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[K Street takes aim at Dem ethics reform bill](#)

K Street is stepping up its efforts against House Democrats' sweeping ethics reform bill that includes tough new restrictions on lobbying.

The measure won't pass the GOP-controlled Senate, but lobbyists are eager to stamp out proposals they see as overreach and believe would restrict K Street's ability to advocate on issues.

Neil Bradley, executive vice president and chief policy officer at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, called parts of the bill a "blatant unconstitutional attempt to regulate our free speech" in a call with reporters on Tuesday.

"I just don't think that it passes constitutional muster," Ryan Meyers, deputy general counsel at the Chamber, added.

The wide-ranging bill, H.R. 1, which also includes proposals for electoral reforms and more transparency over campaign finance in addition to the tougher rules for lobbyists, is a major priority for Democrats.

Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) (D-Calif.) has been touting the bill since the House flipped. This week, she called it "essential" to giving the public "the confidence that we will be able to act without the influence of big, dark money and distortions in the elections caused by the voter suppression that is out there."

The proposals are also popular with the public, making the bill an important messaging tool for Democrats in the run-up to the 2020 elections. And it comes as the party's progressive wing has been hammering away at special interest groups and calling for an overhaul of lobbying and ethics rules.

For lobbying groups, H.R. 1 provides an opportunity for them to push back on the criticism and prevent the measures from gaining traction with the public.

Democrats began debate on Wednesday, with a vote expected later this week.

House Democrats are uniformly behind the bill, with all 235 co-sponsoring the legislation. And the bill has united the sometimes-fractious Democratic Caucus. The New Democrat Coalition, made up of pro-business fiscally conservative lawmakers, endorsed the bill as a bloc on Wednesday.

The legislation has no Republican co-sponsors, but opponents are hoping to minimize any potential GOP defections. While the bill won't become law this Congress, groups want to prevent the measures from gaining any traction with the public.

"We are looking for and hoping to see bipartisan opposition to this unconstitutional attempt to restrict the free speech rights of Americans," Bradley told The Hill.

Like the Chamber, the National Association of Manufacturers will key-vote the bill — the process by which outside groups rate lawmakers based on particular votes — and are urging lawmakers to oppose it, the association first told The Hill.

K Street is also finding support from outside conservative groups who oppose the bill. Heritage Action on Tuesday said they would also key-vote it, and Americans for Prosperity urged lawmakers to vote against it.

The focus of K Street criticism is a measure that would force groups that engage in some political activities to disclose all donors who gave over \$10,000. Business groups say that measure unfairly targets them and could force some organizations to restrict their political activities.

Matt Haller, senior vice president of government relations and public affairs at the International Franchise Association (IFA), said the bill has “overly broad and unconstitutional provisions” in a letter to congressional leaders on Monday.

The IFA stressed that the bill would create an uneven playing field for associations due to reporting requirements.

“Specifically, organizations that have members that join for less than \$10,000 will be exempted from the legislation’s proposed reporting requirements,” Haller’s letter said. “This exclusion is designed to carve out labor organizations from disclosure requirements, leaving associations that represent the business community in the crosshairs.”

The Chamber, the nation’s most powerful business lobby, said they worry the bill would dissuade trade associations from trying to advocate on issues.

“When you get into the details of this over 500-page bill ... its impact is to try to take the business community and trade associations out of the political process and out of the advocacy process,” Bradley said on the call.

The Chamber is rallying support against the bill. It sent a letter signed by more than 300 different business organizations from 46 states outlining their opposition to the legislation.

The group singled out language in the bill that calls for using the so-called PASO standard when determining political activity. That could cover any communications from lobbying groups that “promote,” “attack,” “support” or “oppose” a candidate or elected official.

“Unlike existing campaign finance law ... the vague and overly broad new definition of PASO communications applies year-round and threatens to consume any legislative advocacy that dares mention an elected official,” the letter says.

Other groups are finding problems with different provisions.

The National Association of Business Political Action Committees, which represents corporations and business associations with PACs, also opposes the bill for its overhaul of how businesses can interact with campaigns.

“Many of the provisions, if enacted, could severely restrict the role of the business community and their PACs,” the group declared, calling the bill “potentially onerous” for business lobbies, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

The bill’s language would also expand the definition of a coordinated communication, as defined by the Federal Election Commission.

“If you’re a trade group and you meet with a member to discuss an issue, then potentially any communication you would make, even if you don’t discuss an election or what that candidate

plans to run on in the election, simply discussing an issue with the official might make any communication you make subsequently a coordinated communication,” Meyers said on the call. One area of the bill there is broader bipartisan support for is tightening the rules on when lobbyists for foreign interests must register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, an issue in the spotlight because of special counsel [Robert Mueller](#)’s investigation into Russia’s interference in the 2016 election.

Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle have introduced legislation to crack down on unregistered foreign lobbying and close loopholes that foreign entities use to conceal their work.

H.R. 1’s measures focus on restricting money from foreign nationals that could influence elections. If a company has even just one foreign national shareholder or executive, it could face new limits on political spending.

But K Street has concerns that goes too far.

Haller told The Hill the bill would “effectively make any association with an international member a foreign agent,” saying such an outcome was “absurd.”

“For instance, an association that includes a Japanese company with American operations is obviously advocating for that company, not the government of Japan,” Haller said. “At best, this provision is an attempt to solve a problem that doesn’t exist; at worst it’s designed specifically to make it more difficult for businesses to advocate for their interests.”

Senate Majority Leader [Mitch McConnell](#) (R-Ky.) has made it clear the bill isn’t going to get a floor vote in the upper chamber.

“House Democrats have wasted no time rolling out a sprawling proposal to grow the federal government’s power over Americans’ political speech and elections,” he wrote in a Washington Post op-ed in January.

And on Tuesday, the White House issued a veto threat. In a statement of administration policy, the White House said the bill “chills free speech by creating requirements that would limit the ability of Americans to participate in advocacy without undue compliance costs and without fear of public reprisals.”

But even though the bill will hit a dead end this year, lobbying groups are not taking the threat they see from the bill’s measures lightly.

“This purely partisan legislation is an attack on free speech that’s designed to limit the ability of Americans to participate in the political process,” David French, the National Retail Federation’s chief lobbyist, told The Hill.

“Simply put, it’s a dramatic overreach and very concerning.”

[**SC politicians, lobbyists and more owe \\$2.4M in ethics fines, but many will never pay**](#)

The Hampton County Democratic Party owes \$37,300 in ethics fines, but the state is probably never going to get the money.

The party, which hasn’t raised any money since 2008, racked up the fines for failing to file six financial disclosure forms between 2009 and 2010.

“We’ve been working on trying to get that stuff resolved,” [Hampton County Party Executive Committeeman John Polk](#) said of the fines. “Some of this stuff is ridiculous with the prices and fees they add on...It’s a lot of stuff that can be cleared up with a few phone calls and letters.”

The Hampton County Democratic Party is one of the 337 candidates, political parties and lobbyists who owe the state ethics commission a total of \$2.4 million in fines — many of which will likely never be collected.

“The Ethics Commission has limited legal tools to collect from people on the list,” [former ethics commission attorney Michael Burchstead](#) said in an email. “Many simply cannot afford to pay the hefty fines. Contacting the filers is also a big issue. I have seen dissolved corporations and dead candidates on that list, but often someone changes their address and despite best efforts the agency is unable to contact them.”

For example, former Richland 1 School Board candidate [Torlando Childress](#) owes more to the ethics commission than anyone else — \$212,945.28 for a 2009 violation for failing to file a campaign disclosure form. In a separate 2011 case he was sentenced to 18 months in prison for after he pleaded guilty to embezzling \$300,000 from a local bank.

His ethics fine is what accountants call “[bad debt](#),” or debt that’s unlikely to be recovered.

Like Childress, more than half of [those who owed fines eight years ago still owe the ethics commission money](#), even though many large fines have been reduced, according to ethics commission data and a 2011 article from The State that included the full list of debtors.

Many of the fines are for failing to file statements of economic interest or campaign finance reports. These forms, required of all candidates and political parties, show who donates to a campaign, how the money is spent and whether candidates have any conflicts of interest.

Last year, the state ethics commission tried to collect on all of the debts it was owed but received only \$104,238.39, according to the Department of Revenue, which is charged with collecting debts owed to state agencies.

“We’re trying to collect from everyone using the means given,” said S.C. Ethics Commission Executive Director Meghan Walker.

The Department of Revenue wasn’t able to collect more money because either the debtors didn’t have enough money to pay the fines or the department couldn’t find the debtors, spokeswoman Bonnie Swingle said.

[The revenue department collects money owed by garnishing wages, tax returns and levying bank accounts](#), according to the department’s website.

A few years ago, the commission had an informal meeting with [Columbia debt collection attorney Ed Grimsley](#) to discuss the possibility of using a private debt collector. However, ethics committee staff recommended against using private debt collection services, because if the ethics commission switched to a private debt collector, the agency would no longer be able to collect debts through the Department of Revenue, Walker said.

Grimsley told The State it wouldn’t be hard to collect the debts the ethics commission is owed. Once a court rules that a debt is owed, the county sheriff can seize assets, such as a car, to pay the debt, Grimsley said.

