

MULTISTATE

Lobbying | Tracking | Compliance | Consulting

County officials vacationed at vendor's Florida beach condo

Two Iowa county treasurers recently vacationed with a businessman they have supported for a lucrative tax website contract, staying at his Florida beach property for free in an apparent violation of state ethics law.

Dubuque County Treasurer Eric Stierman and Winneshiek County Treasurer Wayne Walter confirmed the trip to The Associated Press, highlighting a long, cozy and ethically questionable relationship between county officials and an important vendor.

The longtime elected officials flew to Florida last November. There they met Marc Carr, founder and CEO of GovTech Services, which hosts [the website](#) used by most Iowa counties to collect property and motor vehicle taxes. For three nights, the trio stayed at a Florida home with Stierman's brother-in-law. For two nights, they stayed at Carr's condominium in St. Pete Beach, a resort town on a barrier island near St. Petersburg.

Stierman and Walter denied any wrongdoing, describing Carr as a friend with whom they had previously vacationed in Florida.

"Just three buddies going on a trip," said Stierman, who acknowledged sending Christmas cards featuring a photo of the men to other county officials.

But the treasurers have long wielded their influence to benefit Carr's company, which has collected millions since 2011 under a contract with the Iowa County Treasurers eGovernment Alliance.

Stierman was a board member for the alliance when the contract — now worth \$460,000 annually — was awarded. Both have served as alliance president and have known Carr since he was Adams County treasurer in the 1990s.

Since 2014, Stierman has appeared in an [online testimonial](#) praising GovTech's work as "wonderful" and Carr's customer service.

"Would I hesitate to ever go with them again? No, I would not. I'm extremely happy with the service that we get from them," he says. "Marc calls you back or he answers the phone directly and your problems are taken care of."

Building on his exclusive contract with 88 of Iowa's 99 counties, Carr, 48, has expanded [his business](#) into other states.

He said that he believed the use of his condo by county treasurers was legal but that he'd ask a state panel for an opinion.

State Auditor Rob Sand said Wednesday that his office recently opened an investigation into the matter.

The Iowa [ethics law](#) bans public employees from accepting gifts and favors worth \$3 or more from "restricted donors," who include vendors, lobbyists and others affected by their official actions. Vendors are barred from offering gifts, and the law doesn't contain an exception for friends.

"Even where there is a genuine personal friendship, the acceptance of personal benefits from those who could gain advantage by influencing official actions raises suspicions that tend to undermine the public trust," it warns.

St. Pete Beach condos rent anywhere from \$100 to \$200 a night in November. Carr and his wife, who live in Glenwood, Iowa, purchased the condo in 2015. Stierman said he had stayed there once previously. Walter said the stay last November was his only but that the trio previously vacationed together in Daytona Beach.

Stierman and Walter suggested that the free lodging did not amount to a gift because they accepted it in exchange for the free stay that Carr received from Stierman's brother-in-law. Walter later claimed that he bought drinks and "other stuff" for Carr during the vacation to offset the free lodging, adding that he paid cash and couldn't remember details.

[Georgia bill would delay fundraising reports at key time for lawmakers](#)

The Thursday before the 2019 General Assembly session opened in January, the House Republican leaders' political action committee held a fundraiser at the stately Capital City Club in downtown Atlanta, taking in about \$168,000 from big-money businesses and lobbyists hoping to persuade lawmakers to give them tax breaks or help them smite their competitors or reduce government oversight.

Some of the same people showed up at the same location that week at a fundraiser for incoming Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan, who raised \$186,000, mostly from special interests looking to get on his good side when he became the president of the Georgia Senate the following Monday, Jan. 14.

In all, statewide elected officials, lawmakers, their caucus PACs and the major state parties collected about \$1.5 million in the two weeks before the start of the session, some taking in checks less than 24 hours before the General Assembly was gaveled in for a new session.

Lobbyists make the rounds of such fundraisers days before each legislative session, but a bill the Georgia Senate passed last week would change state law so that — every other year — the public wouldn't know who contributed until months after the session ends.

