalls expected from the pandemic.

Public Safety vs. Public Participation

Jason Sabo, an Austin lobbyist representing non-profit organizations, said state leaders will have to balance public safety with public participation in the upcoming legislative session.

“(The Texas Capitol is) the only place in the state where everybody comes together and if we lose that our political culture changes,” Sabo said. “If we lose the public participation in public policy, I assure you, lobbyists like me won’t be going anywhere.”

“We will still be here regardless of whether not you’re here.”

Standing committees typically begin meeting in the spring before a legislative session but much of that work has been limited during the pandemic. State agencies will submit legislative appropriation requests in August.

Both Miller and Sabo believe the democratic process benefits from public participation. It’s unclear whether participation will occur at the Texas Capitol in 2021 or be limited to the offices of lobbyists, like their own, a couple of blocks down the road.

[Ohio House Speaker Arrested In Connection With \\$60 Million Bribery Scheme](#)

FBI agents arrested Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder on Tuesday morning at his rural farm. Householder was taken into custody in connection with a \$60 million bribery scheme allegedly involving state officials and associates.

Four others were also arrested: former Ohio Republican Party Chairman Matt Borges, Householder adviser Jeffrey Longstreth and lobbyists Neil Clark and Juan Cespedes.

The charges are linked to a [controversial law](#) passed last year that bailed out two nuclear power plants in the state while gutting subsidies for renewable energy and energy efficiency.

The federal complaint describes a years-long bribery campaign to build support for Householder's bid to become House speaker and then pass the nuclear bailout law with his help.

Householder won the speakership in January 2019, and the bailout passed in July 2019. It went [into effect](#) in October.

Householder, a Republican, represents a district east of Columbus. He first began serving in the Ohio House in 1997 and was speaker from 2001 to 2004, when he stepped down because of term limits. He then worked as Perry County auditor before returning to the House in 2017.

Householder, Longstreth, Clark, Borges and Cespedes were each charged with "conspiracy to participate, directly or indirectly, in the conduct of an enterprise's affairs through a pattern of racketeering activity." The charge carries a maximum of 20 years in prison.

The criminal complaint also charges Generation Now, which it describes as "a 501(c)(4) entity secretly controlled by Householder."

Federal prosecutors say that between March 2017 and March 2020, entities related to an unnamed company — but that would appear to be nuclear power company FirstEnergy Solutions — paid approximately \$60 million to Householder's Generation Now.

"Make no mistake, this is Larry Householder's 501 (c)(4)," U.S. Attorney David DeVillers told reporters on Tuesday. The money from the scheme was spent to the detriment of other political candidates and the people of Ohio, DeVillers said.

Members of Householder's enterprise used those payments for their own personal benefit and to gain support for Householder's bid to become speaker, prosecutors say.

"In the Spring and Fall of 2018, the Enterprise spent millions in Company A money to support House candidates involved in primary and general elections whom the Enterprise believed both would vote for Householder as Speaker and, ultimately, would follow his lead as Speaker and vote for bailout legislation for Company A," the complaint states.

In exchange for payments, prosecutors say, Householder and his associates helped pass House Bill 6, then worked to ensure it went into effect by defeating a ballot initiative.

The plan worked. The complaint says Householder-backed candidates that benefited from money from Generation Now helped to elect Householder as the Speaker. House Bill 6 was introduced three months into his term — legislation worth \$1.3 billion to Company A.

Regular payments to Householder's secret company from Company A began in March 2017, a couple months after he took a trip on Company A's private jet, according to the federal

complaint. But the payments got much bigger after the legislation was introduced: In May 2019, while the bill was pending before lawmakers, Company A allegedly wired \$8 million to Generation Now.

Householder and his associates used some of the money on mailers and advertising to support the legislation, and some of it for their own benefit, prosecutors say.

The bill was passed by [a vote of 51-38](#). After the bill was signed into law by Gov. Mike DeWine, a campaign began to organize a ballot initiative to overturn the law. Company A-controlled accounts responded by wiring \$38 million to Householder's company between July and October 2019.

