

# MULTISTATE

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## [Lawmakers, lobbyists join DeSantis on Israel trip](#)

Gov. Ron DeSantis will lead a contingent of more than 100 people, from elected officials and educators to lobbyists and religious leaders, on a weeklong trip to Israel that will include a state Cabinet meeting in Jerusalem where a bill targeting anti-Semitism will be signed.

DeSantis' office Wednesday released a list of the people who will take part in the trip that starts Saturday, though the head count does not include security personnel. Also, the information did not provide a cost breakdown for taxpayers.

DeSantis deferred a question on costs to Enterprise Florida, a public-private economic development agency that is orchestrating the trip.

"I'm not sure exactly who's all going," DeSantis said while appearing Wednesday at the North Florida School of Special Education in Jacksonville. "There's going to be people that go that are not part of my official party."

An Enterprise Florida spokeswoman did not immediately provide information about costs.

But Helen Ferre, a DeSantis spokeswoman, said in an email Wednesday that trip co-chairs, business and religious leaders, state lawmakers and educators -- who combine to account for about 80 members of the traveling party -- are paying their own way.

The DeSantis administration released information about the trip Wednesday amid increased scrutiny about issues such as who will take part, costs and how Floridians could watch the Cabinet meeting.

DeSantis and members of the Cabinet will meet at 3:30 p.m. on May 29 -- 8:30 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time -- at the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem. The event is expected to be live-streamed in the Cabinet meeting room in Tallahassee and on The Florida Channel.

An agenda posted on the Cabinet website includes a resolution on the state's relationship with Israel and presentations on "victims of terror," "water quality" and "emergency management."

DeSantis said Wednesday he will also sign a bill (HB 741) to combat anti-Semitism during the meeting.

"That's going to be a special moment," DeSantis said.

Under the bill, Florida's education system would add religion as a protected class regarding discrimination against students and employees. Currently, people are protected from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, marital status or disability.

The signing, however, is not listed on the agenda, which also notes, "This agenda does not involve the composition of any collegial body consisting of the Governor and Cabinet as a board, commission, or otherwise."

First Amendment Foundation President Barbara Petersen, who has questioned why a Cabinet meeting is being held more than 6,000 miles from the state Capitol, called the statement on the agenda “nonsensical” and “meaningless.”

“The Cabinet is a collegial body,” Petersen said. “A meeting is any discussion of public business between two or more members of the Cabinet. I’m totally perplexed by this. But then, I’m perplexed by the whole notion of holding a Cabinet meeting in Israel.”

The Cabinet is scheduled to meet again June 4 in Tallahassee.

The trip, DeSantis’ first international excursion as governor, includes a traveling party of 20 people with ties to state agencies; 12 elected officials, including the Cabinet members and five legislators; 27 members of the business community; 25 educators, mostly from state colleges and universities; and a trio of religious leaders, according to the list released Wednesday.

Participants include Florida Power & Light President and CEO Eric Silagy, Greater Orlando Aviation Authority CEO Philip Brown and Florida Chamber of Commerce President Mark Wilson. Florida Chamber spokeswoman Edie Ousley noted the business organization has participated in dozens of trade missions, including visits last year to the United Kingdom, Ireland and China.

“With one in four jobs in Florida tied to trade, ensuring Florida’s global economy is competitive is vital to securing Florida’s future,” Ousley said. “The Florida Chamber invests in economic development trade missions because of their benefit to jobs and economic prosperity in Florida.”

Among the registered lobbyists making the trip are Jason Unger of the GrayRobinson firm, Fred Karlinsky of the Greenberg Traurig firm, Scott Ross of the Capital City Consulting firm and Danielle Scoggins of Florida Realtors.

The announced traveling party of 103, which includes several spouses, also features eight co-chairs.

Among the co-chairs are former state Sen. Ellyn Bogdanoff, a lobbyist whose clients range from the city of Miami and Tampa Electric Co. to the Florida Association of Jewish Federations; Simon Falic, CEO and chairman of Duty Free Americas, and Jana Falic, co-president of the Women’s International Zionist Organization; Republican Jewish Coalition Board Member Marc Goldman; philanthropists Carlyn and Lothar Mayer; and Jeffrey Feingold and former State Board of Education member Barbara Feingold.

