



[Gov. Kathy Hochul’s daughter-in-law is top lobbyist at pharma firm that has sought to influence NY lawmakers](#) (New York)

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul’s daughter-in-law is a top lobbyist at a pharmaceutical firm that has been actively trying to influence state and federal lawmakers.

Hochul took over as governor Tuesday following Andrew Cuomo’s resignation over a sexual harassment scandal.

During her first address as governor Tuesday, Hochul said her administration would address ethics issues.

“Today, I’m directing an overhaul of state government policies on sexual harassment and ethics, starting with requiring that all training be done live, instead of allowing people to click their way through a class,” Hochul said in the speech, which she delivered soon after this story was first published.

Christina Hochul, who is married to the governor’s son, William Hochul III, is a director of federal policy at Biogen. The company develops therapies that aim to combat Alzheimer’s disease, multiple sclerosis and spinal muscular atrophy. Its corporate headquarters is in Massachusetts.

The company has been involved with a recent lobbying campaign in New York. State lobbying disclosure reports show that between January and June, Biogen paid \$20,000 for Harter Secrest & Emery to engage with state lawmakers on multiple bills.

The disclosure report shows that the lobbyists Biogen hired targeted leaders in the state Senate on “potential legislation related to Alzheimer’s disease.”

The report does not list Christina Hochul as a lobbyist working the campaign. Yet if Biogen continues to have business in the state, it could create an ethics hurdle the new governor will have to face as she settles into the job.

A spokeswoman for Biogen told CNBC that Christina Hochul does not lobby at the New York state level and will not do so. The representative did not rule out the company itself engaging with New York state lawmakers while Kathy Hochul is governor.

“Christina Hochul works on federal health policy for Biogen; she has not, does not, and will not engage in state-level government affairs in New York,” Allison Parks, the Biogen spokeswoman, said in an email Tuesday. “Biogen remains committed to engaging with government officials in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations, as well as our own internal ethical and compliance principles.”

Christina Hochul did not respond to requests for comment.

The governor’s daughter-in-law is listed on federal lobbying disclosure reports, showing that she and her team actively tried to influence members of Congress and those within President Joe Biden’s administration.

Hochul’s daughter-in-law isn’t the only close family member creating optics problems for the new governor.

Hochul’s husband, William Hochul, is a former federal prosecutor who works as senior vice president and general counsel at gambling and hospitality giant Delaware North. [The Daily Beast noted that Hochul’s administration](#) will have authority over key regulators that have ties to the gambling industry, including the New York State Gaming Commission.

At the time, Hochul’s team said there is “already a recusal process in place” as it relates to her husband’s work for Delaware North. The [Buffalo News](#) previously reported that William Hochul will remain at Delaware North despite his wife becoming governor.

A spokesman for the governor’s office told CNBC that Delaware North has set up a firewall that prevents Bill Hochul from having any involvement in state business, restricts his compensation from New York State-related businesses and establishes a strict monitoring of any communications with Delaware North to ensure compliance.

The spokesman did not answer questions on possible ethics issues pertaining to Christina Hochul’s company conducting business in the state.

Blair Horner, the executive director of the New York Public Interest Research Group Fund, told CNBC in an email Tuesday that Hochul should request an advisory opinion from the Joint Commission on Public Ethics on how to handle potential familial conflicts of interest.

“In the 21st Century, it’s not surprising that spouses and offspring have their own careers that can impact a public official,” Horner wrote. “The governor should request from the Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE) a formal advisory opinion on how to keep separate the work of the state from her family members who are lobbyists. Under the law, JCOPE cannot make their opinions public, but the governor can — and should.”

Ethics experts have already called on Hochul to strengthen the Executive Chamber’s stance on possible ethics dilemmas following former Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s nearly 12-year tenure running the state.

“It is beyond time to reform the state’s ethics oversight system, shore up and fully follow FOIL [Freedom of Information] laws, and increase transparency about conflicts of interest,” Susan Lerner, the executive director of government watchdog Common Cause/New York, said in a [previous statement](#). “We are confident that incoming Governor Kathy Hochul sees the importance of these common-sense issues and understands the role they play in restoring integrity to the Executive Office and confidence in our state government.”

Lerner spoke as part of a coalition of organizations calling on Hochul to make key reforms while governor.

Hochul’s daughter-in-law has been a key lobbyist at the federal level. Lobbying disclosure reports for the first half of 2021 show that Christina Hochul lobbied for Biogen in the House, the Senate and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The lobbying reports note Hochul and her Biogen colleagues focused on issues pertaining to Medicare and Medicaid. The disclosure reports say Hochul and her team had “discussions regarding Medicaid 340B drug discount program” and a focus on “reducing out-of-pocket costs for biosimilars in Medicare Part B.”

