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Weekly Lobbying Articles

March 15, 2018

Northwest Arkansas Democrat Gazette

March 14, 2018

Lobbyist denies murder plot

<http://www.nwaonline.com/news/2018/mar/14/lobbyist-denies-murder-plot-20180314/>

Indicted lobbyist Milton Russell "Rusty" Cranford denies seeking the murder of a co-conspirator in an illegal lobbying scheme, according to a statement made through his attorney Tuesday morning.

Cranford, 56, of Bentonville is the subject of a murder-for-hire investigation in Arkansas, but hasn't been charged, according to a prosecution motion filed Monday in Missouri. That motion recommends he be denied bail on lobbying conspiracy charges.

"Mr. Cranford adamantly denies the government's allegations regarding any attempt to harm, intimidate or interfere with a witness or to flee from these charges," reads a statement from Nathan Garrett, Cranford's Kansas City, Mo.-based defense attorney.

"The government's claims made to detain Rusty Cranford are full of hearsay from highly questionable sources, untested and unreliable aspersions, and mischaracterizations," the statement says. "While Mr. Cranford has much more to say in this regard, we will address these matters, along with the underlying indictment, in the course of litigation."

A federal grand jury in Springfield, Mo., indicted Cranford on Feb. 20 for one count of conspiracy and eight counts of accepting bribes. He is set to appear Friday for a federal court hearing in Springfield on whether he should remain in custody and to schedule further proceedings.

Cranford has considerable motive to flee beyond his indictment and the solicitation of murder allegation, Monday's detainment brief from the office of the U.S. attorney for the western district of Missouri argues.

"Cranford is likely to face significant additional charges in more than one federal district, and advisory sentences of up to life imprisonment under the United States sentencing guidelines, should he be convicted," the motion says.

His indictment in the western district of Missouri "comes as part of a larger set of interconnected investigations and prosecutions involving public corruption and the misuse and embezzlement of public funds entrusted to tax-exempt charities, in the western district of Missouri, and in the eastern and western districts of Arkansas."

Cranford is a long-time lobbyist in Arkansas on behavioral health issues. The charges and allegations against Cranford made public so far are:

- An indictment for taking kickbacks from Donald Andrew "D.A." Jones, 62, of Willingboro, N.J. Jones is a Philadelphia-based political consultant. Cranford is charged with helping arrange for Jones to illegally lobby for a nonprofit organization barred from such political activity, Preferred Family Healthcare of Springfield. Cranford is also accused of arranging \$264,000 in kickbacks from Jones in return for Cranford and another employee's help in securing the agreement between Jones and Preferred Family Healthcare. This scheme was in place from 2011 to early 2017, according to the indictment.
- Hatching a plan to kill Jones after Jones pleaded guilty in the illegal lobbying conspiracy on Dec. 18. A month earlier, Jones had refused pleas by Cranford to lie to investigators, according to the detainment motion. That took place in a face-to-face meeting between the two men on Nov. 13 in Oklahoma City. Jones' attorney, Alan Tauber of Philadelphia, said Tuesday his client had no comment.
- Paying kickbacks in 2013 to two Arkansas legislators, Sen. Jon Woods and Rep. Micah Neal, in return for a \$400,000 state General Improvement Fund grant they steered to a company Cranford presided over and helped create called AmeriWorks. Woods and Neal, both Republicans from Springdale, have since left office. Neal pleaded guilty Jan. 4, 2017, to his part in the scheme. Woods goes to trial April 9. Cranford has been mentioned by name in court proceedings in Woods' case, but has not been charged in that matter.

Monday's detainment motion confirms that Preferred Family's "leadership" arranged to pay Cranford's defense attorney \$400,000 on June 2, 2017 -- five months after Neal pleaded guilty in the improvement fund kickback case and after Woods had been indicted in March of that year. A spokesman for Garrett's law office declined comment on whether Garrett was the beneficiary of the \$400,000 trust fund.

Preferred Family is a nonprofit company operating substance abuse and behavioral health treatment centers in five states including Arkansas. Preferred Family issued a statement Tuesday.

"Preferred Family Healthcare continues to cooperate with the Department of Justice in its investigation into the actions of former executives and employees related to business operations. We believe that the investigation focuses on the actions of these individuals, who were employed or contracted with PFH's predecessor organization, Alternative Opportunities.

"None of the individuals referenced in the Department of Justice documents is currently affiliated with PFH."