Jeffrey Feingold’s MCNA Dental Plans was one of three managed-care plans chosen by the state Agency for Health Care Administration last year to offer dental services to the state's Medicaid population.

Besides DeSantis and members of the Cabinet -- Attorney General Ashley Moody, Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis and Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried -- the traveling party includes elected officials such as state Sen. Wilton Simpson, R-Trilby; Sen. Lauren Book, D-Plantation; Rep. Chris Sprowls, R-Palm Harbor; Rep. Randy Fine, R-Palm Bay; Rep. Chip LaMarca, R-Lighthouse Point, and Rep. Joe Geller, D-Aventura.

People with ties to state agencies include Enterprise Florida President and CEO Jamal Sowell; Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Noah Valenstein; Visit Florida President

and CEO Dana Young; Space Florida President and CEO Frank DiBello; and state Emergency Management Director Jared Moskowitz.

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## **[LA City Council Moves Ahead On Plan To Ban Political Contributions From Real Estate Developers](#)**

The Los Angeles City Council moved forward on an ordinance Wednesday which would ban candidates running for city elected office from receiving political campaign contributions from real estate developers.

If approved, it would be the first such ban on property developer donations by any jurisdiction in the nation, according to the L.A. City Ethics Commission, which unanimously backed the ban, along with the Rules, Elections, and Intergovernmental Relations Committee.

The council voted 14-0 to ask that three ordinances be drafted by the City Attorney's Office: one is based on Ethics Commission recommendations one is based on a City Council motion with slight differences, and a third proposed ordinance would focus on behested payments.

If any are adopted, they would become effective after the 2020 election. Several council members raised questions during the meeting about the definitions of developers and behested payments that would be affected by the ordinances.

“The City of Los Angeles has enacted a robust set of laws designed to prevent any perception that the official actions of elected officials are influenced by campaign contributions,” [the motion states](#). “These laws include outright prohibitions on campaign contributions from registered lobbyists, restrictions on contributions by businesses that are contracting (or seeking to contract) with the City, and prohibitions on solicitations of contributions from City employees and commissioners. However, no such comparable regulations exist for developers seeking City approvals for potentially lucrative projects.”

The motion, which is cosponsored by six council members, was introduced back in January [following FBI raids on the home and office](#) of longtime Councilman Jose Huizar.

In November, the FBI raided Huizar's office as part of its [investigation into possible bribery, extortion and money laundering](#) at L.A. City Hall focusing on huge real estate investments from Chinese companies.

No arrests have been made in connection with the raid. Since 2005, Huizar has represented District 14, which is mostly made up by the Boyle Heights area. He is prevented from running again due to term limits when his current term expires in 2020.

Under the guidelines recommended by the Ethics Commission, property developers needing discretionary approval from the city would be restricted from making political contributions from the date the application for the property is filed until 12 months following the final resolution of the application.

The proposed changes would also include a ban on political donations from non-individuals and on “behested” payments made to a charity or government program at the request of an elected official. Non-individual can include groups such as labor unions and corporations.

City law currently limits contributions from non-individuals to \$226,500 for City Council candidates.

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## **Internal emails reveal how the chemical lobby fights regulation**

Jane DePotter spent almost a decade making her Michigan jewelry studio a second home for young artists seeking direction, seniors looking to exercise their hands and minds and new immigrants in search of community.

And then she started to get sick. First came the brain fog, then the painful kidney and bladder symptoms.

“It feels like I have a bladder infection all the time,” DePotter said.

It was only after her doctor put her on cancer watch that state inspectors found a tank of toxic chemicals [under the floor](#) of a neighboring shop.

One of the chemicals, a degreaser called trichloroethylene (TCE), is dangerous enough to humans that the Obama administration sought to ban its use as a spot treatment in dry cleaning. It has been linked with the organ problems DePotter experienced, as well as cancer and birth defects. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [says](#): “TCE is carcinogenic to humans by all routes of exposure.”

Donald Trump’s EPA, though, has chosen not to finalize the ban, one win among many for the powerful chemicals lobby whose former advocates have been appointed to senior jobs inside the regulator since his election.

