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[Trump Campaign Official Lobbies for Ohio Coal, Nuclear Subsidies](#)

The Ohio House of Representatives on Wednesday approved a measure that would subsidize the state's struggling coal and nuclear plants after lobbying from a member of President [Donald Trump](#)'s re-election campaign.

Bob Paduchik, who also led the Ohio Trump campaign in 2016, called lawmakers urging them to support the legislation and stressing that the president was behind it as well, according to a person familiar with the conversations.

Paduchik's pitch underscored the thousands of coal and nuclear power plant jobs that could be tied to the legislation and the political risks to Trump in the battleground state if it failed, said the person, who requested anonymity to discuss the matter.

Representatives of the White House and the Trump campaign did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Paduchik is a former co-chairman of the [Republican National Committee](#) and also worked for the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, a lobbying group.

Paduchik could not be reached for comment. He told Cleveland.com that he was advocating for the bill as a private citizen with a personal interest in energy issues, and not on behalf of the White House.

The measure, which now goes to the [Ohio Senate](#), requires electric customers to subsidize the state's aging coal and nuclear power plants. The measure is likely to be approved before the end of the legislative session June 26, according to consulting firm ClearView Energy Partners.

Last year, Akron, Ohio-based FirstEnergy Solutions Corp. asked the Department of Energy to issue an emergency order to keep certain plants operating. And Robert E. Murray, the billionaire founder and chairman of mining company Murray Energy Corp., which has sold coal to the company, spent months in 2017 pushing Trump and top administration officials to keep coal power plants running.

The Ohio measure would slap new fees on electric bills for a "Clean Air Program" and steer most of the revenue to FirstEnergy Solutions's Davis-Besse and Perry nuclear plants. A separate monthly fee would be authorized through 2030 to support two coal plants operated by the [Ohio Valley Electric Corp.](#)

FirstEnergy Solutions, which filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy last year, has said it would close the reactors without the subsidies. Critics characterize the Ohio plan as a corporate bailout.

"Advocates of HB 6 have spent millions on ads and high-priced lobbyists to ram this unpopular bill through the Ohio legislature," said Dick Munson, a director of the [Environmental Defense Fund](#), referring to the bill. "Now it seems they're so desperate they've even called in the White

House to lobby Ohio Republicans for the bill, somehow arguing that a coal and nuclear bailout will help the president's re-election prospects."

FirstEnergy Solutions said in a statement that the legislation would preserve more than 4,000 jobs and an important revenue source for Ohio by keeping the state's nuclear power plants open for years to come.

Paduchik emphasized the jobs in his calls with Ohio legislators. The message: Trump can't afford to see the plants shut down and jobs lost heading into the 2020 election.

The Ohio effort follows a failed bid by the Trump administration to shore up unprofitable coal and nuclear power plants with federal subsidies.

In at least one case, a measure intended to rescue coal plants in Indiana, the coal industry sought to enlist the help of the Trump administration, according to a second person familiar with the efforts. The legislation ultimately failed.

Among those lobbying in favor of that measure, which sought to prevent Indiana utilities from replacing coal plants with gas and renewable energy sources, was former Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt, and the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity.

[Anti-corruption group hits Congress for ignoring K Street, Capitol Hill 'revolving door'](#)

An international anti-corruption group is hitting Congress for what it considers an ongoing failure to restrict the revolving door between K Street and Capitol Hill.

In a report released Wednesday, the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO), an offshoot of the Council of Europe of which the United States is a participant, charged that while Congress has taken steps to restrict influence peddling by sitting lawmakers, it has failed to put similar restrictions on those who migrate to the lobbying world upon leaving office.

"At a time when polls indicate all-time lows in government trust, the report stresses the need for passage of congressional rules to better manage 'revolving doors,'" the group said in a release.

Government watchdogs in Washington were quick to pile on, noting that Congress has not enacted any new restrictions on the revolving door since 2007, when it adopted the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act (HLOGA) in direct response to the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandal of several years earlier.

Craig Holman, government affairs lobbyist with Public Citizen, said his group conducted a study a decade ago finding that 42 percent of House members, and 50 percent of senators, moved to lobbying firms after leaving office. And due to congressional inaction since then, he added, "I see no reason why that would have changed."