Yellowhammer
March 13, 2018

Ethics Commission director says bill weakens ethics law

<https://yellowhammernews.com/ethics-commission-director-says-bill-weakens-ethics-law/>

The director of the state Ethics Commission said a bill before Alabama lawmakers could open up a potentially wide loophole in state ethics law by carving out an exemption for people doing economic development work.

“I think it’s a bad bill that weakens the ethics law considerably,” Alabama Ethics Commission Executive Director Tom Albritton said.

The House of Representatives last Tuesday approved a bill to exempt economic developers from the definition of lobbyist under the state ethics law. Supporters argued it is needed to help Alabama compete with other states for projects and factories by keeping developers’ activity confidential, but critics said it opens up an exemption in the ethics law that governs interactions with government officials.

The bill says that an economic development professional — defined as a person who does fulltime economic development work or works part-time and is “precertified” by the Ethics Commission — shall not be considered a lobbyist.

“It exempts people from the definition of lobbying when I think most people would agree that what they are doing is in fact lobbying,” Albritton said. “You are also declaring that the other portions of the ethics act related to a lobbyist’s transaction with public officials no longer apply to them. That’s where the problem lies in my view.”

He said another danger is that “economic development is “often used as kind of catch all designation for activity that people want to conduct with executive branch agencies, or executive offices or the legislature itself.”

“At the end of the day, there’s a good bit of activity that could be argued is economic development,” Albritton said.

Alabama Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield, who oversees the state’s industry recruitment efforts, said his department and professional economic developers asked for the legislation because of confusion that began arising in 2015 on whether developers should register as lobbyists.

“If we don’t clarify this under the law, professional site consultants are going to draw a big red line around Alabama,” Canfield said.

“That red line is going to say avoid bringing projects to the state of Alabama because there are too many states that will, for one, protect the confidentiality of your project and two, not require you go through training and registration on a regular basis. It will be easier to conduct professional economic development activities in these other states,” Canfield said.

Rep. Ken Johnson, the bill’s sponsor, said the state should not put a “hurdle” on professional site developers by requiring them to register as lobbyists.

Johnson said the five-member Alabama Ethics Commission previously tabled an advisory opinion on the matter so lawmakers could attempt to address the issue.

Johnson said he believes lawmakers have prevented it from becoming a wide loophole by specifying that the exemption couldn’t be claimed by legislators, other public officials and people who are otherwise lobbyists.

The Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said he opposed the bill at first but was pleased with changes to the bill, before its House passage, that he said creates a “narrowly-drawn exemption for full-time economic development professionals.”

Albritton said a better way, in his view, would be to keep the developers under the state ethics law, but allow the reports on their activity to remain confidential for a period of time so deals in the making are not publicly disclosed.

The bill now moves to the Alabama Senate.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh said he wanted to speak with both Marshall's office and the state ethics commission. "I'm not going to move anything unless the attorney general and the ethics commission are on board with it," Marsh said.

The Times Herald
March 13, 2018

Schuetz promises more open government

<https://www.thetimesherald.com/story/opinion/editorials/2018/03/13/schuetz-promises-open-government/32894389/>

Two of the candidates for Michigan governor are campaigning on promises of fixing the worst thing about state government: The lack of transparency in Lansing.

Lt. Gov. Brian Calley, who has spent 11 years working for state government, has proposed creating a part-time legislature with one of the goals being reducing the influence of lobbyists and special interests.

Attorney General Bill Schuetz this week proposed a number of Freedom of Information Act and Open Meetings Act reforms to shine more light on state government. Schuetz has worked for state government 23 years after six years in Congress.

Both men have spent most of their working lives in state government. We mention that because the current gubernatorial race won't be their first opportunity to reform state government.

Schuetz's FOIA and open meetings reforms are needed and necessary. Skeptics have reason to question his sincerity, though. His proposals:

- Bring the governor's office and the Legislature under the FOIA laws. Michigan is the only state that exempts both. It's one of the reasons public watchdog groups say Michigan has the least open government in the nation. He also proposes to tighten deadlines for fulfilling with requests and to close loopholes.