“I think the law is pretty clear that they’re due,” Grimsley said. “It’s just like any other effort to collect the debt through a civil court.”

State officials with large and experienced staffs tended to avoid ending up on the list of people who owe ethics fines. More than 80 percent of the outstanding fines are for local government candidates, according to ethics commission data. Around 15 percent of the fines are for lobbyists or the people who employ them (those fines are typically smaller). Only 3 percent of fines were for state-level candidates. Other fines were for local political parties, ethics data show.

“This has been a long-standing problem with local government candidates who run one time,” said John Crangle, a long-time S.C. ethics watchdog.

Sometimes, candidates say they are not aware initially they have to file a form or that they owe money. [Richland District 2 Superintendent Baron Davis said he was initially unaware he owed \\$100 to the ethics commission.](#) After Richland 2 School Board Chair Amelia McKie faced calls to resign for the amount she owes the ethics commission, Davis said he checked the ethics website and paid the fine without officials needing to contact him, he said at a February school board meeting.

[McKie, who owes roughly \\$52,000 to the ethics commission,](#) owes more than any other currently serving public official in the state, according to ethics data.

Those who owe money to the S.C. Ethics Commission aren’t allowed to take office, S.C. law says. However, the ethics commission has no legal authority to keep an elected official out of office, Walker said.

The ethics commission’s ability to collect on its largest debts, however, may be a moot point. A Feb. 20 U.S. Supreme Court decision in the case [Timbs v. Indiana said the constitution’s ban on excessive fines applies to local governments.](#) Crangle and Polk, from the Hampton County Democratic Party, said the more extreme fines owed to the ethics commission are all but certain to be challenged because of the unanimous Supreme Court ruling.

“You can hardly justify \$50,000 in fines and penalties for what this school board member has been doing,” Crangle said of Richland 2’s McKie.

[Current law says those who fail to file the appropriate forms must pay \\$10 per report](#) for every day after they’re notified they owe. But after 10 days, that increases to \$100 per missing report per day. The commission can also impose a penalty on top of that. Current law caps the maximum fines at \$5,000, but until 2011, there was no ceiling to how much one would owe.

But for some, the law still needs a change.

“When you get a \$2,000 substantive ethics violation and you get a \$5,000 fine for not filing a form, that’s a problem for me,” Burchstead said.

One way to fix this, Burchstead says, would be to have one set of tougher rules for people running for governor, Senate and the House of Representatives and another standard for local government candidates.

“The problems arise because it was a primitive statute,” Burchstead said.

[House gives OK to ethics commission](#)

The state House version of a bill to institute a voter-mandated ethics commission won bipartisan approval by a decisive margin Sunday evening.

House Bill 4 now heads to the Senate, where a competing proposal outlining the powers and procedures for the seven-member independent commission is under consideration. Both measures come after New Mexicans in November voted overwhelmingly in support of an

amendment that would set up a state ethics commissions charged with investigating complaints of wrongdoing against state employees, elected officials, legislators and lobbyists.

“My hope is that if this bill becomes law, we have balanced two things: the public’s right to expect that we’re going to be held accountable for our actions,” Rep. Daymon Ely, D-Corrales said. “But also, and equally important, due process for those people accused of wrongful conduct.”

Heather Ferguson, executive director of Common Cause New Mexico said the bill incorporates “the best principles of what would make an effective ethics commission.”

“The whole goal of this commission is to rebuild public trust that has been so deeply eroded over time and high-profile, scandalous cases where our elected officials have gone to jail,” Ferguson said.

As approved, complaints would be made public when commission officials find that probable cause exists to start an investigation. Complaints that are found by the commission to be frivolous or unsubstantiated could be made public by the complainant or respondent, which, Ely said, was a “check on the commission.”

The proposal would also gives the commission subpoena power, which Ferguson said would allow it to “operate efficiently and expediently.” And it would have the ability to issue advisory opinions to help officials avoid accidental violations.

“Many times, mistakes don’t even have to happen if they could just seek some guidance and clear advice on what they can spend their money on, or what needs to be filed when,” Ferguson said.

Representatives largely spoke in support of the bill, which passed 56-11, though they shared suggestions for improving it.

Up for debate on Sunday was the proper length for a “blackout period” before an election during which the commission would not adjudicate a complaint filed against a candidate except pursuant to the Campaign Reporting Act or Voter Action Act.

As approved by the House on Sunday, that period is 60 days before an election. But Rep. Rod Montoya, R-Farmington, suggested expanding the “blackout period” so that it would begin 60 days before the start of early voting.

Montoya said the purpose was to ensure that people would not file complaints solely to “undermine a candidate’s ability to run without distraction.” His amendment was tabled.