"Congress — GRECO is correct — has not done anything to address the revolving door since HLOGA in 2007," Holman said Tuesday.

Concerns surrounding the revolving door are hardly new to Washington, and both parties have long used the promise of "draining the swamp" to make inroads with voters, who poll overwhelmingly in opposition to the idea that former lawmakers can lean on their Rolodexes to exert disproportionate influence over public policy — and earn handsome salaries in the process.

[President Trump](#) campaigned successfully on that message in 2016, and upon taking office he issued an executive order promoting some of the same tough ethics rules adopted by his

predecessor, President Obama, including restrictions on former-lobbyist hires directing policies they previously sought to influence. Since then, however, Trump has stacked his administration with former lobbyists, some of whom are now charged with overseeing the very issues they had lobbied before.

"It turns out that that pledge was really nothing but campaign rhetoric," said Holman. "The problem is it's going entirely unenforced."

House Democrats have made more serious strides, promoting a clean-government agenda last year as part of their midterm strategy, which helped them seize control of the chamber. The issue was one of just three central talking points on the campaign trail, and their first bill with their new majority in the House — H.R. 1 — featured several steps designed to limit the influence of former lawmakers racing to cash in on K Street.

Most significantly, the bill would expand those required to register as lobbyists to include strategic consultants and lobby-firm "advisers," closing an enormous loophole that currently allows former lawmakers to elude the temporary ban — one year for House members, two for senators — on lobbying government officials directly immediately after leaving Congress.

It would also require formal registration for those who spend at least 10 percent of their time lobbying for a client, versus the 20 percent threshold currently in place.

Yet congressional lawmakers of either party seem reluctant to limit their own future opportunities. A GOP proposal introduced in the last Congress to extend the post-Capitol Hill lobbying ban to five years died quietly without a hearing.

Sen. [Jon Tester](#) (D-Mont.) last month introduced similar legislation, which has little chance of moving through the Republican-controlled upper chamber, where Senate Majority Leader [Mitch McConnell](#) (R-Ky.) has refused to consider H.R. 1.

And Rep. [Dean Phillips](#) (D), a Minnesota freshman, had in mind to amend H.R. 1 to expand Obama's two-year "cooling off" period not only by capturing all lobbying activity — not just direct contacts with government officials — but by applying it to both Congress and the administration. In the final bill, only the executive branch is subject to the new limits.

"From some corners of the caucus there are concerns about it, which is unfortunate from our perspective," lamented one Democratic aide, not associated with Phillips's office, who's familiar with the debate.

Holman was even more biting.

"The members of Congress are perfectly willing to codify strong revolving door restrictions on the executive branch," he said, "but when it came to applying it to themselves, now [there's] limited appetite."

Some Democrats say they're not giving up, vowing to press forward with legislation to expand the broader restrictions to exiting members of Congress. The current system, they say, is a mockery, allowing former lawmakers to lobby in everything but name.

"They can still run a lobbying shop and do all the activity and basically supervise a lobbying scheme, they just can't be the ones to actually make the lobbying contact," said a second Democratic aide. "We want to do similar legislation that would apply to the legislative branch, as well."

The issue is making its way to the presidential trail, where Sen. [Elizabeth Warren](#) (D-Mass.) is vowing to fight government corruption, in part by installing a lifetime lobbying ban on all elected officials.

GRECO, for its part, is not advocating for Warren's concept, a Council of Europe spokesman said this week, nor is it recommending a specific extension of the current cooling-off period. "But it could not disregard that the efficacy, including the length, of current cooling-off periods was subject to relevant criticism," spokesman Panos Kakaviatos said in an email.

Meanwhile, last year's disruptive midterms have highlighted the scope of the revolving door phenomenon in Washington, as a "who's who" of powerhouse former lawmakers quickly found their way to K Street.

The list includes former Rep. Joseph Crowley (D-N.Y.), the previous head of the House Democratic Caucus, and former Rep. [Bill Shuster](#) (R-Pa.), the former chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, who set up shop at Squire Patton Boggs, where they joined former Speaker [John Boehner](#) (R-Ohio) as political consultants.