The legislation, [Senate Bill 213](#), would eliminate the disclosure state officials and lawmakers have to make around Jan. 31 each year that shows contributions in the days leading up to the start of the session.

Those contributions would instead be reported in July in non-election years, such as 2019. So if an industry contributed \$100,000 to lawmakers and top state officials or their PACs the day before the session, and then won approval for a multimillion-dollar tax break, the public wouldn't know until after the governor signed it into law.

House members have already raised objections about that provision in SB 213, and a committee studying the measure will likely amend the bill to keep the early disclosure for lawmakers. Even some lobbyists think it's a bad idea to delay when the public can find out which special interests contributed to House and Senate leaders at pre-session fundraisers.

"If you are looking for more transparency, doing away with some of the reporting is not accomplishing that goal," said Ronnie Chance, a former Senate leader who represents Dish Network, MARTA and others.

Where did the idea come from?

While the bill is sponsored by [state Sen. Bill Heath, R-Bremen](#), the recommendations came from the state ethics commission, formally known as the Georgia Government Transparency & Campaign Finance Commission. The commission is charged with collecting campaign finance, vendor gift and lobbying expenditure reports; registering lobbyists; issuing advisory opinions; and dispensing penalties for violations.

Bethany Whetzel, deputy executive secretary of the commission, said the bill was designed to clear up confusion in reporting requirements and fix a loophole in the law that allows some PACS — funds generally created to support certain businesses or political interests — to avoid having to disclose what they spend.

Whetzel said her agency has also seen problems with local officials not filing the reports for the Jan. 1-31 fundraising period because they didn't know it was required. The reports were instituted in 2014 specifically to make sure the pre-session fundraising was reported while the session was going on. The reporting period is essentially meaningless for local government officials.

But Whetzel said, "The way the law is written, it's a one-size-fits-all approach."

So the commission recommended doing away with the early session report in non-election years. Lawmakers are up for election every two years. They would still have to file the report in election years.

The bill passed the Senate without opposition on March 7, or Crossover Day, one of the busiest days of the session because it's the deadline when legislation typically needs to pass at least one chamber to have a good chance of becoming law.

Neill Herring, a veteran Sierra Club lobbyist, has long been critical of the pre-session fundraising, and he said the bill would allow "essentially secret funding by lobbyists behind the backs of voters, the press and the bills' opponents."

“The natural inclination of the class of elected officials tends powerfully toward secrecy regarding their own behavior,” he said.

Pre-session fundraising is a big business

What’s not a big secret is that statewide elected officials and lawmakers take in huge amounts of money each January right before the session. While lobbyists can buy lawmakers lunch or dinner during the session, they can’t donate to their campaigns.

So the early January fundraisers are the last chance lobbyists have to show legislators some campaign love before they start voting on bills.

Chance, who once served as Senate majority leader, remembers going to pre-session events where he had trouble escaping an elevator because so many lobbyists and business types wanted to give him checks.

Lobbyists tell stories of having to dodge cars on Peachtree Street running between pre-session fundraisers, where they were expected to deliver contributions to multiple lawmakers.

As is the case every year, many of the biggest donors have big-money legislation before the General Assembly.

Several of the top donors this year were involved in the [annual fight over the state’s certificate of need law](#). Right now a private business that wants to open a hospital or expand a health care operation must obtain a certificate from the state declaring that the service is really needed.

The most prominent supporter of changing the law to allow more competition, Cancer Treatment Centers of America, which wants to expand its business in Georgia, contributed about \$70,000 in the weeks leading up the session. That included \$25,000 to the Georgia House Republican Trust — the chamber’s leadership PAC — and \$2,600 each to [House Speaker David Ralston, R-Blue Ridge](#), [House Speaker Pro Tem Jan Jones, R-Milton](#), [House Majority Leader Jon Burns, R-Newington](#), and [Senate President Pro Tem Butch Miller, R-Gainesville](#).