In total, Company A allegedly paid the Householder enterprise \$60 million over a three-year period, in exchange for the billion-dollar-bailout.

Prosecutors say the payments were "akin to bags of cash – unlike campaign or PAC contributions, they were not regulated, not reported, not subject to public scrutiny—and the Enterprise freely spent the bribe payments to further the Enterprise's political interests and to enrich themselves."

Prosecutors say that while there are no charges yet against Company A, the investigation is ongoing.

FirstEnergy Solutions, the nuclear power plant company, was renamed Energy Harbor after it emerged from Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings. The Akron-based company employs about 2,600 people, according to financial disclosures from February.

"We are reviewing the complaint and will cooperate fully with the government's investigation," Energy Harbor said in a statement to NPR.

At a Tuesday court hearing, the defendants were ordered to surrender any firearms and to remain within the Southern District of Ohio. They are barred from communicating with anyone who may become a witness in the trial, including the other men charged Tuesday. Those with passports were ordered to surrender them. Preliminary hearings are set for early August.

Householder has faced scrutiny before. In 2004, there were reports of his engaging in alleged corrupt activity, though he was never charged.

Gov. Mike DeWine called for Householder's resignation after the charges were announced on Tuesday afternoon.

"I am deeply concerned about the allegations of wrongdoing issued today by the U.S. Attorney's Office," DeWine [tweeted](#). "Because of the nature of these charges, it will be impossible for Speaker Householder to effectively lead the Ohio House of Representatives; therefore, I am calling on Speaker Householder to resign immediately. This is a sad day for Ohio."

Last year's nuclear bailout law [tacked on a charge](#) to residents' power bills, sending \$150 million a year to the nuclear power plants. They are owned by the company Energy Harbor, which was previously known as FirstEnergy Solutions.

The law also included a subsidy for two coal plants.

NPR member station WOSU [reported](#) that FirstEnergy [contributed](#) more than \$150,000 to Ohio House Republicans in the run-up to the 2018 election — including over \$25,000 in donations to Householder's campaign.

"According to the state lobbyist database, Energy Harbor is the only client listed for [Cespedes](#)," WOSU reported. "Borges also worked as a [lobbyist](#) for FirstEnergy Solutions, while Longstreth is connected to Generation Now, which [campaigned against](#) the bailout referendum."

The American Wind Energy Association called for an inquiry into the circumstances of House Bill 6's passage.

"It now appears that the passage of this bill was not just against the will of the people, but also may have involved serious and possibly criminal impropriety," said Andrew Gohn, the association's Eastern State Affairs Director, in a statement. "We call for a full examination of the circumstances surrounding this attack on clean energy and for Gov. DeWine and the legislature to pause implementation of HB 6 and ultimately repeal this harmful and regressive legislation."

[**PAC money to Page from lobbyist under FBI scrutiny draws interest in St. Louis County executive race**](#)

St. Louis County Executive Sam Page last year accepted \$2,049 in campaign contributions from a political action committee tied to a Jefferson City lobbyist and company under FBI investigation in Kansas City.

The contribution came the month after Page lent his support to a low-income housing project in Dellwood that listed Gardner Capital as its developer, and whose financial backers are the Centene Charitable Foundation and Sterling Bank, according to [documents filed](#) with the Missouri Housing Development Commission.

The project developers were seeking \$615,000 in annual low-income housing tax credits from the commission, and ultimately won approval in December 2019, according to a list of greenlighted [projects](#).

Gardner Capital, Sterling Bank and Centene Corp. all retain the same lobbyist, Steve Tilley, who also is a former Republican Missouri House speaker from Perryville and long-time adviser to Gov. Mike Parson.

[The Kansas City Star](#) reported on Nov. 26 that the FBI was investigating Gardner Capital and Tilley, among others, in a possible pay-to-play scheme surrounding projects approved by the Independence, Missouri, mayor and City Council.