- Make state universities comply with the same FOIA and open meetings laws as the rest of state government. Wrong-headed court decisions exempt much of university business from public scrutiny, an outrage from institutions that spend millions of tax dollars and make decisions that determine the futures of thousands.
- Ban revolving door lobbying by former state officials.
- Ban gifts from lobbyists to elected officials. Special interests have purchased too much influence in Lansing. It has to stop.
- Require full financial disclosure for candidates and state office holders to avoid and expose any conflicts of interest. Schuette voluntarily releases his tax returns. All elected officials should do so. It should be mandatory for any candidate for statewide office.
- Create a state ethics watchdog - another shortcoming critics point out when they rank Michigan government dead last in accountability.

Except Schuette is not always a champion of open, clean government. He has gotten a lot of press for prosecuting state and local officials, including ousted state legislators, bureaucrats blamed for the Flint water fiasco and corrupt Detroit principals.

But he is also embroiled in a long-running legal dispute with Progress Michigan, a liberal activist group, over his office's use of private email accounts. His first open government reform should be complying with requests for the emails that detail lobbyist contacts with his office.

Montgomery Advertiser
March 13, 2018

Commerce, Ethics Commission at odds over developer bill

<https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/2018/03/13/commerce-ethics-commission-odds-over-developer-bill/410983002/>

There may not be one big change to the state's ethics laws this year. But as the weeks wind down in the 2018 session, several smaller ones may be afoot.

With a large omnibus ethics bill backed by the attorney general unlikely to move in the current session, legislation that reflects smaller pieces of it or other measures have moved to various milestones in the Legislature.

Some of the proposals — like the now-stalled omnibus bill — look to clarify existing reporting or improve reporting. But at least one has set the Alabama Ethics Commission in conflict with the Alabama Department of Commerce.

The legislation, sponsored by Rep. Ken Johnson, R-Moulton, would exempt “economic development professionals” — defined in the bill as “a person employed full-time” working on some economic development or trade objective — from obligations to register as lobbyists. The definition excludes public officials.

The bill has the support of the Commerce Department — Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield did not return messages seeking comment last week — and Johnson and other supporters argued that the exemption would allow developers to attract business without tipping their hands as to what they’re working on. Johnson argued on the floor that the regulation could put Alabama at a disadvantage in recruiting business to the state.

“They may be looking at various and multiple states they do not want to tell who they’re working for because at that point they’re not lobbying us,” Moulton said after the House approved his bill Tuesday. “They’re looking for a site that’s available for the entity they represent.”

Tom Albritton, the executive director of the Alabama Ethics Commission, opposes the proposal. Albritton said those involved in development can register without disclosing that sort of documentation.

“Simply saying that anyone involved in economic development isn’t a lobbyist approaches the issue from the wrong direction,” Albritton wrote in an email. “The better solution, in my view, is to recognize that they are lobbying, but then protect project sensitive information from public disclosure. We offered that solution, but it was rejected.”

The bill as originally filed did not have the specific economic development professional exemption. Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said his office worked with the Department of Commerce to put in the more narrowly-tailored language, similar to language that was in the omnibus bill the attorney general's office supported.

"The amendment provides a narrowly-drawn exemption for full-time economic development professionals from being treated as lobbyists under the ethics law," Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said in a statement Thursday. "This would include, for example, high-level individuals from foreign car companies or staff members of local chambers of commerce."

Alabama law prohibits currently serving legislators from engaging in lobbying activities. House Speaker Mac McCutcheon, R-Monrovia, said Thursday the bill aimed to keep Alabama recruiters able to pull projects in.

"This was something that was very important, and something that was very timely," McCutcheon said. "But in no way did we circumvent the ethics bill and try to water down the ethics bill."

But the debate Tuesday brought criticism of the bill and public competition for private sector jobs. Many representatives said the state government needed to provide more solid data and how many jobs projects funded with public money created.

"I think this is some of the worst public policy we do in this country," Rep. Patricia Todd, DBirmingham, said. "States against each other, cities against each other."

Albritton said his office might have to come up with the guidance on the bill.

"What I see coming through my office is bona fide economic development activities, but then a lot of people wanting to travel under the designation of economic development, when there may not be verification that that's a bona fide economic development activity," he said.

The fate of the bill could rest with Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, who said he will speak with Marshall and Albritton about the proposal. Marsh earlier this month called for a longer-term study of the state's ethics laws and proposals for revisions in the 2019 session.

"I'm not going to move anything unless the attorney general and the Ethics Commission are on board with it," Marsh said Thursday. "My preference, if I had it, would be to wait on (20)19 on everything, but if the gentlemen determine it's time to move forward on those pieces, I'll see what I can do."