The EPA could take years to review TCE, one of the first 10 chemicals it will consider under an update to US chemical laws. And internal emails obtained by the Sierra Club in a public records lawsuit reveal the industry wanted to go even further and to also relax guidelines for quickly cleaning up contaminated sites.

Documents analysed by the Guardian show industry lobbying against the science linking illnesses and TCE and two other controversial chemicals – formaldehyde and hexavalent chromium.

### **Pushing back on stricter TCE clean-ups**

In June 2017, the American Chemistry Council’s (ACC) senior director Stephen Risotto [in a letter](#) asked the agency to “suspend the implementation” of a 2014 EPA memo laying out how regulators should hasten TCE cleanups.

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As one of 56 lobbyists working for ACC in Washington in 2018, Risotto used an approach that non-industry chemicals experts and campaigners for stricter regulation said they encounter frequently.

Risotto criticized the science behind the rules and said the cleanups were costing companies. He contested the low dose at which EPA assumes TCE poses a risk, particularly to women of child-bearing age.

“The results on which the policy relies have not been reproduced in better conducted studies,” Risotto said in the letter.

Then deputy assistant administrator Patrick Davis, a political appointee, said no, but he suggested the EPA might revisit that decision later as part of a separate process. Under a new law meant to encourage more chemicals testing, the EPA is moving some chemical reviews from its risk assessment program to its toxics program, which is run by a former industry official.

## **You don't know later in life what kind of damage is done to your body**

Risotto didn't give up, however, and a few months later escalated the issue to Kell Kelly, a close aide to the EPA's former administrator, Scott Pruitt. In December 2017, Kelly had a meeting with Risotto and three other industry representatives, according to emails.

ACC spokesman Jonathan Corley, in a response to the Guardian's queries about the lobbying effort, said the basis for the cleanup rules is "contrary to the conclusions reached by most other scientists".

The ACC disputed claims it sowed doubt about science, saying it "worked to advance the use of rigorous, objective and peer-reviewed science as the foundation of responsible public policy and regulation of chemicals".

Jayne DePorter, a jewelry maker of White Lake, Michigan, became sick. A tank of toxic chemicals was later found by her studio Photograph: Ali Lapetina/The Guardian

### **Advertisement**

For now, the TCE guidelines stand, and EPA says it does not currently have plans to review them. But that may not hold true. Manufacturers of the chemical continue to oppose the core study behind TCE regulations, which found that rats exposed to even very small amounts of the chemical in utero developed cardiac malformations.

The Halogenated Solvents Industry Alliance, which represents TCE users and makers, funded its own study to try to show that the rat research can't be replicated. "A single flawed study should not be the basis for the toxicological value that serves as the basis for regulation," the group said in 2017 [comments](#) to the EPA. Jennifer Sass, a senior chemicals expert at the environmental advocacy group the Natural Resources Defense Council, said while the study did prompt some "reasonable criticisms", about a dozen others backed up its findings.

Sass said the industry is fighting the research because the EPA used it to assume that a developing fetus might be at risk with even very low levels of exposure for a short period of time.

In a response to the Guardian, the industry alliance argued the research has been "widely criticized", including by the California Environmental Protection Agency. The group insisted the chemical is safe if used appropriately and does not increase the risk of cardiac malformations or other developmental problems.

### **Up to 4,000 'vapor intrusion' sites**

DePotter, who is 56, has been wracked with guilt thinking about the young women who have spent days each week metalworking in her studio in a strip mall in affluent Franklin. She was shocked to hear that the industry would try to weaken cleanup rules for the chemical. She knows one of her students had bladder cancer and another had frequent bladder infections. After the contamination was revealed, she closed the studio and refunded tuition rather than risk anyone else getting sick, she said.

"You don't know you're breathing them in and you don't know later in life what kind of damage is done to your body," DePotter said. "I think it's ridiculous to roll back the guidelines."

Michigan officials have said there could be as many as [4,000 so-called "vapor intrusion" sites](#) in the state, where invisible chemicals might be seeping into the air people breathe indoors.

In one Indiana town with underground TCE pollution, parents whose children developed rare cancers [accuse](#) the EPA of “serious mismanagement”. Other states, including New York and Wyoming, are struggling with polluted sites too. Without federal restrictions, Minnesota has debated [banning](#) TCE on its own.