[Lynn Jenkins](#), a Kansas Republican who retired after the last Congress, had launched her own lobbying shop last December, a month before she left Capitol Hill. Ex-Sen. [Joe Donnelly](#) (D-Ind.) and ex-Rep. [Lamar Smith](#) (R-Texas) headed to Akin Gump. And former Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), who had worked for five years with Washington's Covington & Burling firm before being tapped last September to replace the late Sen. [John McCain](#) (R-Ariz.), has since returned to the firm.

In the two years before his short return to the Senate, Kyl earned almost \$1.9 million from Covington, according to his financial disclosure forms.

"Many ex-lawmakers find it difficult to resist the temptation of a big payday," said Alan Zibel, a researcher at Public Citizen. He warned the revolving door "tilts the playing field in favor of people who have the money to hire ex-lawmakers."

"We don't think that corporations should have privileged access to the people writing their laws," he said.

The growing prominence of the debate — combined with popular support for the reforms among voters — has left Democrats hashing out a plan to stage votes on individual parts of H.R. 1 where they might find bipartisan support. The strategy will begin with election security provisions — an issue highlighted by Russia's meddling in the 2016 cycle — but they are also eyeing votes on the lobbyist restrictions as a messaging tool heading into 2020.

"Obviously," said the first Democratic aide, "that would be a really good way to get Republicans on record quashing an anti-corruption bill."

[2019 Lobbyist Spending In Montana At \\$3.8 Million And Climbing](#)

At least \$3.8 million was spent to influence Montana lawmakers' work during the first three months of 2019. That's with one more month's worth of lobbyist spending reports for the 2019 legislative session yet to be filed. The deadline for that is today.

Lobbying dollars can include things like paying a lawyer to speak against a bill in a public hearing, putting up advertisements backing a piece of legislation or picking up the tab when discussing a specific policy with a lawmaker over a steak dinner.

The amount of money spent on lobbying in Montana's legislative sessions is regularly more than is spent on the campaigns to get state lawmakers elected. That's been true in every legislative session since 2011, according to data compiled by the National Institute on Money In Politics — and 2011 is as far back as the group's lobbying data goes.

This year, more than \$1 million was reportedly spent during each of the first three disclosure periods. That total will increase when final reports are filed with the state Commissioner of Political Practices, Tuesday.

Lobbyist spending questioned in Clay County

If you are one of nearly 250,000 people living in Clay County, your tax dollars are paying two Jefferson City lobbying firms \$7,000 per month.

But good luck uncovering what those lobbyists are doing in any written reports.

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In fact, Clay County has no reports to show from one lobbyist, Michael H. Morris and Associates, even though the lobbyist's contract requires a weekly report, KMBC 9 Investigates has learned.

Another lobbying firm, Husch Blackwell Strategies, is providing "Missouri Legislative News" in weekly emails about various bills and news in Jefferson City. But KMBC 9 Investigates could not find any language in those emails tailored specifically toward Clay County, according to an information request received last week.

See those reports here:

<https://htv-prod-media.s3.amazonaws.com/files/molegislativenews-1558740305.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3BFkhjGLGRJ-MiHstczXOlcnQTowDRcC8C9ouMonoE1EUd16bhQbCW-n8>

https://htv-prod-media.s3.amazonaws.com/files/legislativeupdate-1558740319.pdf?fbclid=IwAR22oZtLcCxNR_tXMVJDVhhLJ2EnGLY2ZryvannJIOiYwdIUgz40aNMIT-o

The findings question the county's benefit from the Jefferson City lobbyists. Citizens have brought forward concerns to Missouri State Auditor Nicole Galloway about how much the county is spending on lobbying activity in the halls of the state capitol.

"I haven't seen anything that they've done that benefits the citizens and taxpayers of Clay County," said Jason Withington, the chief petitioner of the citizen-demanded state audit. "It's just a waste of taxpayer money."

A county administrator who receives any lobbyists' reports disagreed.