Other ethics bills have moved in the House. The House Ethics and Campaign Finance committee Wednesday approved two bills aimed at improving disclosure of officials' economic interests. One, sponsored by Rep. Rich Wingo, R-Tuscaloosa, would require legislators entering consulting contracts "outside the member's scope of work" to report them to the State Ethics Commission before receiving payment.

The Ethics Commission would keep a public record of the proposal on its website. The commission does not have enforcement powers, but Wingo said the reporting requirements would be a "speed bump" that could prevent legislators from getting into conflicts of interest.

"This is to make people stop and think twice," Wingo told the committee. "Had we had something like this three or four or five or six years ago, we would have saved ourselves a lot of embarrassment."

Wingo's bill should go to the floor of the House Tuesday.

The committee also approved a second bill from Rep. Alan Baker, R-Brewton, that would clarify the definition of a minor ethics violation and raise the scope of it from \$250 to \$1,500.

Michigan Radio
March 12, 2018

Candidates announce plans to increase transparency in state government

<http://michiganradio.org/post/candidates-announce-plans-increase-transparency-state-government>

It's national Sunshine Week – a time when officials and reporters shed light on access to public information.

In Michigan, candidates for state office are using the opportunity to announce how they would improve transparency.

Attorney General Bill Schuette announced a plan to improve government transparency today, but some call it a political stunt in Schuette's bid for governor.

State Rep. Jeremy Moss, D-Southfield, has made transparency in state government his mission. He's introduced bills – some of them similar to Schuette's proposal. For example, both want the governor's office to be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

But Moss said Schuette has been in a unique position as attorney general to improve transparency. And he hasn't.

“So where has he been for the last eight years as attorney? Now, very conveniently, he's running for governor and running on transparency, but he's been totally off duty the last eight years,” Moss said.

Schuette's plan would also ban former state elected officials from becoming lobbyists for five years, and it would require candidates and office holders to release their tax returns.

Democrat Jocelyn Benson is running for Secretary of State. She called for more campaign finance disclosure requirements, including a mandate that unions and corporations publicly file reports in certain cases. She also wants to require public officials to file financial disclosure statements.

Benson says people have a right to know how politicians get their money.

“It's the job of the secretary of state to amplify people's voices in the political process, stand up for them, make sure they have a voice,” she said.

News Tribune
March 11, 2018

Ethics Commission work screeches to a halt

<http://www.newstribune.com/news/local/story/2018/mar/11/ethics-commission-work-screeches-to-a-halt/717089/>

Three members of Missouri's six-member Ethics Commission — including Bill Deeken, of Jefferson City, a former state representative and former Cole County Clerk — end their four-year terms Thursday.

Gov. Eric Greitens has not submitted nominations for their successors, making the commission powerless to take any actions as of the end of this week.

That's because state law states: "At least four members are necessary to constitute a quorum, and at least four affirmative votes shall be required for any action or recommendation of the commission."

Although Missouri's Constitution twice says the governor's appointees to boards and commissions "shall serve until their successors are duly elected or appointed and qualified," the law establishing the Ethics Commission and its members said: "Terms of successor members of the commission shall expire on March fifteenth of the fourth year of their term."

"No member of the commission shall serve on the commission after the expiration of the member's term."

"No person shall be appointed to more than one full four-year term on the commission."

Senate President Pro Tem Ron Richard told reporters last week that, without any appointments from Greitens, the state Senate "can't act. I'd like to keep that commission relevant, with a campaign year and everything else going on."

The commission's staff can still handle campaign finance and lobbyist reports, because Executive Director James Klahr's six-year term doesn't end until fall 2019.

The law governing the commission operations says the director "shall be responsible for the administrative operations of the commission and perform such other duties as may be delegated or assigned to the director by law or by rule of the commission."

Also, the law authorizes the director to "employ staff and retain such contract services as the director deems necessary, within the limits authorized by appropriations by the general assembly."

However, only the commission can:

Receive and review complaints regarding alleged violation of state campaign laws.

Conduct initial reviews and investigations regarding complaints.

Refer complaints to appropriate prosecuting authorities and appropriate disciplinary authorities, along with recommendations for sanctions.

Initiate judicial proceedings.

Review and audit — for timeliness, accuracy and completeness of content — any reports and statements required by the campaign finance disclosure laws, financial interest disclosure laws, or lobbyist registration and reporting laws.