The article also mentions Tilley's Missouri C PAC as a vehicle for donations to the Independence mayor before a vote that would benefit Gardner Capital.

A spokeswoman for Page, one of four Democrats running in the Aug. 4 primary for county executive, denied any sort of pay-to-play scheme connected to the county executive's support of the Dellwood project. It is in the 9900 block of West Florissant Avenue, at the site of an AutoZone that was destroyed during the Ferguson unrest in 2014.

She did not respond to questions about whether Page knew of the publicly reported FBI investigation at the time of the donations, Dec. 19, and whether it was appropriate to accept money from a Republican-affiliated PAC under FBI scrutiny.

"No, there is neither pay nor play," said Page campaign spokeswoman Michele Hornish.

She said no one lobbied Page or the county executive's office for his support of the development.

Still, the fact that some of the same players involved in the Dellwood project are involved in Independence raised at least some concern among Page's opponents in next month's Democratic primary.

“It sounds to me like the kind of thing that there has to be further consideration of for people to ascertain how — whether it’s appropriate or not,” said Mark Mantovani, one of Page’s challengers next month.

“I do not want to cast any kinds of aspersions at this point,” he said.

St. Louis County Assessor Jake Zimmerman was less reticent.

“It’s probably not an accident that that money seems to be changing hands through mysterious unnamed committees,” Zimmerman said. “And I hope there’s a full accounting.”

Jamie Tolliver, the fourth Democrat in the race, said she had tried to focus her campaign on community needs rather than fundraising.

“It is perceived that in politics when you do receive larger endorsements from people, one way or the other, it’s like you owe them a favor,” she said.

The winner of the Democratic primary will face the winner of the Republican primary in November, either Ed Golterman or Paul Berry III. Libertarian Theo Brown Sr. and Green Party candidate Elizabeth Mitchell are also running.

Independence

Gardner Capital, which is listed as the developer of the Dellwood project in state documents, faces scrutiny in Independence over a solar farm project the city approved in 2017, the Star reported on Nov. 26.

The company in 2017 contributed to a political action committee, Missouri C PAC, which then contributed to the campaign account of Independence Mayor Eileen Weir.

In a closed City Council meeting, the mayor and council approved the purchase of a 94-acre golf course that would be converted to a solar farm, which Gardner Capital would help operate, the Star reported.

The newspaper has reported that Tilley, who has lobbied for Gardner Capital since 2013, is a focus of the FBI investigation.

Money moved in a similar way last year, with some of it ending up in Page’s campaign account.

Mark Gardner, chairman of the board of Gardner Capital Inc., was the only person to contribute to the group Conservative Leaders of Missouri in 2019, according to Missouri Ethics Commission records.

On Sept. 25, he gave \$25,000 to Conservative Leaders of Missouri.

On Dec. 9, Conservative Leaders of Missouri contributed \$2,049 to Missouri C PAC.

Ten days later, on Dec. 19, Missouri C PAC contributed \$1,000 to Page for Missouri. That same day, the C PAC contributed \$1,049.11 as an in-kind contribution to the Page campaign.

“Tilley in-kind food and drinks for one fundraiser for Dr. Page,” Hornish said. “Dr. Page knows Tilley, and has since their time in the General Assembly.”

“Page for Missouri has held at least 30 separate fundraising events,” she added.

The Missouri C PAC made 23 other contributions in 2019, and Page was the only candidate running for local office in Missouri to receive checks, [records show](#).

Tilley, Mark Gardner and Mike Gardner, the CEO and president of Gardner Capital, did not respond to requests for comment.

Dellwood project

In a Nov. 7 letter to the Missouri Housing Development Commission, Page said a 44-unit mixed income senior housing complex, the Urban League Senior Housing at Dellwood, was St. Louis County’s first funding priority for the year. He gave six other projects a lower priority.