[‘Sanctuary cities,’ lobbyist ‘revolving door’ among 400+ new bills in Michigan Legislature](#)

Just two months into their term, members of the 100th Michigan Legislature have already introduced more than 400 bills, including those that seek to end the legislator-to-lobbyist “revolving door” and ban “sanctuary cities.”

Almost 400 bills passed during last year’s *Lame Duck* action after the 2018 election — which is why it’s no surprise that legislation has been introduced taking aim at end-of-the-year sessions. Some of the Legislature’s first actions have had a partisan flavor in checking the power of new Democratic executives: [overturning](#) Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s executive order restructuring the Department of Environmental Quality; intervening in Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson’s

proposed gerrymandering lawsuit settlement; and urging Attorney General Dana Nessel to drop a lawsuit against President Donald Trump's national emergency declaration.

But many legislative efforts this session are bipartisan, including big-ticket packages reforming [auto insurance](#) and [civil asset forfeiture](#) laws.

Here's a roundup of some other notable bills so far:

Board of Education election alteration

Every two years, Michigan's political parties nominate candidates for the State Board of Education, who go on to face voters in a statewide general election.

Under [Senate Bill 25](#), sponsored by state Sen. Ed McBroom (R-Vulcan), political parties would have to account for geographic considerations when nominating candidates, as the *Advance* has [reported](#).

While candidates would still be elected statewide in November, political parties would have to nominate candidates from one of eight geographic regions.

Regions are drawn by divvying up the state's counties, and parties would be assigned two regions to nominate from for each of their state conventions.

In 2020 and every eight years thereafter, parties would nominate from regions one and five; in 2022 and every eight years thereafter, candidates would be selected from regions three and seven; in 2024 and every eight years thereafter, parties would nominate from regions two and six; and in 2026 and every eight years thereafter, candidates would be chosen from regions four and eight.

Incumbent members would be allowed to be nominated for another term regardless of the region in which they reside.

The bill explains that the reason for the geographic boundaries is "to better promote a diversity of perspectives on the state Board of Education representative of the great diversity of schools, students, and communities across the many regions of this states."

Graduated income tax

Michigan's income tax could look more like the federal income tax if a constitutional amendment introduced in the Senate is approved. Such measures require a two-thirds vote in both chambers, which is a steep climb.

[Senate Joint Resolution D](#), introduced by Sen. Jeff Irwin (D-Ann Arbor), would allow the state to impose an income tax at a graduated rate. Under the bill, local units of government would still be prohibited from levying a graduated income tax.

Michigan is only one of eight states in the country that still relies on a flat income tax structure, [according](#) to the Michigan League for Public Policy, which supports a graduated tax.

Voters in Michigan have [rejected](#) a graduated income tax three times. The last vote was more than 40 years ago in 1976.

This is legislation Democrats have repeatedly introduced in the Legislature over the years and has been vehemently opposed by Republicans, the free-market Mackinac Center for Public Policy and the Michigan Chamber of Commerce.

U.S. troops walk to the Department of Public Works facility in Kandahar province, Afghanistan, on Jan. 28, 2012. | DoD photo by Senior Airman Sean Martin, U.S. Air Force, Wikimedia Commons

Electronic voting for active military

When a member of the military requests an absentee ballot, it's delivered to them electronically. Service members are then asked to print the ballot, fill it out, and then mail the paper ballot back to the appropriate clerk.

Under [SB 79](#), introduced by Sen. Paul Wojno (D-Warren), a former city clerk, service members on active duty would be allowed to return their completed ballots electronically via an official military email address.

Women on public corporation boards

After a record number of women were elected in 2018 — including all three of Michigan's top constitutional officers, Whitmer, Benson and Nessel — [SB 115](#), sponsored by Sen. Sylvia Santana (D-Detroit), intends to bring gender equality to publicly held corporations headquartered in Michigan.

Beginning in 2021, every corporation based in the state would be required to have a minimum of one female director on its board.

For corporations with five directors on its board, the number of required women would increase to two in 2023. If a corporation has six or more directors on its board, they would be required to have at least three female directors beginning in 2023.

'Sanctuary cities' ban

Local units of government would be prohibited from enacting or enforcing any policies limiting local officials, officers and employees from cooperating from federal officials regarding the immigration status of an individual in the state of Michigan under a package of eight bills GOP House bills.

Effectively, the bills would prohibit localities from designating themselves "sanctuary cities." Republicans have introduced similar measures before.

House Bills [4083](#), [4084](#), [4085](#), [4086](#), [4087](#), [4088](#), and [4089](#) are sponsored by Rep. Pamela Hornberger (R-Chesterfield Twp.), while HB [4090](#) is sponsored by Rep. Beau LaFave (R-Iron Mountain).