Provide information and assistance to lobbyists, elected and appointed officials, and employees of the state and political subdivisions in carrying out the provisions of state campaign laws.

Render advisory opinions.

Promulgate campaign and campaign finance rules.

Richard acknowledged state law treats the Ethics Commission members differently from other state appointees, and said he'd be open to an effort to change the law, so the situation happening later this week could be avoided.

"But," he noted, "it's kind of late in the session to do that" — unless someone offered the change as an amendment to another bill.

And the Ethics Commission isn't the only state board that won't be able to hold a meeting with formal votes.

The eight-member State Board of Education has only had three members since Jan. 3, when Greitens withdrew his nomination of five members appointed last year, then re-appointed the same five.

The move allowed the Senate more time to consider those five people — who include Marvin "Sonny" Jungmeyer, of Russellville, a former member of the Cole R-1/Russellville School Board.

Under state law, the governor's appointments made while the Legislature isn't in session must be approved by the Senate within 30 days of the start of a legislative session, which was Feb. 2.

However, appointments made during a session must be considered before the session ends May 18.

Richard said last week that the Senate's Gubernatorial Appointments Committee will likely hear one of those nominees after the Legislature's spring break ends March 26.

The appointments are controversial because the governor named nine people to fill the four State Board of Education seats where the members were serving past the end of their previous terms, with an apparent goal of firing Education Commissioner Margie Vandeven.

Since the governor doesn't hire or fire the commissioner, opponents argued, he stacked the board so it would do so, resulting in the board voting 5-3 on Dec. 1 to remove Vandeven.

Greitens never said why he wanted Vandeven removed, although he said in a news release after her termination that Missouri had fallen from 18th to 28th in fourth-grade reading, and 23rd to 32nd in eighth-grade math scores from 2009-15.

Vandeven wasn't commissioner during most of that time.

The governor also said \$64 million was added to the state budget for the 2017-18 school year, but "the bureaucrats took your money. Teachers didn't get a raise." However, he didn't note teacher and administrators' salaries are decided by local school boards, not the State Board.

Under Missouri law, those rejected by the state Senate can never be appointed to that office again, and several senators have threatened to filibuster their nominations and to vote against Greitens' appointees.

Richard said last week his plan is to bring the five appointees to full Senate debate, and "see where this goes and give the governor a chance to pull them out if they don't make it."

San Francisco Chronicle
March 10, 2018

Bribery case puts spotlight on Cuomo, who could escape glare

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/news/crime/article/Bribery-case-puts-spotlight-on-Cuomo-who-could-12743435.php>

There's one guaranteed outcome of the bribery trial of a former top aide to Gov. Andrew Cuomo: another black eye for Albany's long tradition of pay-to-play politics.

A jury in Manhattan has been deliberating for more than a week in the case of Joseph Percoco, a longtime aide accused of taking more than \$300,000 in bribes from companies that needed his help with state business.

The trial has painted an unflattering picture of the state capital, highlighting it as a place where deep-pocketed developers use campaign donations to gain influence and rules meant to regulate lobbying are flouted.

Among the revelations: Cuomo administration officials avoided public information laws by using private email addresses to conduct state business; a lobbyist close to the administration evaded disclosure rules by never registering with the state; Percoco continued to work out of a state office even after he was supposed to have left government to lead Cuomo's 2014 re-election campaign.

But the trial's outcome may do little to limit Cuomo's political ambitions or, if past is any guide, lead to meaningful ethics reforms.

"Most people are not going to know or pay much attention," said Michael Johnston, a political scientist who now works at the International Anti-Corruption Academy, based in Austria, after spending many years at Colgate University in upstate New York.

Cuomo is considered a possible White House contender in 2020 and is seeking a third term this fall. But he has not been accused of any personal wrongdoing and has said he was unaware of any corrupt acts by Percoco or others charged in the case.

Johnston noted that the case against Percoco has lacked the juicy narrative of some other scandals that have seriously damaged governors with presidential ambitions.

Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie was politically damaged in the 2013 "Bridgewater" scandal, in which some of his aides created gridlock on the George Washington Bridge as an act of political retaliation against a Democratic mayor.

The Percoco case, by comparison, is a complicated and somewhat bland stew of state contracts and lobbying regulations.

Blair Horner, director of the New York Public Interest Research Group, said the case has exposed a lack of safeguards in Cuomo's administration when it comes to state contracting oversight. Too much power rests in the hands of just a few trusted aides, he said.