"Annually more than 1,500 pieces of legislation are filed, and I can't even begin to estimate the number of amendments distributed," said Nicole Brown, Assistant County Administrator for Public Services. "It's imperative that Clay County have vigilance on matters such as backbreaking unfunded state mandates (like passing state road costs to counties and creating a funding "lottery") and other, more retaliatory legislation such as playing political football with the park rangers or carving out a poorly constructed recall mechanism for Clay County alone."

Brown is referring to efforts by state legislators to bring [Clay County's park rangers](#) under the Sheriff's Office, as well as a bill that would allow voters to [recall county commissioners](#).

Both bills died in committee. It is unclear how much influence the county's two lobbyists, Husch Blackwell Strategies, and Michael H. Morris & Associates had influencing those bills.

Emails to both firms were not immediately returned.

In 2018, Clay County paid Husch Blackwell Strategies \$31,500 and Michael H. Morris & Associates \$35,000, according to records obtained by KMBC 9 Investigates.

The questions about lobbyist spending and written reports surfaced when Clay County Western County Commissioner Gene Owen [admitted to KMBC](#) last week he had not seen any lobbyist reports, even though he has voted to provide spending authority for their services. Owen said he hears about what's happening in Jefferson City from his assistant county administrators.

Presiding Commissioner Jerry Nolte has seen no lobbyist reports either. But it is not for lack of trying. Nolte said he had to file a Missouri Sunshine Request, receiving word back from the county's outside legal counsel in February that no lobbyist records existed.

"The thing is, this is an investment, and what we need to now find out is, what is the return on that investment?" Nolte said.

The lobbyist reports obtained by KMBC 9 Investigates begin in February after Nolte's request. An email to Eastern County Commissioner Luann Ridgeway was not immediately returned, Monday.

Nine Missouri counties, including Clay County, have lobbyists in Jefferson City, according to Missouri Ethics Commission records.

If you have any questions about Clay County's spending or any tips about what's happening in county government, email investigative reporter Matt Flener at mflener@hearst.com.

[It's killing us: why firefighters are battling to ban flame retardants](#)

Jay Fleming is a booming [Boston](#) firefighter who has climbed the ranks since 1978. He has two engineering degrees, a no-nonsense manner and thick accent.

For the last seven years, he has applied his considerable wit to banning flame retardant chemicals in [Massachusetts](#), which might sound counterintuitive to those not steeped in the byzantine logic of American chemical regulation.

"Firefighters are like the canary in the mine," said Fleming. "If there is a problem with these chemicals, we're going to get it," said Fleming. "We're exposed to the highest level."

Fleming has watched colleagues die of cancer since he started in the department. His father was also a firefighter. He died of lung cancer in an era when few firefighters wore masks, let alone the rebreathers available today.

But now, that diagnosis feels less exotic than news his peers get – findings of kidney, bladder and thyroid cancers. The legislator who once carried the bill to ban fire retardants, former firefighter and senator Ken Donnelly, himself [died of brain cancer](#) at just 66. Fleming blames flame retardants, some of which have already been designated as likely to cause cancer and which have been found to disrupt the endocrine system, according to the [National Institutes of Health](#).

Already, new generations of the products have been introduced since concerns were first raised about their safety, effects on the human body and persistence in the environment.

“When they started to transition to this plastic stuff [in the home], it just produced smoke that was a lot more irritating,” said Fleming. Firefighters never said to “add flame retardants, they just said address the plastics problem, because it’s killing us [from the smoke while fighting fires] ... The solution to adding chemicals to the furniture was to add more chemicals to the furniture.”

Fire retardant chemicals were first [proposed by tobacco companies](#) as a solution to fires started by cigarettes in the 1970s. Rather than reformulate their products, they suggested, society could reformulate everything else.

Today, all manner of materials are treated with flame retardant chemicals, often required by law, including [children’s pyjamas](#), upholstery for [plush furniture](#) and car seats.

At the same time, studies have shown children exposed to flame retardants are more likely to have [poorer social skills](#). Exposure in utero could have [lower the overall IQ](#) and working memory. Some studies have shown disruption to [thyroid functions](#) and a possible link to cancer. The chemicals also bioaccumulate in the body. Flame retardants have been found at “considerable” levels in [freshwater](#) and in [midwestern bobcats](#).