Prior to Biogen, Hochul lobbied for the McManus Group, a health-care consulting firm, according to data from the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics. There, CRP says, Hochul represented pharmaceutical firms such as Amgen, Allergan and Merck.

[Republican Lobbyist Barry Bennett Comes Under DOJ Scrutiny](#) (US)

Federal prosecutors are investigating Barry Bennett, a Republican lobbyist and onetime unpaid campaign adviser to former President Donald Trump, over allegations that he secretly set up and funded a U.S.-based advocacy group without disclosing its ties to the government of Qatar, according to people familiar with the matter.

Mr. Bennett founded his lobbying firm, Avenue Strategies, soon after Mr. Trump's election and signed on to represent Qatar a few months later, according to the firm's federal lobbying disclosure records. The tiny Gulf nation, which hosts a large U.S. Air Force base, was at the time embroiled in a diplomatic and political conflict with its regional rivals Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The Embassy of Qatar paid Mr. Bennett's firm about \$3 million total between July 2017 and July 2018 for work that included developing "a long-term plan to create closer ties between the United States and the State of Qatar," according to the records.

Prosecutors have presented evidence to a grand jury alleging that Mr. Bennett set up and funded a political group called Yemen Crisis Watch, according to the people familiar with the matter, as a way to embarrass Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E., which at the time were enmeshed in [a military campaign against Houthi rebels in Yemen](#). That war has since left thousands dead and fueled what the United Nations described in 2019 as the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Yemen Crisis Watch never registered with the U.S. government, as it would have been obligated to do under the Foreign Agents Registration Act if representing foreign interests. Mr. Bennett didn't report that he set up and funded the organization, a review of FARA filings shows. Qatar gave Avenue Strategies \$250,000 in October 2017 earmarked "for use in supporting the relief of humanitarian suffering in Yemen," according to a lobbying document.

Mr. Bennett declined to comment. A spokesman for the Justice Department declined to comment. The Qatar Embassy didn't respond to a request to comment.

Yemen Crisis Watch had an active social-media presence in late 2017. A prominent evangelical minister and a Kansas Republican politician took up its cause, [placing op-eds in a Washington newspaper](#) and participating in a congressional briefing in late December. On Twitter, the group said it intended to "promote awareness of the atrocities and humanitarian crisis unfolding in Yemen."

Jeff Colyer, then the lieutenant governor of Kansas, and Robert Schuller, a pastor and namesake son of the prominent televangelist who founded the Crystal Cathedral in Orange County, Calif.,

spoke at the congressional briefing. A few days later, Avenue Strategies made two \$2,000 contributions to Mr. Colyer's 2018 gubernatorial campaign, according to campaign finance reports.

Mr. Colyer, who since served as Kansas governor for a year and is running for another term in that position, said in a statement: "I have volunteered my time for decades for medical and humanitarian purposes to help those in war zones. There is no accusation that I did anything improper here."

Mr. Schuller, who [wrote two opinion pieces on Yemen](#) for the Washington Examiner, declined to comment.

Mr. Bennett tapped Ying Ma, a Republican consultant, to help with the effort, according to documents and the people familiar with the matter. (Ms. Ma had previously been a contributor to The Wall Street Journal's opinion section and its China Real Time blog.)

The Justice Department has made stepped-up enforcement of the laws against foreign influence-peddling a priority in the aftermath of the 2016 election, which saw a major Russian-led influence operation directed against the U.S. presidential campaign. A number of high-profile lawyers, lobbyists and political donors have faced allegations that they tried to shape U.S. policy on behalf of foreign interests without disclosing those links.

Last month, for example, Tom Barrack, a real-estate investor and longtime ally of Mr. Trump, was arrested on [charges of acting as an unregistered agent for the U.A.E.](#), to which he has pleaded not guilty. Among the allegations are that Mr. Barrack relayed messages between U.A.E. officials and the White House in 2017 about that country's dispute with Qatar, including about a potential plan by the U.S. government to convene a summit at Camp David, which was opposed by U.A.E. officials.

And in 2019, President Barack Obama's onetime White House counsel Greg Craig was charged and later acquitted at trial of [failing to properly disclose his work for Ukraine](#).

Mr. Bennett was Republican Ben Carson's 2016 presidential campaign manager and later became an outside adviser to Mr. Trump. He then formed Avenue Strategies with other prominent Republican consultants.