'Red flag' gun laws

Michigan would join 11 other states in allowing access to firearms to be removed if a gun owner exhibits warning signs of violence under a package of bills introduced simultaneously in the House and Senate, as the *Advance* [reported](#).

Judges would be required to evaluate testimony and evidence before issuing an extreme risk protection order, which would allow law enforcement to temporarily seize their weapons.

Individuals that are the subject of an extreme risk protection order would be prohibited from purchasing any new firearms for as long as the order was in effect.

"Time and time again, we have witnessed tragedies unfold which could have been prevented with proactive steps, including restricting access to firearms for those with acute mental health

issues,” Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard, a former GOP gubernatorial candidate, said at a press conference unveiling the legislation Thursday.

GOP former Gov. Rick Snyder [expressed](#) support for “red flag” legislation last year after 17 people were shot to death at a Florida high school.

In the House, [HB 4283](#) is sponsored by Rep. Robert Wittenberg (D-Huntington Woods); [HB 4284](#) is sponsored by Rep. Jon Hoadley (D-Kalamazoo); and [HB 4285](#) is sponsored by Rep. Julie Brixie (D-Meridian Twp.).

In the Senate, [SB 156](#) is sponsored by Sen. Mallory McMorrow (D-Royal Oak); [SB 157](#) is sponsored by Sen. Erika Geiss (D-Taylor); and [SB 158](#) is sponsored by Sen. Rosemary Bayer (D-Beverly Hills).

Lobbyist ‘revolving door’

In the first two months of 2019, [six lawmakers](#) that left office at the end of 2018 have registered as lobbyists, along with former Lt. Gov. Brian Calley. Some members of the Legislature are again trying to do something about it.

State Sen. Jim Runestad (R-White Lake) has introduced [legislation](#) aimed at ending the so-called “revolving door” before.

His bill this term, [SB 57](#), would prohibit a legislator from becoming a lobbyist for two years after they leave office. If that person chaired a committee during their time in the Legislature, the cooling-off period would be extended to three years.

A separate bill introduced in the House, [HB 4149](#), sponsored by Rep. Yousef Rabhi (D-Ann Arbor), would institute the three-year lobbying ban for former committee chairs, but would not require other legislators to wait.

Lame Duck session overhaul

After a particularly jam-packed 2018 Lame Duck session, in which the Legislature passed almost 400 bills, three constitutional amendments take aim at the process.

The first proposed constitutional amendment, [HJR C](#), introduced by Rep. Gary Howell (R-North Branch), would require the Legislature to adjourn for the year on the Friday before the first Monday in November during even numbered years, as the *Advance* [reported](#).

This means the Legislature would not meet at all in the period of time between an election and the start of the new session. Critics have pointed out that would make it difficult for the Legislature to respond to potential emergencies.

Enter Rep. Terry Sabo (D-Muskegon), who introduced [HJR D](#) to require that any bill considered during a session held after a November election receive at least a two-thirds vote in both chambers to become law — like all constitutional amendments (including this one).

Another constitutional amendment, [HJR E](#), was introduced by Rep. Jeff Yaroch (R-Richmond). Rather than requiring any bill considered during a lame-duck session have a two-thirds vote to become law, Yaroch’s proposed amendment would only require a two-thirds vote for bills introduced during a Lame Duck session.

Earned Income Tax Credit

Irwin, an Ann Arbor Democrat, has sponsored [Senate Bill 107](#) increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to a higher rate than it was before GOP Gov. Rick Snyder cut it as part of his 2011 tax overhaul, as the *Advance* reported.

Currently, low-income residents can claim on their tax return 6 percent of the federal EITC, down from 20 percent. Irwin's plan boosts that to 30 percent. This would impact more than 750,000 Michiganders.

"The Earned Income Tax Credit is a proven tool for lifting working families out of poverty, and the money it puts into the pockets of the working poor goes right back into our local economies," Irwin said in a statement.

Part-time Legislature

Former Lt. Gov. Brian Calley's ballot drive for a part-time Legislature failed to make it onto the ballot in 2018, just as many proposals have in the past.

But that hasn't deterred Rep. Michael Webber (R-Rochester Hills), who has proposed a constitutional amendment to make the Michigan Legislature a part-time body.

[HJR A](#) resembles the first draft of Calley's measure, which mandated the Legislature not meet for more than 90 consecutive days.

Unlike Calley's initiative, however, Webber's bill does not include a provision tying legislators' pay rates to the average earnings of Michigan teachers, which would be prorated to account for the number of days served. In effect, the legislators would make about half of their current salaries.