But he said the case isn't likely to cause big political problems for Cuomo unless Percoco is found guilty.

"If Percoco is exonerated, then this is a headache for the governor, but that's it," he said. "He can take two aspirins and he'll be fine. If he's convicted then I think it could be a body blow."

The case against Percoco has received little attention outside New York, but should he run for president, Cuomo's opponents will no doubt raise the specter of Albany corruption.

"It's all about money and power with this governor, and New Yorkers are now seeing that ugly truth revealed, drop by drop," said Sen. John DeFrancisco, who is running for the Republican nomination for governor.

So far, Cuomo appears to be more worried about a potential challenge to his re-election from "Sex and the City" star Cynthia Nixon, a public education advocate who is also reportedly considering a bid for the Democratic nomination.

"My administration has probably been subjected to more investigation than any state administration; after all that they have two people who are now on trial for wrongdoing," Cuomo told reporters Wednesday, referring to Percoco and Alain Kaloyeros, the former president of SUNY Polytechnic Institute who faces charges he steered state business contracts to companies whose executives had given to Cuomo's campaigns.

Kaloyeros' trial is set to begin this spring.

There's also little reason to believe lawmakers will tighten ethics rules or campaign finance limits in response to the Percoco case. More than 30 state lawmakers have left office facing allegations of misconduct since 2000, yet there's been little response from Albany officials, despite calls to strengthen state ethics rules.

"Virtually nothing has been done to address rampant corruption," said Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb. "With corruption trials and arrests piling up, it is unfathomable that we have yet to fix this problem."

New Jersey Law Journal
March 14, 2018

Revenue Up 7 Percent for NJ Lawyer-Lobbyists in 2017

<https://www.law.com/njlawjournal/2018/03/09/revenue-up-5-percent-for-nj-lawyer-lobbyists-in-2017/?slreturn=20180219100758>

For 2017, the 10 highest-earning lawyer-lobbyists pulled in \$12.18 million, up from \$11.36 million in 2016, a 7.2 percent increase, according to the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission, which regulates lobbying, campaign fundraising and spending.

It's important to note that which lawyer-lobbyist firms make the top 10 varies from year to year based on earnings, so the comparison is not among the same group of firms.

Overall, revenues for the thousands of registered lobbyists who work the Statehouse dropped slightly, to \$57.32 million from \$57.64 million in 2016, ELEC reported.

Nevertheless, ELEC Executive Director Jeff Brindle said lobbying in Trenton remains a healthy industry. “In a democratic society, policy-making often doesn’t come easy or quietly,” Brindle said in a statement.

The two biggest spenders overall were Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey and Public Service Enterprise Group, which spent \$2.52 million and \$2.35 million, respectively, on lobbying efforts, ELEC said.

Horizon successfully fought Gov. Chris Christie’s attempt to seize \$300 million of the insurer’s surplus to fund programs fighting opioid addiction. PSEG is still attempting to persuade lawmakers to approve a plan to levy millions of surcharges on ratepayers, purportedly to prop up its aging nuclear power plants in Salem County.

As has been the case historically, the revenues for the top 10 law firms that lobby, or have lawyers on their staffs, were dwarfed by the two biggest players: Princeton Public Affairs Group and Public Strategies Impact, both of Trenton, which saw 2017 revenues of \$9.23 million and \$6.16 million, respectively.

Among the law firms that lobby, Newark-based Gibbons, which bases its lobbying arm in Trenton, again led the pack with \$2.11 million in 2017 revenue, a slight drop from 2016 revenue of \$2.32 million.

Gibbons’ lobbying arm is led by David Pascrell (son of Democratic U.S. Rep. William Pascrell), co-chairman Kevin Walsh and Paul St. Onge (son-in-law of former Democratic U.S. Sen. Bill Bradley).

Despite the slight drop-off in revenues, Pascrell said he was pleased with the year.

“It was an extraordinary year, especially since we were working with a full complement,” Pascrell said. “We continue to grow.

“After 20 years of doing this, it looks like we finally arrived,” he said.

Gibbons’ most lucrative clients were Atlantic City Electric, which paid the firm \$225,000 in fees; CSC Holdings, owner of Cablevision, which paid \$166,500; and Rowan University, which paid the firm \$132,701, according to ELEC records.