But all this time – despite the endorsement of pediatricians, firefighters and lawmakers – Massachusetts has failed to sign a bill into law.

Opposing the bill, despite its many backers, has been the American Chemistry Council (ACC).

[Their member companies](#) read like a list of American blue chips – branches of oil giants such as Chevron Philip Chemical Company and ExxonMobil, pharmaceutical manufacturers such as Eli Lilly and Company and Merck & Co, and public-facing companies such as DuPont and 3M.

The ACC told the Guardian: “Flame retardants play an important role in fire safety and are proven to be effective in preventing fires. If a fire does occur, flame retardants slow its progression and provide people extra time to escape while giving firefighters more time to respond.”

The group added that flame retardants are “especially important today as the large volume of electrical and electronic equipment in buildings and a larger volume of combustible materials can increase the potential for fire hazards”.

This winter, the ACC registered two lobbyists based out of New York to combat the flame retardant bill. Margaret Gorman and Erin DeSantis, both in-house lobbyists working in the north-east for the ACC, were joined by three lobbying firms employing 10 more lobbyists registered to work on the issue.

The Massachusetts legislature approved a fire retardant ban with bipartisan support. However, their efforts were thwarted when the Republican governor, Charlie Baker, “pocket-vetoed” the bill, letting it die without signing it.

“While I would get a sense there were people out there opposing my bill, I never knew exactly who,” said the Democratic representative Marjorie Decker, who carried the bill. There was no vocal opposition. The bill received bipartisan support. “Part of this was thinking they could end-run me.”

In an attempt to pressure the governor to sign the bill, Decker held a press conference with firefighters. It was there she found out from a reporter that the ACC had a meeting with Baker, while supporters had not.

“How amazing to be that powerful. You get a meeting with the governor, we don’t,” said Decker. His office offered them a meeting the next day – not with the governor, but his staff.

The ACC asked for a carve-out for car seats, so the materials could still be sold with flame retardants, arguing it would be better for low-income consumers.

“It’s an insult,” said Decker. “I grew up low-income, public house, poor. To suggest that lower-income families should have dangerous choices, that they think that is an economic argument they can make – it’s gross.”

In response to questions from the Guardian, the ACC praised Baker’s “pragmatic approach” in reviewing the legislation, which it said was seriously flawed and “hurriedly passed”. “The bill would have undermined overall product safety and conflicted with existing fire safety regulations while also placing an undue burden on Massachusetts businesses and consumers.” The ACC said it supported firefighters, including support for research into improving their health.

Higher-end furniture manufacturers in particular are responding to demand from consumers to produce furniture without the chemicals. Less fire-vulnerable furniture can be achieved by specific fabric weaves, without requiring flame retardant chemicals. However, the trend has yet to reach all, and in particular leaves low-income people out.

At the same time, while one state after another has attempted to ban flame retardants, they have repeatedly failed.

Out of 16 states which tried to pass flame retardant bans between 2017 and 2019, including Massachusetts, 12 did not succeed. The ACC was registered to lobby state representatives in 10 of those 12 states.

More than 100 lobbyists

With a massive influence operation and a [\\$123m budget](#), the ACC has 109 lobbyists registered at 40 statehouses across the country, including some who registered in multiple states, and 56 more lobbyists registered in Washington DC, ready to dispatch when lawmakers proposed regulations on their industry.

Although the ACC is not a household name, it is currently [better financed](#) than well-known groups such as the National Rifle Association (NRA). The ACC has a budget more than 20% bigger than the gun rights group.

But unlike the NRA, it does not appear to work with a base of public support. Instead, they are financed by some of the world’s most powerful companies, who often supply valuable jobs in politicians’ jurisdictions.

They will send a lobbyist from DC to Hawaii at the most local level of city and county to try to stop plastic bans here

In states such as Hawaii, where lawmakers often lead the pack on legislation to reduce single-use plastics, the ACC hired eight lobbyists in the last five years. The group also monitors local jurisdictions.

“They will send a lobbyist from DC to Hawaii at the most local level of city and county to try to stop plastic bans here,” said Rafael Bergstrom, executive director of Sustainable Coastline

Hawaii. Hawaii has been especially hard hit by plastic ocean debris, shards of which wash up knee-deep on the beaches of remote Hawaiian beaches.