Critics of Calley's proposal argued that the Legislature's powers to overturn a veto by the governor and to adopt ballot initiatives before they reach the ballot would be greatly limited.

Expand FOIA

Michigan's Legislature subjects every state department and agency, as well as local governments, to the state's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). But under current law, the governor and Legislature are exempted from the law — making Michigan one of only two states to do so.

Now, a package of 10 House bills is scheduled for a committee hearing next week that would alter Michigan's open-records law. The governor's office would be subject to FOIA and it creates the Legislative Open Records Act (LORA) overseeing requests for records regarding the Legislature.

The bills are: [HB 4007](#), sponsored by Rep. Daire Rendon (R-Lake City); [HB 4008](#), sponsored by Rep. Vanessa Guerra (D-Saginaw); [HB 4009](#), sponsored by Rep. Donna Lasinski (D-Scio Twp.); [HB 4010](#), sponsored by Rep. Annette Glenn (R-Midland); [HB 4011](#), sponsored by Rep. Ryan Berman (R-Commerce Twp.); [HB 4012](#), sponsored by Rep. Roger Hauck (R-Union Township); [HB 4013](#), sponsored by Rep. Sue Allor (R-Wolverine); [HB 4014](#), sponsored by Rep. Andrea Schroeder (R-Independence Twp.); [HB 4015](#), sponsored by Rep. Graham Filler (R-DeWitt); and [HB 4016](#), sponsored by Rep. Darrin Camilleri (D-Brownstown Twp.).

Drivers' license renewal extension

Michigan drivers can currently get their driver's licenses renewed for four years at a time.

Under [HB 4273](#), introduced by Rep. Kevin Coleman (D-Westland), Secretary of State offices would be allowed to issue licenses that are valid for a full eight years.

Child marriage ban

On the first day of the 100th Michigan Legislature's term, Rep. Sarah Anthony (D-Lansing, Rep. Graham Filler (R-DeWitt), and Rep. Kara Hope (D-Holt) introduced three bills to prohibit minors from getting married.

Sponsors of the bill cite human trafficking and studies that show negative outcomes for girls married before adulthood as their reasoning for pushing the legislation.

"If young people can't legally sign a contract until age 18, we need to offer them consistent legal protections across the board," Filler said in a statement. "If we can do anything to reduce the alarming number of cases of sexual abuse and human trafficking in our state, we have to step up and do our part."

The bills are [HB 4003](#), [HB 4004](#) and [HB 4005](#).

Aretha Franklin Highway

A portion of M-10 in the city of Detroit would be named the Aretha L. Franklin Memorial Highway under [HB 4060](#), introduced by Rep. Leslie Love (D-Detroit).

The bill has already been approved by the House Transportation Committee, as the *Advance* [reported](#). The bill is now in the Ways and Means Committee, which must give its OK before HB 4060 can go before the full House.

Ballot selfies

After the issue [failed](#) to gain enough momentum in 2018's Lame Duck session, the Legislature is ready to take another crack at legalizing ballot selfies with [HB 4196](#), introduced by Rep. Steven Johnson (R-Wayland).

Under current law, voters are prohibited from taking a selfie with their ballot. If they are caught doing so, they can be penalized by having their ballot invalidated.

The law is intended to prevent vote buying or other voter coercion.

Prohibit tanning for minors

Minors would be prohibited from using a tanning device under [HB 4205](#), introduced by Rep. Hank Vaupel (R-Fowlerville).

An owner of a tanning facility that allows a minor to use their tanning machines would be considered guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to \$150 for each violation.

High school graduation requirements

Michigan's high school graduation requirements could see changes under [HB 4269](#) and [HB 4270](#), both of which were introduced by Rep. Beth Griffin (R-Mattawan).

Rather than being required to take one credit in visual arts, performing arts or applied arts, students would instead have to take three credits in: a language other or English (including sign language), or visual arts, performing arts or applied arts, or computer science or computer coding, or a career and technical education program.

African-American history commission

Introduced during Black History Month, [HB 4276](#) seeks to bolster the information taught in public schools on African American history.

The bill, introduced by Rep. Sherry Gay-Dagnogo (D-Detroit), would create a temporary Commission on the Inclusion of African American History in K to 12 Instruction consisting of

one representative from the University of Michigan, one representative from Michigan State University, one representative from Wayne State University, one individual to represent teachers and one individual representing school district officials.

Members of the commission would be appointed by the governor and would have one year to meet before making recommendations to the State Board of Education and Legislature on grade-appropriate instruction on African-American history for all grade levels.

Once the commission makes their recommendations, the Board of Education would have two years to adapt the state's curriculum accordingly.

Air quality enforcement fund

Another bill introduced by Gay-Dagnogo, [HB 4264](#), would create an Air Quality Enforcement and Mitigation Fund.