Again coming in second was Trenton-based Optimus Partners, which had \$2.05 million in revenue last year.

Optimus is headed by Philip Norcross, managing partner at Marlton’s Parker & McCay and brother to U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross, D-Camden, and George Norcross, the southern New Jersey Democratic power broker. Optimus also is led by Jeffrey Michaels, the former chief of staff to Republican Gov. Donald DiFrancesco.

Its major clients were the Casino Association of New Jersey, which paid \$175,000; Holt Logistics Corp., operator of port facilities in Gloucester City, which paid \$147,000 in fees; and New Jersey American Water Co., which paid \$126,000.

Coming in third is Trenton’s Archer Public Affairs and its parent law firm, Archer & Greiner of Haddonfield, with combined revenue of \$1.56 million. The combined firms finished in third place the previous year. The firms had three clients—CareCentrix of Hartford, Computer Square Inc. of Keasbey,

and Inspira Health Network of Mullica Hill—who each paid \$90,000 in fees. Another major client was the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of New Jersey, which paid \$72,984.

Fourth is Riker, Danzig, Scherer, Hyland & Perretti, which is based in Morristown but maintains an office in Trenton. It saw \$1.42 million in revenue last year.

Finishing in fifth was a newcomer to the list, Trenton's Komjathy & Kean, with \$1.34 million in revenue. The firm is headed by Aladar Komjathy, a career public servant and lobbyist, and Eileen Kean, a lawyer who joined the firm in 2010. She is the sister of Assemblyman Sean Kean, R-Monmouth.

"The two of us, we've been lucky," said Komjathy, who added that while he is a Democrat and Kean a Republican, the pair does not present themselves as politically affiliated. "We don't wear our affiliations on our sleeves," he said.

Komjathy & Kean's best-paying clients were RAI Services of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, which paid \$114,747 in fees; Comcast, which paid \$106,315; and beer brewer Anheuser-Busch, which paid \$96,000.

Coming in sixth was Porzio Governmental Affairs of Trenton, the lobbying subsidiary of Morristown law firm Porzio, Bromberg & Newman, which had revenues last year of \$1.1 million. Its top clients were MasterCard, which paid \$84,125 in fees; Greenwood Racing Inc. of Bensalem, which paid \$85,214; and the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, which paid \$65,027.

Porzio finished fifth last year.

Finishing seventh, for the second year in a row, was River Crossing Strategy Group, with revenue of \$845,000. The Trenton firm is headed by Eric Shuffler, who was counselor to former Democratic Govs. James McGreevey and Richard Codey. He also was chief of staff to Democratic U.S. Sen. Robert Torricelli.

River Crossing's big clients were Asbury Partners, a development company, which paid \$90,000 in fees; Better Education for Kids, an educational advocacy group, which also paid \$90,000; and the Morristown Municipal Airport, which paid \$72,000.

In the eighth spot is West Orange's Chiesa, Shahinian & Giantomasi, headed by former New Jersey Attorney General—and, briefly, Republican U.S. Sen.—Jeffrey Chiesa. It had revenue of \$765,187. The firm previously was known as Wolff & Samson, which was led by David Samson, another former state attorney general and the former chairman of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

The firm's major clients were Health Management Systems of Hamilton, which paid \$206,581 in fees; PSEG, which paid \$77,428; and Combined Power Production and Gas and Electric Utility, which paid \$77,428.

The firm dropped two spots from the year before.

Rochelle Park's Florio, Perrucci, Steinhardt & Fader finished in ninth place, moving up one spot, with revenues of \$521,068. It is headed by former Democratic Gov. James Florio. The firm's top lobbyist had been former McGreevey counsel Paul Fader, who died last last year shortly after leaving the firm.

Florio Perrucci's top 2017 clients were Suez Water Co. of Harrington Park, which paid \$120,000 in fees; Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, which paid \$91,212; and PepsiCo, which paid \$75,000.

Rounding out the top 10 was Impact NJ, which saw revenues of \$470,000. The firm is led by former Democratic Morris County prosecutor and one-time gubernatorial candidate Michael Murphy, and former Republican U.S. Rep. Guy Gregg.

Its biggest client was a marijuana dispensary, Comprehensive Care Centers of American in Woodbridge, which paid \$95,000 in fees. Other clients were River Terminal Development Co. of Kearny, which paid \$90,000; and National Strategies of Washington, D.C., another lobbying firm, which paid \$66,000 in fees.