Two of the leading opponents of the bill, the Georgia Hospital Association and Georgia Alliance of Community Hospitals, gave about \$50,000 and \$20,000, respectively, to state officials and lawmakers in the same period, often to the same people as CTCA. The Hospital Association also contributed \$25,000 to Gov. Brian Kemp’s inaugural committee. Some hospitals also spent big — one estimate reached \$2 million — on an advertising campaign to defeat the bill that would change the certificate of need law.

The measure [failed to win approval in the House](#).

Delta Air Lines’ PAC gave about \$15,000, spreading the money to about two-dozen lawmakers, including House and Senate leaders. Delta [has already won approval in the House for a 20-year suspension of the state tax on jet fuel](#), which is expected to save airlines \$35 million to \$40 million a year. As the dominant air carrier in Georgia, Delta would reap the lion’s share of that savings. The measure — [House Bill 447](#) — is awaiting a vote in the Senate, but it has Kemp’s backing.

Auto dealers are traditionally among the biggest donors to state candidates, and the new-car dealers lobby contributed more than \$55,000 to state officials in the first two weeks of January, including \$6,600, each, to Kemp and Duncan. The new-car dealers lobby backed a bill to lower the tax rate Georgians pay on cars and force used cars to be taxed based on the sales price, rather than the lower book value. New cars are taxed on the sales price. [House Bill 365](#), which [the new- and used-car dealers lobbies agreed to after years of costly battles at the Capitol](#), has passed the House and awaits action in the Senate.

Several lobbyists and businesses backing and opposing legislation [that would have put a tax on digital video, books, music and video games, including streaming services such as Netflix](#), gave big as well. The measure was designed to subsidize construction of internet lines in economically depressed rural parts of the state. It also would have eliminated franchise fees for cable TV and landline phones, and sales taxes on landline phones, cellphones and broadband equipment.

The cable industry and AT&T, the largest force in the telecommunications industry at the Georgia Capitol, backed the proposal. AT&T, which asked for changes so as not to affect parts of its businesses that would have seen new taxes, gave \$33,000 to more than two-dozen lawmakers in the weeks leading up to the session. The Cable Association gave \$12,000, a majority of which went to Duncan, Miller and Ralston.

The bill failed to get out of the state House.

None of the fundraising would go away if the original version of SB 213 passed. It would just be hidden in non-election years until after the session.

[State Rep. Bruce Williamson, R-Monroe](#), sits on the committee considering the legislation in the House and is treasurer of the House Republican Trust, which raised the \$168,000 four days before the session. The trust raises money to help Republican House candidates at election time, and virtually all of its checks come from Capitol special interests and other lawmakers.

Williamson said he doesn't want to see the Jan. 31 filing go away.

"I like the Jan. 31 reporting. I think the transparency is better," Williamson said. He'd rather see the law changed so that political action committees have to file reports if they spend anything on candidates, which would eliminate the loophole the ethics commission wants to close. Currently, they don't have to file reports until they spend \$25,000.

Chance's client, Dish Network, opposed the broadband bill because it would have added taxes for satellite services. The former lawmaker said he received dozens of invitations to attend pre-session fundraisers for state officials, lawmakers and PACs this year. He said some lobbyists feel like they have to attend the pre-session events and give money.

He doesn't. His invitations wound up in the trash can, he said.

[Boeing a major lobbying player on Capitol Hill](#)

Boeing, one of the world's largest aircraft manufacturers, also is one of the biggest players in the Washington influence game -- spending millions to lobby Congress and the executive branch each year.

Last year, Boeing's spending on lobbying topped \$15.1 million, federal records show. The company ranked No. 10 in lobbying activity that year in Washington, according to a tally by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics. That falls way behind the big trade groups such as the US Chamber of Commerce and the American Hospital Association, but ahead of some of its competitors for the government's lucrative defense business, such as Lockheed Martin.

Boeing has also deployed dozens of lobbyists, many working for outside firms, to help shape government policy.