“It’s very interesting, because where we’re trying to be very public-facing in our movement,” the ACC “hardly say anything in a public hearing”, said Bergstrom.

Close to politicians and regulators

Fleming, who has testified all over the north-east, told a similar story. “They hardly ever come to the public hearings,” he said. But in Massachusetts, “they end up getting meetings with the governor’s staff”.

In 2018, the ACC lobbied the federal government on infrastructure, opioids, plastic polystyrene, cosmetics and recycling. They lobbied on the clean power plan, bills to track water contamination and on ozone standards. They lobbied on microbeads and labels, and on the budgets of the Departments of Justice, Interior, Labor, [Health](#) and Human Services and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

In the last three months of that year, the ACC hired or contracted 56 lobbyists in Washington DC alone to work on everything from marine debris to warning labels. Their in-house Washington lobbyists, not including contractors, [cost \\$1.9m](#).

They donate to politicians and lobby across a half-dozen federal agencies. In just one example of their 2018 election spending, the group [spent \\$938,000](#) supporting [the Nevada senator Dean Heller](#), who lost his race, according to the Center for Responsive Politics and [ProPublica](#).

They also maintain extremely close relationships with regulators. Regular [emails fly back and forth](#) between the ACC and the EPA, according to documents reviewed by the Guardian.

The former EPA administrator Scott Pruitt attended an ACC [meeting at a luxury resort](#). The head of the EPA department tasked with regulating chemicals, [Dr Jeff Morris](#), spoke at the ACC’s Washington DC conference.

The Trump administration nominated a candidate whose research has bolstered industry safety claims about flame retardants to head the EPA’s chemical safety division. [Michael Dourson](#), a member of the ACC’s flame retardant [scientific advisory board](#), withdrew his name from consideration after two senators said they would not support him because of his past industry connections.

The ACC runs a political action committee, which last year raised \$857,000 (its highest total ever). Its contributors include American current and former senior management of ExxonMobil, Dow Chemical and Chevron Phillips Chemical. That money is spent predominantly on Republicans.

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The ACC also set up the Mind the Science website targeting consumers and retailers last year. This is not to be confused with an actual grassroots group called [Mind the Store](#), founded to get potentially dangerous chemicals out of shops. The ACC has also paid researchers, whose work [later cast doubt](#) on the dangers of flame retardants.

The ACC also works with groups such as the [American Legislative Exchange Council](#), better known as Alec. For instance, the ACC, the Plastics Industry Alliance and Alec have [all worked together](#) recently to stop plastic bag bans by widely sharing model legislation through Alec.

The ACC said its membership in Alec is no different than “similar groups like the Council of State Governments, Women in Government, the National Council of State Legislatures and the Environmental Council of the States. These organizations help facilitate the exchange of ideas across the country concerning state public policy issues.”

[Comcast does so much lobbying that it says disclosing it all is too hard](#)

Comcast may be harming its reputation by failing to reveal all of its lobbying activities, including its involvement in trade associations and lobbying at the state level, a group of shareholders says in a proposal that asks for more lobbying disclosures.

Comcast's disclosures for its lobbying of state governments "are often cursory or non-existent," and Comcast's failure to disclose its involvement in trade associations means that "investors have neither an accurate picture of the company's total lobbying expenditures nor an understanding of its priorities, interests, or potential risks from memberships," the proposal said. "Comcast's lack of transparency around its lobbying poses risks to its already troubled reputation, which is concerning in a highly regulated industry, especially given the rise of public Internet alternatives."

The [proposal](#) is on the ballot for Comcast's June 5 annual shareholder meeting and was filed by [Friends Fiduciary](#), which "invest[s] based on Quaker values" and says it "actively screen[s] companies for social responsibility." Friends Fiduciary and other investors who joined the proposal collectively hold "over 1 million shares of Comcast stock," they said.

The shareholder resolution would be non-binding even if it passed. It asks for an annual report disclosing, among other things, "Payments by Comcast used for (a) direct or indirect lobbying or (b) grassroots lobbying communications" and information on "Comcast's membership in and payments to any tax-exempt organization that writes and endorses model legislation."