Page’s office defends the project, saying the ranked list went through a review process and that investment from the state is necessary for the low-income area.

Chris Krehmeyer, president and CEO of Beyond Housing, whose proposed Pagedale development was ranked No. 2 on the county list but didn’t receive funding, said support from local officials helps the state commission decide which projects to fund, but that a high ranking doesn’t guarantee a project will be approved.

“We’ve been doing this so long,” he said. “I think we’ve done more tax credit projects than just about anybody in the St. Louis region ... and we’ve rarely been ranked No. 1.”

Doug Moore, spokesman for Page’s office, said the county has used the same evaluation process for such projects for several years, and that Page thought it was appropriate to rank the projects.

“Staff in the Planning Department and the Office of Community Development were the first point of contact with developers,” he said in an email.

Moore said the planning department “collected and assembled project information” and invited developers to present their proposals to the county.

“The staff also organized a tour of the project for county executive, county council and MHDC staffers,” he said. “The Community Development staff sent recommendations to County Executive staff, who then worked with the County Executive to make the final decision.”

He said the project is located in the “Promise Zone,” which is “in the heart of West Florissant Avenue, an area economically challenged since August 2014.”

“This project demonstrates the County’s ongoing commitment to the redevelopment of the area,” Moore said. “The project is also supported by several strong partners in the community who we believe need our support to continue the redevelopment momentum in the community.”

[North Dakota Ethics Commission requests attorney general opinion; bill drafts in works for 2021](#)

North Dakota's Ethics Commission is asking for an attorney general opinion amid its rulemaking process.

Commission Executive Director David Thiele said the five-member board is seeking clarification on "our authority to expand on the definition of 'lobbyist' as it relates to gifts." A time frame for receiving an opinion is unclear.

North Dakota voters in 2018 approved the Ethics Commission in a constitutional initiative that also included a lobbyist gift prohibition that takes effect in January. Related rules are to be adopted by then. The 2019 Legislature passed Republican majority leaders' framework for implementing the measure.

"Regarding gifts, when we looked at the statute and the direction we were going, the statute that the Legislature passed last session didn't cover all of the people that we have jurisdiction over," Thiele said. "We believed it was too narrow, so in our gift rule, we were going to expand on that, so that's the clarification we're looking at from the attorney general."

The commission already has rolled out its website, adopted complaint procedure rules, and established a confidential complaint hotline and email address. It's in the midst of its rulemaking.

To date, the commission has declined all three complaints it has received.

The board had to adjourn its meeting early on Thursday due to technical difficulties. The next meeting is Aug. 12, when discussion will resume on the [four-page draft gift rules](#), which the commissions plans to finalize before the Legislature convenes in January.

The Legislature's interim Judiciary Committee on Wednesday reviewed several bill drafts related to the Ethics Commission that could advance for the 2021 session.

Rep. Karla Rose Hanson, D-Fargo, walked the committee through her [two bill drafts](#) that "address the friction points" between constitutional and new statutory language passed in 2019 related to the Ethics Commission. Since its first meetings last fall, the new board has discussed apparent conflicts between duties and definitions in state law and the constitution.

Hanson, who is seeking a second term, said her proposals would "strengthen our new Ethics Commission's ability to do its job and strengthen North Dakota's campaign finance and lobbyist rules."

House Speaker Larry Klemin, R-Bismarck, who chairs the committee, introduced [a bill draft](#) that would allow lawmakers, lobbyists and candidates for state and legislative office to request advisory opinions from the Ethics Commission. The bill is modeled after State Bar Association of North Dakota procedures.

"It's kind of looking for guidance where there's a question that's not really answered directly by the statute or a rule or the constitution, and it's a matter of interpretation and you're going to the Ethics Commission in advance of doing something," Klemin said.

Thiele also led the committee through [commission-proposed legislation](#) that includes complaint procedures and Klemin's proposal.

The committee will take action on the lawmakers' bill drafts at its next meeting in September. Other bills could come during the 2021 Legislature.