### **‘Sowing doubt’**

Chemicals experts outside the industry say the lobbying efforts on TCE demonstrate the strategies that companies with toxic products have used for decades: sowing doubt about toxicology science, stalling regulation and wielding influence with political officials through campaign donations.

“The playbook repeats itself over and over,” said Sonya Lunder, a senior toxics adviser at the Sierra Club.

The US has long allowed companies to use thousands of chemicals with little or no data on whether they are safe. A 2016 update to US chemical laws is meant to require more testing, but critics say Trump’s EPA is using the new process to [undermine ongoing reviews](#). The EPA says the changes to how it assesses chemicals will let the agency “expeditiously” regulate dangerous ones.

Lunder said the public only learns about the harmful chemicals that have unusual effects or that are discovered randomly by scientists. “A lot of the science is moving forward in a very opportunistic and chaotic way,” she said.

That has been to industry’s benefit.

But Corley said critics of the ACC are making “tired attempts to vilify the chemical industry to advance their advocacy goals”.

“ACC will continue to be a constructive participant in the discourse about these important issues,” Corley said, declining to comment on the number of lobbyists the group employs.

The ACC has been lobbying the federal government to consider its own industry-funded science in reviewing two other chemicals – formaldehyde and hexavalent chromium – which have been known to be dangerous yet have been under debate for years. The EPA classified formaldehyde – used in wood products such as cabinets and furniture – as a [probable human carcinogen](#) in 1987. The EPA was aware that workers who inhaled hexavalent chromium had [higher rates](#) of respiratory cancers as early as 1984.

In January 2018, the ACC sent [a letter](#) criticizing how the EPA was handling a review of formaldehyde. That summer, [news broke](#) that the federal government had been stalling the release of findings that most Americans inhale enough formaldehyde to be at risk for leukemia.

In the letter, the ACC said its formaldehyde panel had left a meeting with EPA staff “very alarmed and troubled”, that the agency might conclude that “any level of formaldehyde exposure results in some level of potential cancer risk”.

The group said EPA was relying on studies that “have been shown in recent years to have significant scientific and methodological issues”, and that ACC had “proactively supported cutting-edge research with leading scientists ... resulting in several dozen peer reviewed publications”.

Asked whether the ACC encouraged the government to delay the formaldehyde, Corley said the agency’s risk assessment program has “been plagued by serious issues for years”.

“It is no surprise that EPA leadership took time last year to reevaluate the IRIS program and how it was functioning,” Corley said.

The ACC maintains that “dozens of peer-reviewed studies” show the level of formaldehyde people inhale does not cause leukemia.

EPA officials answer questions at a launch of a first national ‘action plan’ under rising pressure to deal with a toxic family of PFAS chemicals contaminating water in Fountain, Colorado, and across the US. Photograph: Joe Amon/Denver Post via Getty Images

The formaldehyde letter from ACC was signed by Kimberly Wise White, who was later assigned to the EPA’s science advisory board, which reviews what science the agency considers. That board isn’t currently considering formaldehyde, the EPA said, and members with a conflict of interest could be required to recuse themselves.

The formaldehyde review has been moved to a different program meant to prioritize certain chemicals, meaning it will be overseen by one of the EPA’s top chemicals officials, the former ACC executive Nancy Beck.

Other former industry representatives who now work on chemical rules at EPA include: Erik Baptist, a chemical safety appointee who worked for the American Petroleum Institute; Peter Wright, a Dow Chemical lawyer running the Superfund cleanup program; David Dunlap, a deputy in EPA’s research office who was a Koch Industries official; and Steven Cook, the head of EPA’s Superfund task force who was in-house counsel for plastics and chemical company LyondellBasell Industries.

Trump’s nominee to run the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention, researcher Michael Dourson, withdrew from consideration after controversy over his [close ties with industry](#).

### **The Erin Brokovich chemical still under review**

The chemicals lobby has also been pushing EPA researchers to consider more industry-funded research on hexavalent chromium. Also known as Chromium-6, the drinking water contaminant was made infamous by Erin Brokovich.