Comcast has been active in lobbying against [state net neutrality laws](#) and [municipal broadband](#), which is [restricted by laws passed in many US states](#). The Friends Fiduciary proposal pressures Comcast to disclose more of its state-level lobbying activity.

Comcast's board unanimously recommended that shareholders vote against the Friends Fiduciary resolution, saying that Comcast "already disclose[s] most of our government lobbying interactions" as required by law. "[O]ur Board believes that the requirements in this proposal are burdensome and an unproductive use of our resources and are not in the best interests of our shareholders," Comcast said in a rebuttal included in its [proxy statement](#).

Friends Fiduciary acknowledged that its proposal is unlikely to pass. It needs a majority, but "CEO Brian Roberts holds 33.3 percent of the voting shares," a Friends Fiduciary spokesperson told Ars. Friends Fiduciary has filed similar proposals the past few years and received 19.1 percent of the vote in 2018, up from 16.6 percent in 2017, the group said.

Excluding Roberts' shares, the proposal received 32 percent of the vote in 2018, the group also said. "We see even proposals that don't pass as an important barometer of shareholder perspective, and over 30 percent of outside shareholders requesting more transparency from Comcast on their lobbying as a strong statement to the company," Friends Fiduciary told Ars.

Net neutrality and municipal broadband

The Friends Fiduciary proposal argued that more lobbying disclosures are necessary in part because "Comcast's lobbying spending is perceived to go counter to its public statements, a

sentiment which has only grown given recent debates over net neutrality." As evidence, the group pointed to a November 2017 [Slate article](#) titled "Comcast wants you to think it supports net neutrality while it pushes for net neutrality to be destroyed."

Separately, Comcast should say how much it gives to Broadband for America, a "group which has been [subpoenaed](#) by the New York attorney general in the course of an investigation into the potential fraudulence of some of the 22 million comments submitted to the Federal Communication Commission" during the net neutrality repeal proceeding, Friends Fiduciary said. Comcast is a member of the group.

Friends Fiduciary also argued that Comcast's secrecy around lobbying could contribute to the rise of municipal broadband networks that compete against Comcast broadband. The shareholder proposal said:

Comcast's lack of lobbying transparency perpetuates its negative public image and could fuel regulatory backlash or contribute to the rise of municipal broadband, potentially threatening [company profitability](#). In a highly regulated industry providing essential services such as telecommunications, we maintain that careful consideration of reputational risk becomes even more crucial. Municipal broadband has drawn bipartisan support, especially in conservative areas. More than 750 communities in the US have decided to operate their own networks. As [one article](#) puts it, "Our desire for better broadband, and our collective disdain for Comcast, tends to be one of the few things capable of bridging the partisan divide." Comcast's consistent low rankings in the areas of trust and citizenship speak to the potential for its lack of transparency to impact its future prospects.

State disclosures lag behind federal ones

While Comcast faces strict rules for disclosing federal lobbying activity, its lobbying disclosures are not sufficient at the state level, Friends Fiduciary said.

"Comcast expends significant company resources on lobbying at both the state and federal level in comparison with other companies," the Friends Fiduciary proposal also said. "Although required at the federal level, state and other disclosures are often cursory or non-existent—meaning that investors have no way of knowing how much the company is spending beyond the federal level."

Additionally, the group argues that Comcast's "board oversight structures are insufficient given the volume of Comcast's lobbying spending."

By contrast, AT&T "does comprehensively disclose its lobbying expenditures," the proposal said. Comcast spent \$30.3 million on lobbying at the federal level in 2017 and 2018, "the highest sum in the telecommunications sector and 4th highest sum of all reporting US companies," the proposal said. Comcast's spending on lobbying at the state level is also likely significant, given that "Comcast hired 241 lobbyists in 35 states in 2017," Friends Fiduciary said. But the full extent of Comcast's state lobbying is unknown, as "[l]obbying disclosure requirements are currently close to nonexistent in 22 states," the group said.