Lobbying ties

Further cementing the company's Capitol Hill ties, a former Boeing lobbyist now serves as staff director on the Senate's Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. The committee on Tuesday announced it would hold a hearing at a future date about aviation safety, following Sunday's deadly crash of a Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft on a flight from Ethiopia to Kenya.

John Keast, a former principal at Cornerstone Government Affairs, lobbied the House and Senate last year on Boeing's behalf, according to lobbying reports filed with the Senate. Boeing spent \$200,000 last year with Cornerstone, a tiny fraction of its overall lobbying bill.

Keast has long-standing ties to the committee's chairman, GOP Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi. He previously served as Wicker's chief of staff in the US House of Representatives and managed Wicker's first successful House campaign, in 1994.

Wicker's aides indicated that Keast would work on aviation safety issues for the panel because his advocacy on behalf of Boeing focused narrowly on defense matters.

"While at Cornerstone Government Affairs, John Keast lobbied for a variety of clients including Boeing on defense issues only," Wicker spokeswoman Brianna Manzelli said in a statement to CNN.

She said Wicker "has personally been actively engaged" with the leadership of the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board on Sunday's accident.

More than two dozen airlines around the globe have grounded the 737 MAX 8 since Sunday's accident, the second crash of the model in six months. Federal authorities have not ordered the planes grounded in the United States. In a conversation on Tuesday with President Donald Trump, Boeing CEO Dennis Muilenburg "reiterated" to the President the company's position that the aircraft is safe, a Boeing spokesman said.

Speaking to CNN on Tuesday, Wicker said he "absolutely" would fly on the MAX 8.

When asked whether Congress should weigh in on whether the planes should be grounded, he said: "We have professionals tasked with that job, and I wouldn't interfere with that."

Millions in contributions

Boeing's political action committee and its employees also donate millions to federal candidates in each election cycle. More than \$4.5 million went to congressional candidates and other political committees in the 2018 midterms alone, according to the center's data. Boeing divided its political giving to candidates roughly evenly between Democrats and Republicans.

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Washington, was the biggest recipient of money that Boeing's PAC and its employees directed to a candidate, totaling a little more than \$54,000 in the midterms, according to the center's data.

Cantwell, who was elected to a fourth term last November, serves as the top Democrat on the Senate's commerce and transportation panel. Boeing has roots and operations in Seattle.

Wicker received \$10,000 from Boeing's PAC in the midterms, records show.

The company's political action committee also donated the maximum \$10,000 to Sen. Dianne Feinstein in the midterms, Federal Election Commission data show. This week, the California Democrat called on Boeing to ground all of its 737 MAX 8 aircraft until an investigation into Sunday's crash is complete.

In the 2016 presidential election, Boeing employees donated more heavily to Democrat Hillary Clinton than to Trump, who largely financed his first political campaign with small-dollar contributions and his own money.

But the aircraft giant made up for the gap after the election with a \$1 million donation to Trump's inaugural committee.

Federal law bars corporations from donating directly to candidates, but they can give to inaugural committees and face no legal limits on the amount they can contribute to support the festivities surrounding a presidential swearing-in.

Boeing had donated \$300,000 to the committee tied to President Barack Obama's second inauguration. Obama chose not to accept corporate money for his first inauguration in 2009.

[Lobbyists weigh in on disclosure, ban on spending proposals](#)

As the House of Representatives geared up for a late night on the floor last Monday, a group of lobbyists were asked to provide dinner for legislators: green chile cheeseburgers from Lota Burger.

A few days later, on Thursday, Rep. Jane Powdrell-Culbert, R-Albuquerque, thanked a group of "lobbyists, about 40" who paid for what's now an annual tradition — a catered lunch for House members from her extended family's restaurant, Powdrell's barbeque. The mood on the floor was jovial.

To some, the displays did not quite square with the lawmakers' vote the previous Sunday to ban lobbyist spending on lawmakers during a legislative session.