[In an April public science meeting](#), officials at the EPA said there are more than a thousand studies on the chemical that have come out since the agency’s last review, on oral ingestion, in 2010.

ToxStrategies, a consulting group that represents the American Chemistry Council and the Electric Power Research Institute, presented multiple industry-funded studies that discount some of the findings the EPA is considering and flagged problems in non-industry research.

One study that showed a significant increase in stomach cancers relied on a cohort of cement workers who may have been exposed to other chemicals, one consultant argued.

The ACC in a response to the Guardian argued “mode of action” studies show no toxicity in rodents exposed to hexavalent chromium at 10 times EPA’s limit for drinking water.

For both formaldehyde and hexavalent chromium, industry has pushed the EPA to use mode of action studies, which show the specific change at the cellular level that causes an illness.

A chemical producer might argue that although there is an association between exposure and illness, there still isn’t enough evidence to show how the illness happens and rule out other

factors. Industry lobbyists will also say that the EPA isn't considering the correct dose or means of exposure.

Sonya Lunder, of Sierra Club, said the tactics are "generally used to call for more data or to critique whether an effect is relevant on human".

"Sometimes all this buys is a little bit more time for them to do one more study, she said.

Chemical studies in rodents are expensive and time-consuming. So the federal government is relying more on cellular-level studies conducted in petri dishes, often developed in partnership with industry, said Jennifer Sass, of the Natural Resources Defense Council. EPA argues its approach for evaluating chemicals "does not skew towards one type of study over another".

But Sass disagreed and said the changes are "a complete disaster", she said. "What's new now is that EPA is making decisions and calling chemicals safe," Sass said, when "before there were just a whole bunch of chemicals with no decisions".

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### **[Taxpayer-Funded Lobbying Restriction Dies in the Texas House](#)**

The bill aimed at curbing the practice of taxpayer-funded lobbying went up in flames on Monday night. Rep. Mayes Middleton's (R-Wallisville) [sponsored legislation](#) (SB 29) was [voted down](#) 58-85 after a series of floor maneuvers and amendments altered the substance of the bill.

The legislation was originally [postponed](#) last Friday after the discovery of a technical error that could have resulted in a point of order against the bill.

During floor debate, Middleton's bill was hit with a barrage of points of order — the [first two](#) of which were called before the Wallisville Republican could get a word out. Both points of order failed.

Middleton stated in his explanation of SB 29, "This bill bans our tax money from being spent by political subdivisions of this state from lobbying for higher taxes here in Austin."

Some recent polling indicates that over [90 percent](#) of Texans oppose taxpayer-funded lobbying. Nevertheless, the chaos started when Middleton offered an amendment that clarified SB 29 applied only to counties and municipalities. However, Rep. Trent Ashby (R-Lufkin) successfully amended Middleton's amendment to include only counties with a population above 250,000 and municipalities within those counties.

This excluded all but [20](#) of Texas' 254 counties from the ban.

Ashby's amendment passed with 30 Republicans voting in favor and was implemented into the final version of the bill.

Ashby expressed concern that the bill would burden rural counties. "They can't afford to have someone on staff keep up with everything going on [in the legislature]," Ashby said. However, Middleton believes the bill would "even the playing field" between rural and urban areas.

Middleton said in response to Ashby's amendment, "I don't believe our rural taxpayers should be treated differently than our urban taxpayers." And by adopting this amendment, Middleton continued, "We're saying our rural taxpayers are worth less." He finished by saying, "I think we need to treat all taxpayers equally whether they are rural or urban."

Rep. Kyle Biedermann (R-Fredericksburg), when questioning Ashby on his amendment, said: "This [the bill] is for taxpayer protection, not protection for our cities and counties."

The adoption of the Ashby amendment effectively killed the legislation.

Texans have expressed concern over numerous tax issues. Included among them is the premier issue of the session: property taxes.

An early 2019 [poll](#) found that 58 percent of Texans believe property taxes are too high. To partly address this issue, the “[Big Three](#)” pushed a sales tax increase to help offset the planned property tax abatement. But this plan was [shown to be](#) unpopular, and ultimately resulted in the abandonment of the sales tax increase.

Rep. Joe Moody (D-El Paso) offered a clarifying amendment that would define and refine language in the amendment that would allow cities and counties to, among other things, join their local chambers of commerce.