Mr. Bennett announced in February he was closing Avenue Strategies and abandoning his downtown office, citing the coronavirus and protests in Washington.

Ms. Ma, who had worked on the Yemen Crisis Watch efforts, sued Mr. Bennett in March 2019, accusing him of reneging on an agreement to make her a partner in Avenue Strategies in exchange for referrals. Ms. Ma, who also worked as a deputy communications director for the Carson campaign, has sought more than \$300,000 in the lawsuit. Ms. Ma won a default judgment against Mr. Bennett this year for failing to obey a court order. Ms. Ma didn't respond to a request for comment through an attorney.

Mr. Bennett has said his overall portfolio for Qatar was to develop the country's presence in Trump-era Washington. According to Avenue Strategies' federal lobbying disclosure forms, one of the firm's first moves was to request a DOJ investigation of the Saudi American Public Relation Affairs Committee, which Mr. Bennett argued improperly failed to register as a foreign agent.

By September 2017, Avenue Strategies filed a public update to its contract with Qatar stating that the embassy would boost its fee from \$150,000 per month to \$500,000 per month between September and December of that year. The new contract didn't give a reason for the increased payments.

Avenue's work for Qatar appears to have begun ramping down around the one-year mark. The firm noted an \$85,000 payment from Qatar on July 3, 2018, according to a lobbying filing. In later filings, Avenue said it continued to work for Qatar but didn't document any additional payments.

In March, [Saudi Arabia unveiled a proposal for a cease-fire](#) aimed at disentangling itself from Yemen's civil war, as rebel forces pressed an offensive and the Biden administration sought to extricate the U.S. from the six-year-old conflict.

[Redistricting lobbying laws violated, new complaint alleges](#) (Colorado)

A complaint filed today with the Colorado Secretary of State accuses a group of secretly-funded political operatives of illegally lobbying the state's redistricting commissioners.

The complaint, filed by former Democratic state lawmaker Stanley Matsunaka, accuses former Colorado House Speaker Frank McNulty and former Colorado House and Senate member Greg Brophy, both Republicans, of lobbying the state's independent redistricting commissioners, without formally registering as lobbyists. It also accuses Republican political consultant Alan Philp, along with McNulty and Brophy, of failing to report payment for lobbying activity.

All three are paid by a 501c4 nonprofit group called Colorado Neighborhood Coalition to work on redistricting. Because of the 501c4 status of the group, it's not required to disclose where the group's money came from. When 501c4 nonprofit groups spend in elections, they're called "dark money" groups.

At issue is the transparency required for the once-each-decade political remapping process. In 2018 Colorado voters, like other states' voters in recent years, approved a new independent redistricting commission system, which is being used for the first time this year and which came with the promise of making the process more public and open. Among a raft of provisions included in the voter-approved system designed to achieve those goals are requirements that anyone who lobbies the redistricting commissioners must register and report their activity.

Of the three named in the complain, only Philp has registered as a lobbying for the group. The complaint argues that McNulty and Brophy should also be registered as lobbyists for the organization, and that failing to do so, along with failing to file payment disclosures constitutes a violation of the lobbying disclosure laws established for the independent redistricting commission system.

"This is just another attempt by partisan Democrats to suppress involvement in a public process," McNulty wrote in an email in response to the complaint. "I am not surprised that they'd dust off an old partisan like Matsunaka to intimidate public participation in a process that the Democrats cannot control."

So far, Philp has reported being paid \$2,000 in April by the group. But the complaint accuses him of failing to file more payment disclosures, citing Philp's July and August testimony and letters sent to the commission, as well as a private meeting with a congressional redistricting commissioner in May. The complaint goes through each interaction Philp had with the commissioners at public hearing, in addition to providing as exhibits emails that reference a lunch meeting with Alan Philp, Frank McNulty, Republican Congressional Redistricting Commission Jason Kelly and Alamosa County's Republican County Administrator, Gigi Dennis on May 19.

The complaint claims that Philp needed to report all of his monthly payments from Colorado Neighborhood Coalition individually, not just once in April, and that every interaction with commissioners needed to be disclosed individually, with dollar amounts.

Philp said in response to the complaint that he believes he complied with advice he said he was given by the Secretary of State's office in April. Philp said they told him that specifying on a single report that he was being paid "\$2,000 per month" was sufficient disclosure. But such advice would mean that searching for Alan Philp's name in the Secretary of State's online

lobbying search tool, shows a summary page that displays only \$2,000 total, even though Philp has been paid several times that amount.