The ban was tacked onto a lobbyist transparency bill by Republican minority leader Jim Townsend of Artesia with minimal debate, and the bill passed unanimously. As amended, [House Bill 131](#) would upend the culture of the Roundhouse, where lobbyists and their employers spend hundreds of thousands of dollars each session paying for receptions, banquets, committee and other more intimate meals, not to mention ski passes and occasional haircuts.

But things are not always what they seem in the Roundhouse. Longtime political players have repeatedly described the amendment to New Mexico In Depth as a way to kill the bill. A “poison pill” is what it’s called around the Roundhouse.

Before, HB 131 was a simple measure, one that would bring significantly more transparency to the lawmaking process of legislative sessions in which a slew of bills important to various constituencies are passed, often under the radar.

As the bill navigated through the House, legislators lobbed concerns in its path. A concern repeatedly cited was that it might overburden or hurt lobbyists who lawmakers rely on, and in some cases are their friends.

New Mexico In Depth talked to numerous full-time lobbyists about how the reporting requirement, and now the ban on spending, would affect them.

None of the lobbyists NMID talked with seemed particularly thrilled about the idea of more reporting. But no one voiced particular opposition, either. One produced a list he was carrying around, amid stacks of heavily notated pages of legislation.

But when it comes to spending during the session, all of the lobbyists NMID spoke with had opinions, in some cases, passionate ones. The outpouring of opinions, in fact, has been remarkable.

Those who spoke on the record largely verbalized what a larger group of lobbyists have said over the past week, who sought out New Mexico In Depth to talk about HB 131 but did not want to be quoted.

In a nutshell, lobbyists are hit up a lot to spend money on lawmakers during the session, they say. A big part of the reason is that New Mexico lawmakers are unpaid.

Longtime lobbyist [J.D. Bullington](#), who contributed to the Lota Burger cheeseburger meal, said such meals are part of the fabric of Roundhouse culture. And they may be an important source of funding for many unpaid legislators who receive \$161 a day for lodging and food during each year’s session.

But not all lobbyists have big expense accounts, they’re paying for meals out of their own pocket.

HB 131’s core intent: Greater transparency

Long a bringer of transparency bills, [Sen. Jeff Steinborn](#), Democrat from Las Cruces, likes to say that the most effective way to pass a bill is to keep it simple, with just one idea at a time.

HB 131 initially was straightforward: require [registered lobbyists](#) to report to the Secretary of State two weeks after the end of a session all the bills on which they spent substantial time and effort lobbying lawmakers, and their position on the bills if they took one.

This is the third time Steinborn has sponsored this particular effort to increase lobbyist reporting, joined this year by House sponsors, [Dayan Hochman-Vigil](#) and [Liz Thomson](#), Democrats of Albuquerque. The House bill now has just one committee assignment in the Senate standing in the way of a full Senate vote.

“I don’t have a problem filing an additional report saying here’s all the clients I registered to represent and here are the bills we took an interest in and tried to influence the outcome. I don’t see the big deal in that,” said Bullington, who has been lobbying on behalf of numerous clients for 23 years and has long made extensive campaign contributions and expenditures on lawmakers.

[Linda Siegle](#), who’s been lobbying for various clients since 1992, said she might have to keep more notes, but that generally speaking, “I know which bills I’m working to kill and which I’m working to pass. We all know that.”

Steinborn acknowledged in an interview that a “major dimension” was added to HB 131 with the amendment banning spending on lawmakers, but at the end of the day he hopes senators stay focused on the bill’s original intent.

“It’s crucial that we not lose focus on the main point of the bill, which would be a huge leap forward for transparency,” he said. “Whatever happens as we move forward, we shouldn’t allow the amendment to stop the bill.”

His view is shared by longtime democratic lawmaker [Patricia Lundstrom](#), chair of the House Appropriations and Finance committee, who specifically spoke in favor of the reporting during the House debate.

“There’s not a day that goes by that you don’t see major conflicts of interest,” she said. “What you see are things that are not reported. I like the idea of being able to see what people are working on, who their employers are, and have that recorded. Sometimes you have lobbyists who have conflicts even among their own clients. And you stand there and say, wait a minute, what hat are you wearing today?”