In total, 11 amendments were offered and five were implemented before the legislation was ultimately defeated.

Since 1993, lobbyists (both publicly and privately funded) have [spent](#) almost \$70 billion on government recipients. In that same time frame, lobbyists have [spent](#) over \$130 billion in total expenditures.

Rep. Dade Phelan (R-Beaumont) highlighted the problem with taxpayer-funded lobbying by using an example from Houston. The City of Houston paid HillCo, an Austin-based lobbying firm, on its behalf.

Earlier this year, the Harris County Department of Education terminated that contract because, as HCDE Trustee Josh Flynn said, “we’re spending money for a lobbyist with taxpayer dollars to lobby against the taxpayer.”

Phelan [said](#) of the situation, “firefighters [weren’t] being hired and [weren’t] being given the oath of office, yet [Harris County taxpayers] were paying a lobbying firm \$660,000 to work against the interest of the taxpayer in Houston.”

*Update: Rep. Middleton provided the following statement, “While I am disappointed that a majority of my colleagues in the Texas House refused to stand with Texas taxpayers and the 91% of Texans surveyed who support a ban on taxpayer-funded lobbying, their failure to act has only ensured that I will redouble my efforts to ban the corrupt practice of our tax dollars being used in Austin to lobby for higher taxes in our state. I am adamant that Texans have the tools to hold state and local officials accountable on this issue and plan to bring this bill forward again next session.”*

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### [Lobbyists report less animosity in Tallahassee](#)

The GrayRobinson law firm’s state government affairs and lobbying team was at The River Club in Jacksonville on Monday to present a report on the state Legislature’s 61-day 2019 session that ended May 3.

“It was interesting and entertaining,” said Jacksonville office Managing Director Kenneth Jacobs as he introduced the panel: Chris Carmody, Kim McDougal and Robert Stuart.

“Every year is different in Tallahassee,” said Stuart, GrayRobinson senior government affairs consultant.

This year was even more different, said McDougal, also a senior government affairs consultant, because of the number of new faces in the Legislature.

There were 47 new House representatives and 10 new senators, in addition to new governor Ron DeSantis, who now is considering the bills passed for approval or veto.

In the session, 3,568 bills were filed — 2,583 in the House and 985 in the Senate.

Only 197 were passed and landed on the governor's desk.

The state budget also was approved by the Legislature, the largest state budget in history and a "behemoth," Stuart said.

It's a \$91.1 billion spending plan that appropriates \$221 million for hurricane recovery, \$22.5 billion for education, \$37.6 billion for health care and \$5.4 billion for civil and criminal justice.

Appropriations in the budget for Jacksonville projects include \$8 million for urban core workforce housing, \$2 million for the renovation of Lassiter Hall at the University of North Florida, \$1 million for the Northwest Jacksonville STEM Center for Teens and \$750,000 to install new pedestrian crossings.

Of the education funding, \$12.5 is devoted to K-12, including a \$75 per pupil increase in state funding, compared to the 46-cent increase per pupil in last year's budget, Stuart said.

GrayRobinson shareholder and lobbyist Chris Carmody said the budget includes \$650 million for water quality and programs intended to control algae in the state's waterways.

"There's some thought that the Department of Environmental Protection can't spend that much in one year," Carmody said.

Sales tax holidays and a reduction in a business tax also made it to the governor's desk.

The Aug. 2-6 back-to-school sales tax holiday will exempt computers under \$1,000 as well as clothes under \$60 and school supplies under \$15.

A sales tax holiday May 3-June 6 on hurricane preparedness supplies will exempt merchandise priced \$50 or less.

Some good news for business owners: The tax on office space leases will be reduced from the current 5.7% to 5.5% in 2020.

Carmody said a 60-page bill was passed that will make some substantial changes to state election laws.

Primary elections will be moved back to 11 weeks before a general election from the current 10. It moves up the last day voters can request a vote-by-mail ballot from six days to 10 days before an election.

Also, the no-solicitation zone at polling places will be expanded from 100 feet to 150 feet.