The shareholder proposal applauded Comcast's decision to leave the controversial [American Legislative Exchange Council \(ALEC\)](#), but said Comcast should also "disclos[e] the names of and amounts paid to trade associations and other tax-exempt organizations which lobby on the company's behalf."

Comcast: Expanding disclosures is too hard

As evidence that it sufficiently discloses political activity, Comcast pointed to a [webpage](#) with information on its political contributions—though the page only lists political contributions from 2014 to 2017.

"Because the information that this proposal seeks to be disclosed is generally publicly available in appropriate detail, implementing this proposal would require us to incur unnecessary expense, would divert management attention away from our primary business activities and would raise potential competitive concerns," Comcast said.

Comcast noted that it files quarterly reports with Congress about its federal lobbying activities and that it follows state disclosure laws.

Friends Fiduciary countered that public availability of Comcast's federal lobbying spending isn't enough and that "our proposal asks for more information about state level, trade association, and grassroots spending, all of which are not covered under federal disclosures."

Comcast's response also defends its lobbying activities. "For a company in highly regulated industries such as ours, providing information to legislators and regulators and their respective staffs and making sure they fully understand the implications of their policy decisions is a necessary cost of doing business and an extension of our right to petition our government," Comcast said. "Requiring a company to go through the unnecessary burden of gathering and disclosing such costs—particularly when much of this information is already publicly available either through our own filings or those of any trade associations of which we are members—would be a waste of resources."

[Rep. Inman pleads not guilty, has no plans to resign](#)

Michigan state Rep. Larry Inman on Tuesday pleaded not guilty to federal extortion and bribery charges and remains free on a \$25,000 unsecured bond following arraignment.

The third-term Republican is accused of attempting to sell his vote on a controversial 2018 initiative that repealed the state's prevailing wage law for construction workers. Inman has resisted calls to resign in the nearly two weeks since a federal grand jury handed down a three-count indictment, but it remains unclear when and if the embattled lawmaker will return to work.

"We're talking about that," Attorney Chris Cooke told reporters after Inman appeared for a brief arraignment and pretrial conference before Magistrate Judge Phillip J. Green in Grand Rapids federal court. "There's no plans to resign right now."

Inman, who lives in Williamsburg near Traverse City, declined to talk to reporters, apologizing as he deferred questions to his attorney.

The embattled representative was far more talkative in the immediate aftermath of the indictment, when he denied the allegations against him in a series of [interviews with The Detroit News](#) and other outlets that federal prosecutors now intend to present as evidence.

Inman won't have to put up any money for his bond but could lose \$25,000 if he misses any future court hearings in the case. Green ordered him to surrender his passport to the court and exchange his "enhanced" driver's license for a standard version that will prevent him from leaving the country.

"That's more than reasonable," Inman told the judge when asked if he understood that he will be prohibited from international travel as a condition of the bond.

Dressed in a dark, pin-striped suit and sporting a fresh, close-shave haircut, Inman answered Green's questions with a series of short but polite answers.

Federal prosecutors allege Inman extorted a union and solicited political contributions for himself and other lawmakers in exchange for a potential "no" vote on the prevailing wage repeal legislation, which he ended up voting for instead.

Michigan House Speaker Lee Chatfield, R-Levering, and other top GOP state representatives have called on Inman to resign, citing the potential distraction his case may cause even though he remains innocent until proven guilty.

Inman has proclaimed his innocence since the indictment, which documented a series of text messages he sent to a representative and lobbyist for the Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters and Millwrights.

The union opposed repealing the law, which guaranteed union wages and benefits for workers on government-funded construction projects.

"We only have 12, people to block it. You said all 12 will get \$30,000 each to help there (sic) campaigns. That did not happen, we will get a ton of pressure on this vote," Inman said in one text, according to the indictment.

"I would suggest doubling what you given on Tuesday, asap, we never had this discussion," he wrote in another, according to the indictment.

Federal prosecutors last week indicated their evidence also includes a recorded phone call between Inman and a carpenters union representative, along with additional text messages in which he allegedly solicited contributions from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers ahead of the prevailing wage vote.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Chris O'Connor told Green he had turned over to Inman's attorney all relevant evidence, including data extracted from the lawmaker's cell phone. He declined additional comment on the case.