That Amendment

The major ticket item in lobbyist spending reports each session is food. Lot’s of it — and it’s not just those cozy restaurant meals that fire the public’s imagination. Lobbyists are also helping fund the state Legislature, by providing breakfast, lunch and dinner for lawmakers while they’re working.

It's the lobbyists themselves mainly who organize such meals, Siegle said. "It's difficult up here, when you're coming up here staying in a hotel or condo, and buy your own meals, the per diem barely covers expenses, if it does. It's nice to go out to dinner, it's hard not having a salary or a meaningful per diem."

Nonetheless, "a lot of us do tire of" paying for meals, Siegle said, noting that she doesn't usually have clients who will pay for the dinners, forcing her to dig into her own pocket. When she first started lobbying there were dinners, but not to the extent there are today, at restaurants like the Bull Ring or Rio Chama. "There are two or three a week, for committees and staff, caucuses, leadership."

As to why legislators would pass a bill banning such spending while continuing to participate this session, "It's hard to say, maybe they're tired of it too," she said. "It doesn't look good, really."

[Richard Romero](#), a former legislator who served as president pro tem of the State Senate from 2001 to 2004, and has been a lobbyist for various clients since 2005, says taking legislators out for a meal is valuable for finding the dedicated quality time he needs with them.

"I'm not trying to influence their behavior so much as trying to educate them," he said. "That's important."

But most of that sort of education comes in the months between legislative sessions, not necessarily during the session, he said.

[Charles Goodmacher](#) has been lobbying for the [National Education Association](#) for 6 years, and thinks the lobbyists who buy meals during the session have an advantage over "Joe teacher" back home.

That's because it's during the session that specific, detailed legislation is being passed. "At the moment legislators are up against the wall on whether to vote yes or no, or suggest a change, is the moment a well-funded lobbyist can buy the legislator lots of meals and drinks."

"I think the job of legislators is enormously hard, I'm not slighting a single one of them who listen to the people who take them out to dinner," he said. "It becomes too easy, though, to forget Joe teacher in Deming or Belen who helped you on your campaign."

Goodmacher said a ban on such spending would make it harder on New Mexico's citizen legislators; the solution is to pay them. "We need to pay legislators a salary, or substantial stipend, or provide them year round staff support." (The House has passed this session a House Joint Resolution, [HJR 5](#), to put before voters the question of whether to pay lawmakers.)

Other lobbyists New Mexico In Depth talked with agreed.

"Absolutely, we're at that point," Romero said, "It's time."

Bullington said a paid legislature would put lawmakers on a level playing field. Currently, some rely on lobbyists to help them get up to speed on a wide range of complex issues, and that often happens over a lobbyist-paid meal, he said.

“If you want a really well-informed, independent legislature, you’re looking at a paid legislature with a full-time paid staff,” he said. “I think that would move this state forward. It would be a positive change.”

Of all the lobbyists New Mexico In Depth spoke with, Bullington had the most decisive views about lobbyist reform. He said the culture of lobbyists pooling resources to feed lawmakers isn’t the real issue, given they are unpaid, and circled back to the idea of transparency.

“It’s benign when a group of lobbyists are assembled to collectively pitch in to buy a large group of lawmakers a meal — hamburgers, breakfast burritos, a committee dinner at a restaurant — in exchange for very little recognition,” he said. “Lobbyists see that as a courtesy and part of the fabric of the process.”

That sort of spending is different from the more exclusive dinners that are meant to actually help a lobbyist influence the outcome of a vote on behalf of client, he said. Bullington thinks there should be full disclosure during the session “when lawmakers are intertwined with the lobbying process and enacting legislation” rather than waiting until May, when lobbyists must file reports.

“Lobbyists should report everything they purchase for lawmakers, down to the most basic gin and tonic,” he said. “I wouldn’t find it difficult at all.”

