



M U L T I S T A T E

Louisiana cap on lobbying spending edges up again, to \$65 (Louisiana)

The cap for how much Louisiana's lobbyists can spend to wine and dine public officials is edging higher Thursday.

With the start of the new state budget year, the limit lobbyists can spend on food and drink for state lawmakers, other elected officials and public employees is growing from \$63 to \$65 per person, per occasion.

The Louisiana Board of Ethics, which oversees the lobbying spending restrictions, made the adjustment at a meeting in March, to take effect with the latest state fiscal year.

The lobbying cap enacted more than a decade ago started with a \$50 limit. But the 2008 law allows annual adjustments tied to increases in the federal Consumer Price Index for food and beverages. That index rose 3.8% in the last year, according to the ethics board.

Former Georgia Senate leader, influential Statehouse lobbyist Pete Robinson dies (Georgia)

Lobbyists crowd the third floor of the Capitol during General Assembly sessions, trying to pick up bits of information while waiting for lawmakers to come out of their chambers so they can get a word or two with them.

Pete Robinson was often not among them because he did a lot of his work behind the scenes. When he'd show up in the final few days of a session, you knew something was about to happen. Some deal was going to be cut, some legislation was going to rise or fall.

It almost always did.

Robinson, a onetime rising star in the Georgia Senate who gave it up to become one of the state's most influential lobbyists and political fundraisers of the past 25 years, died early Thursday at age 66.

Robinson had received a diagnosis of bile duct cancer a few weeks ago.

"I just hate to hear it," said Wayne Garner, a longtime Capitol lobbyist who served with Robinson in the Georgia Senate. "He was just a really neat, smart guy. He didn't have a mean bone in his body. He worked well with Democrats and Republicans. He got along with everybody on both sides of the aisle."

Robinson, a lawyer, was elected to the Georgia House in 1984 to represent his home, Columbus.

Six years later, he was elected to the Georgia Senate, where he rose quickly. He first served as an assistant floor leader for Gov. Zell Miller, and later he became Senate majority leader and president pro tempore, the second-highest post in the chamber.

But Robinson gave up a promising political career in 1994. Members of the General Assembly are paid a small part-time salary, and he said serving was taking a financial toll on his family, a common refrain among lawmakers.

"He left at the height of his game, he left to take care of his family," said Rep. Calvin Smyre, D-Columbus, the dean of the General Assembly who worked closely with Robinson. "Very few people will voluntarily leave political office at the heights Pete Robinson did."

Robinson used what he'd learned to return to the Capitol as a lobbyist. He built a huge client list of many of the state's most powerful companies, and he founded Troutman Sanders Strategies. He left to join King & Spalding in January 2019.

Over the years, he represented financial services companies Synovus and CitiGroup, managed care giants Aetna and Cigna, AFLAC insurance, AT&T, BellSouth, Coca-Cola, private prison business CoreCivic, Delta Air Lines, General Electric, General Motors, Georgia Power, drugmaker Merck, Microsoft, the Southern Co., SunTrust Bank, Verizon Wireless and dozens of other companies and associations.

As is the case with a number of top lobbyists, Robinson was also a major fundraiser for state leaders. While he served in the General Assembly as a Democrat, he helped elect governors from both parties.

He worked in Atlanta, but he kept a home in Columbus and was active in the local community.

Gov. Brian Kemp remembered Robinson as “a great friend and a dedicated public servant to the Columbus area and our state.”

“Pete’s decades of leadership in his local community, the General Assembly and various roles since, played a significant role in making Georgia a better place for all who call it home,” the governor said.

Smyre, who had recently spoken with Robinson, said: “He was a dear friend. He was instrumental in the state and instrumental in Columbus.”

Georgia House Speaker David Ralston, R-Blue Ridge, first met Robinson in 1993. Ralston had just been elected to the state Senate.

“During all the years since, he was a trusted friend and a confidante,” Ralston said. “Pete’s influence was stamped all over this state, although in a quiet way. For someone who enjoyed the people and the processes of the political arena, he never sought the limelight.

“Many Georgians, including myself, will miss this great leader. His passing leaves a void which will never be filled.”