Limits would be placed on how money in the fund is spent: 30 percent would be for staffing within the DEQ related to mitigating air pollution; 70 percent would be used to create grants for increased air monitoring, mitigating air pollution, assessing health impacts and educating community residents and local environmental regulators.

Right to Work repeal

While Republicans continue to control both the House and Senate, that hasn't stopped Democrats in both chambers from introducing a series of bills to undo what they view as harmful policies implemented by Republicans, including former Gov. Rick Snyder.

Rep. John Chirkun (D-Roseville) and Rep. Brian Elder (D-Bay City) introduced [HB 4033](#) and [HB 4034](#), respectively, to repeal Michigan's 2012 Right to Work laws, as the *Advance* reported.

These were the first bills introduced by the revitalized Legislative Labor Caucus. Democrats have sponsored bills axing RTW every term since Republicans passed laws during the fiery 2012 Lame Duck session.

"We just thought it was important, especially for the Labor Caucus as a whole, to choose its first bills wisely to express exactly what we stand for and who we represent in the state of Michigan," Elder told the *Advance*.

Tampon tax ax

Elder and Rep. Tenisha Yancey (D-Harper Woods) introduced [HB 4165](#) and [HB 4166](#), respectively) to exempt feminine hygiene products from the sales and use tax, as the *Advance* reported.

There's also a Senate package. Sen. Winnie Brinks (D-Grand Rapids) has sponsored [SB 124](#) and Mallory McMorrow (D-Royal Oak) has introduced [SB 123](#).

"Women already face economic disparities in their paycheck every payday; there is no reason we should also be forced to pay this additional tax for taking care of our reproductive health," said Yancey.

1931 abortion law

On the 46th anniversary of the Supreme Court of the United States' landmark *Roe v Wade* ruling, Sen. Erika Geiss (D-Taylor) introduced [SB 50](#) to repeal a 1931 law that is still on the books in Michigan outlawing abortions.

The 1931 law can't be implemented as long as the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in Roe is in effect. But if that ruling were overturned — as could be the case with a strong conservative majority on the court — Michigan would automatically revert to the law.

“Access to comprehensive health care should never target or limit women's health,” said Rep. Kristy Pagan (D-Canton) in a statement. “It comes down to respecting women to make their own life choices and I am appalled that we are still adding more and more restrictions. By limiting access to safe and legal care, we are putting the lives of women at risk.”

Senate Majority Leader Kelvin Atkinson resigns after admitting to misappropriating campaign funds for personal use

Democratic Senate Majority Leader Kelvin Atkinson resigned from his legislative seat on Tuesday in a tear-filled speech on the Senate floor, announcing he would be pleading guilty to federal charges of misappropriation of campaign funds for personal use and taking “full responsibility” for his actions.

The sudden, emotional resignation marks a precipitous fall for Atkinson, the state's third African-American and first openly gay Senate majority leader. A legislative mainstay, the Las Vegas Democrat was first elected to the Assembly in 2002 and joined the Senate after the 2012 election.

“I hope to have the opportunity to prove someday that this is not who I am, just something I did wrong,” he said in a speech on the Senate floor, adding that “I have no one to blame but myself” for the matter. “I just pray that someday I will have the opportunity to contribute to my community once again in a meaningful way.”

Atkinson acknowledged in his speech that he had used campaign funds for his personal use and said that he would be “pleading guilty for those actions when that time comes.” He declined to comment further on the case before and after the floor session, saying the disposition of the case was not final and he would be referring all questions to his attorney, Richard Wright.

Majority Leader Kelvin Atkinson after he delivered his resignation speech on the Senate floor on March 5, 2019 (Joey Lovato/The Nevada Independent)

Court documents related to the charges had not been posted online as of late Tuesday morning. Wright said in an email that Atkinson will plead guilty to a federal misuse of campaign funds charge in Las Vegas, which is both a state and federal crime and [carries a maximum sentence of up to 20 years](#).

“I am embarrassed, I am ashamed and I am truly, truly sorry,” Atkinson said in the speech. “I pray for your forgiveness.”

State Sen. Nicole Cannizzaro, who previously served as Atkinson's deputy, was elected to succeed him as majority leader in a unanimous vote of the Senate Democratic Caucus Tuesday afternoon. In a statement, she said she was “deeply troubled” by the allegations against Atkinson and the circumstances of his resignation but that it was “in no way reflective” of the caucus's values and standards.

“The trust between the people and their government is a sacred bond and must remain strong,” Cannizzaro said. “Our Caucus will turn the page and move forward. Voters elected us to go to work and fight for them. We fully intend to spend the next 91 days doing just that.”