In what was described as "among the most hotly debated and controversial issues of the sessions," the Legislature prohibited "sanctuary city" policies at the local government level and requires state and local law enforcement to comply with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The House and Senate debated the language of the bill until the 59th day of the 61-day session. Stuart, who was a legislative aide in the Florida House before he joined GrayRobinson's lobbying department 12 years ago, said the session was marked by less animosity between lawmakers and the administration than in past years.

"They seemed to get along. The governor has a level of deference to legislators that previous governors didn't have," Stuart said.

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[Medical pot group holding fundraiser for Missouri governor](#)

A lobbyist for a medical marijuana trade group is co-hosting a high-dollar fundraiser for Gov. Mike Parson next week as officials finalize rules for the state's fledgling medical marijuana program, which is scheduled to launch next year.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reports it obtained a copy of an invitation to the fundraiser at which guests are asked to spend between \$2,600 and \$25,000. Proceeds go to Parson's campaign committee and his political action committee.

Co-host Steve Tilley lobbies for the trade association and represents Florida-based BiotrackTHC, a marijuana products software company that sought but did not win a potentially lucrative state contract. An attorney for the company has filed a challenge with the state.

Parson's PAC chair John Hancock said the group has a broad cross section of contributors.

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### **[State senator airs accusations of kickbacks from lobbyist to local officials but says he has no evidence and won't name names](#)**

A state senator on Wednesday called for a review of municipal campaign disclosures, partly on the basis of unsubstantiated suspicions that one city's lobbyist is giving kickback donations to council members.

Sen. Daniel Thatcher described the accusations openly in a Government Operations Interim Committee meeting, but he refused to name the city in question. A citizen had shared the suspicions with Thatcher, who told his colleagues he hesitated to relay them in a public setting because "it's pretty damning if it's true, and there's absolutely no evidence."

But that didn't stop the West Valley City Republican from airing his concerns, saying the fact he couldn't disprove the allegations was vexing.

Thatcher's unidentified complainant claimed the city was significantly overpaying its lobbyist and surmised that the lobbyist was then funneling this extra money into the campaign funds of council members. When Thatcher checked the council members' campaign disclosures, the forms were blank — no expenditures and no donations were reported — even though the candidates had clearly been spending money on signs and mailings, he said.

Thatcher, who co-chairs the interim committee, said he wonders how many other municipal candidates are submitting incomplete campaign finance reports because they lack oversight or don't fully understand the disclosure requirements.

Rep. Andrew Stoddard questioned the prudence of adopting a top-down approach, rather than relying on city clerks and recorders to keep tabs on their local elections.

"I feel that this is very conspiracy theory-esque, not to discount what you're trying to do," Stoddard, a Sandy Democrat who works as a city prosecutor for Murray, told Thatcher. "I feel like we should trust the city recorders to follow up on these disclosures. ... I think saying we can't trust our city recorders is slightly offensive."

Thatcher said he isn't impugning the integrity of city recorders and clerks, but he is asking them to hold their bosses accountable, which could put them in dicey situations.

"It's not that I don't believe they have integrity. Of course they do. The challenge is, there's a reason why sometimes we have to have checks and balances, and this is one of those cases where I think we clearly need to look into this," Thatcher said.

In state races, candidates are required to report every expenditure and donation, and the Lieutenant Governor's Office reviews the reports to make sure everything is aboveboard, he said. That level of state accountability doesn't extend to city elections, he said.

Even at the state level, it would be difficult to figure out if a candidate was omitting information from a campaign report to cover up illicit activity, a representative of the Lieutenant Governor's Office said.

"We don't have any audit authority. We can't subpoena anything. So we don't know what we don't know, to be frank," said Derek Brenchley, the state's deputy director of elections.

The senator didn't offer a specific solution for his concerns, although he said one idea would be to bar cities from hiring lobbyists who have donated to the campaigns of municipal officials.

Ultimately, Thatcher directed legislative staff to work with the Utah League of Cities and Towns and the state elections office to evaluate municipal disclosures so lawmakers have a sense of "how deep this rabbit hole goes."

After Wednesday's committee meeting, Thatcher said he couldn't reveal the city where the alleged impropriety occurred because he didn't want to make accusations without any supporting evidence. And he wouldn't offer details about the identity of his informant because he was "protecting a source."