[House passes bill to remake voting, campaign finance and ethics laws](#)

With passage of HR 1, the House Democrats’ political money, ethics and voting overhaul, the mammoth proposal now heads exclusively to the 2020 campaign trail, where candidates in both parties say they believe their message will woo voters.

The House passed the measure, 234-193, Friday morning. But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., the bill’s opponent in chief, has assured his side he plans to officially ignore it in his chamber, refusing to bring it for a vote even as he said Wednesday that he believed his party could win elections against those who support it.

Despite its expected doom in the Senate, Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., said he is planning to unroll his version of the package Wednesday and will seek Democratic and Republican co-sponsors. Even if it somehow were to pass the Senate, President Donald Trump has threatened to veto it, and business and conservative interests have mobilized against it en masse.

“The thing that we’ve seen from the Republican leadership and the lobbyists and K Street is that they are completely against it from day one,” Mr. Udall said. “It’s a real full-court press to stomp this out early.”

The overhaul, totaling about 700 pages, seeks to remake the nation’s voting, campaign finance and ethics laws. It would impose new requirements on states to offer early voting and online and

same-day voter registration and would establish an optional 6-to-1 public matching system for political donations under \$200. The proposal would mandate nonpartisan commissions to redraw the boundaries of congressional districts.

It would establish new ethical standards for executive branch officials and Supreme Court justices and impose new prohibitions for the post-government of federal officials and would lower the threshold for that amount of time spent working for advocacy clients that triggers registration as a federal lobbyist. The overhaul also would step up federal oversight of foreign influence campaigns with revisions to the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

“Millions of Americans across the country have been looking at Washington and feeling like they’ve been left out and left behind. They see the influence that big money and special interests have up here in Washington, and they feel like their voice doesn’t matter,” said Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., who was the chief sponsor of the measure, during a pep-rally-themed news conference on the Capitol steps just minutes before the vote.

The dozens of Democratic lawmakers who attended the event held miniature American flags — and presented a show of party unity that they’ve struggled with all week amid conflict over an anti-hate resolution aimed at quelling concerns over comments from Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., who has criticized the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. She stood in the front row.

House Democrats were flanked at the rally by advocates from liberal outside groups, including Neera Tanden, president of the Center for American Progress; Fred Wertheimer of Democracy 21; Lisa Gilbert of Public Citizen; and Tiffany Muller, president of End Citizens United.

[Fair Political Practices Commission Appoints Executive Director](#)

After a deliberation in closed session, the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) today named Erin V. Peth as Executive Director. The FPPC made this decision after conducting a nationwide search, interviewing numerous applicants, and upon the recommendation of the Commission's Executive Director Search subcommittee and the Chair.

"The Commission has appointed an outstanding person to the position of Executive Director" said FPPC Chair Ann Ravel. "Her years of experience with the Political Reform Act and with state government will serve the FPPC well." "Erin's commitment to the Commission's goals and ability to build coalitions among interested parties will be extremely beneficial as the Commission continues to increase transparency in the political process and clarify our ethics laws."

Peth has been serving the people of California for several years. She served as Deputy Legal Affairs Secretary in the California Governor's Office since 2011 where she counseled public officials on governmental ethics, conflicts of interest, and governmental transparency.

From 2007 to 2011, she served as a Deputy Attorney General in the California Department of Justice where she advised constitutional officers and high-level state officials on compliance with the Act's provisions and other conflict-of-interest laws. Peth was an editor of the 2010 Attorney General's Conflicts of Interest Guide and was on the team that prosecuted the first

enforcement action involving electronic voting machines, which resulted in a multi-million dollar settlement for the State. Prior to her state service, Peth was an attorney in private practice from 2003 to 2007 where she counseled clients and litigated cases with an emphasis on election, political, campaign finance, and governmental matters.

A native of Sacramento, Peth received her Bachelor's degree in English and public relations from Marquette University and her Juris Doctorate from King Hall at the University of California, Davis. She is a member of the California State Bar.