Members of Atkinson's own party, from Gov. Steve Sisolak to his longtime friend Assembly Speaker Jason Frierson, harshly condemned Atkinson's actions in statements Tuesday morning. Sisolak said that Atkinson had "betrayed the trust of the public" and should be held to account.

"I am extremely disappointed in the news that Kelvin Atkinson misappropriated campaign funds for his personal use," Sisolak said. "This admitted violation of the law goes against the integrity every elected officer in the state of Nevada should uphold."

Sisolak added that he was looking forward to working with Cannizzaro and other legislative leaders "to ensure our state government operates with the high standards of transparency and integrity that Nevadans deserve."

Frierson, in a statement, said he was unfamiliar with the details of Atkinson's case but that he was "disappointed" by his actions. However, he said that Atkinson "appears to be taking full responsibility, as he should."

"Our job is to focus on passing meaningful legislation that helps all Nevadans," Frierson said. "We cannot be distracted from doing the work that voters elected us to do."

Cheryl Bruce, the executive director of the Nevada Senate Democratic Caucus, said in a statement that caucus members were "saddened and disappointed to learn of the circumstances" of Atkinson's resignation.

"The charges levied against him are serious, and allege conduct that we strongly condemn. His resignation is appropriate," Bruce said. "We trust the courts to do justice in this matter. Given what little information we currently have, we won't be commenting on what appear to be ongoing investigations."

Bruce added that the caucus will "continue to focus on fighting for hardworking Nevadans" under Cannizzaro's leadership.

Attorney General Aaron Ford said in a tweet that he is "deeply shocked and saddened" by the revelations.

"He accepted responsibility and justice will take its course," Ford [wrote in a tweet](#). "My family is praying for him and his family during this difficult time."

Atkinson, who was elected to the top legislative post in 2019 after serving as former Senate Majority Leader Aaron Ford's deputy in the 2017 session, had vowed collegiality and to work to improve the lives of homeless youth on his first day as leader last month.

"I ask that we consider our roles, not as politicians or legislators, but as parents, role models and community leaders," he said in an opening speech on the first day of the session. "Consider the progress we can make as a state if we, the most diverse legislature ever, can behave with dignity, respect and tolerance."

[Born in Chicago in 1969](#), Atkinson attended Howard University and lost his father to gun violence while in college. He came out as gay in a speech on the Senate floor in 2013, and became part of the first same-sex couple to marry in Nevada when it became legal in 2014.

Atkinson previously worked as a management analyst for Clark County. In recent years, he opened a downtown Las Vegas bar called the Urban Lounge.

It's the first departure of a Nevada lawmaker in the midst of a session since former Assemblyman Steven Brooks was expelled from the Legislature in 2013 amid ongoing mental health issues. Another former Assemblyman, Morse Arberry, [was charged in 2011](#) with

depositing more than \$120,000 in campaign funds into his personal bank account but [took a plea deal](#) with a six-month suspended sentence.

The resignation leaves Democrats with a 12-8 advantage in the state Senate, though Atkinson's seat may quickly be filled by an appointed senator. The overwhelmingly Democratic North Las Vegas district will be on the ballot in 2020.

The Clark County Commission will appoint Atkinson's replacement, who must be a Democrat and reside within Senate District 4, which includes the Historic Westside of Las Vegas. Assembly members Will McCurdy and Dina Neal serve in the two Assembly districts inside Atkinson's Senate district.

Asked whether they would seek an appointment to the seat, Neal said she wasn't thinking about that right now, and McCurdy declined to comment. Both lawmakers met with Frierson shortly before Atkinson's resignation Tuesday morning.

News of Atkinson's legal trouble comes a little more than a year after Las Vegas City Councilman Ricki Barlow [resigned his seat](#) and pleaded guilty to misuse of campaign funds for personal use.

Republican Senate Leader James Settelmeyer, a [longtime friend of Atkinson](#), said he was told the federal investigation stemmed from the federal inquiry into Barlow, though he was unaware of specific details of the case. He stressed that the charges should not be seen as indicative of the behavior of other legislators.

"We have to worry about the institution," he told *The Nevada Independent*. "This is the exception, not the rule."

Settelmeyer had stronger words in a later statement and suggested that the problems with Atkinson could extend further.

"Senator Atkinson has violated the integrity of our elections and broken the trust of the voters and his colleagues," Settelmeyer said. "We hope this is an exception, but we must get all of the facts and determine how far this corruption goes."

Assembly Minority Leader Jim Wheeler called Atkinson's actions "troubling."

"Criminal behavior has no place in our legislature," Wheeler said. "I applaud the work of our law enforcement and look forward to hearing the final details of this investigation."