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## [Fossil Fuel Industries Outspend Clean Energy Advocates On Climate Lobbying By 10 To 1](#)

Fossil fuel producers, airlines and electrical utilities outspent environmental groups and the renewable energy industry 10 to 1 on lobbying related to [climate change](#) legislation between 2000 and 2016, according to a [new analysis](#) released Wednesday.

The research, which will be published Thursday in the journal *Climate Change*, suggests that, at a time when the [majority of Americans](#) understand global warming and [support government action](#) to deal with it, industry lobbying still has far greater influence in Washington.

“Public opinion is pretty much a minor factor in deciding what Congress is going to do,” said Robert Brulle, the study’s author and a sociologist at Drexel University.

Money spent on lobbying, he said, is likely a much bigger determinant of whether federal legislation gets off the ground.

“We seem to have a public opinion fetish where if we get public opinion to be supportive of climate change legislation, then it’ll happen,” Brulle said. “My answer to that is, gee, well, we should have gun control legislation then.”

During the period examined by the study, expenditures on federal lobbying aimed at climate issues topped \$2 billion, representing on average 3.9 percent of annual federal lobbying dollars. That spending fluctuated by year. In 2009, it surged to more than 9 percent of the total as Congress debated the American Clean Energy and Security Act, which would have established a cap-and-trade market to limit greenhouse gas emissions and allow companies to buy and sell permits to pollute. The bill failed in the Senate in 2010.

To conduct the analysis, Brulle downloaded nearly 2 million publicly available lobbying files collected by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics. Searching for a dozen key terms – including “climate change,” “global warming” and “carbon” – he pinpointed more than 64,100 reports of such lobbying, identified the reports by business sector, and compared those figures to the sectors’ annual overall spending on lobbying.

That \$2 billion total represents a conservative estimate of industry spending to sway lawmakers on climate issues. Federal disclosure rules only require reports from people who are paid to lobby on behalf of a client, make more than one contact with government officials working on a bill and spend more than 20 percent of their time on lobbying activities. Many other representatives of major corporate interests lobby the government but keep it under 20 percent of their time. The total also does not cover activities such as mobilizing outside groups, getting op-eds published in media outlets or directing public relations campaigns that may shape legislation.

The climate change denial movement remains powerful if splintered. Oil giants traditionally funded the network of misinformation outlets seeding doubt about the role of fossil fuels in warming the planet. But in recent years, right-wing ideologues, such as the billionaire hedge funders of the Mercer family and the industrialist Koch brothers have become the movement's chief financiers.

Exxon Mobil, once the leading architect of the climate denial network, [abruptly quit](#) the Koch-backed American Legislative Exchange Council this month after a disagreement over an Environmental Protection Agency policy affirming the science behind climate change. BP and Royal Dutch Shell had already left the conservative policy group.

The American Petroleum Institute, the oil and gas sector's top lobbying group, noted the study's finding that the fossil fuel industry spent nearly 18 percent of all climate lobbying dollars during the period examined, but suggested it wasn't the whole story. In a statement, spokesman Reid Porter said the industry "also invests more in the development and deployment of greenhouse gas reducing technologies."

The Sierra Club, which made up part of the 2.3 percent sliver of climate lobbying dollars that came from environmental groups, blamed "the unlimited money fossil fuel polluters have poured into our political system" for making "the debate on the climate crisis in the United States ... radically different than in every other country on earth." To try to counter that disparity in lobbying dollars, legislative director Melinda Pierce said the nonprofit mobilizes "more than three million members and supporters."

Brulle suggested that climate advocates could exploit differences between industry sectors that have historically opposed climate legislation as a way to disrupt their lobbying power. Utilities that generate a larger portion of energy from natural gas or renewable power were more likely to lobby in favor of climate legislation, he said, than their coal-powered competitors.

A [2017 paper](#) from Australian National University researcher Christian Downie laid out a strategy that included building coalitions among renewable energy players, exploiting inter-industry divisions by targeting "politically weak industries that are less able to mount a resistance campaign," and exploiting intra-industry divisions by "seeking to bring on board outliers that support policies that the rest of an industry opposes."

But any strategy faces significant challenges.

The Trump administration has little use for efforts to fight climate change. The EPA under then-Administrator Scott Pruitt started the process to repeal the Clean Power Plan, a federal rule that would have incentivized utilities to use more renewable energy and scale back emissions from coal. It also moved to gut a regulation that would have raised the fuel efficiency of vehicles, now the country's biggest source of greenhouse gas pollution, at the behest of auto manufacturers who publicly claim to support climate action. There's little reason to believe Andrew Wheeler, the new EPA chief and a former coal and mining lobbyist, will shift gears.

**We seem to have a public opinion fetish where if we get public opinion to be supportive of climate change legislation, then it'll happen.** Robert Brulle of Drexel University

Meanwhile, corporations that profess concern about the environment are [not always reliable allies](#). A [study](#) published last year in the peer-reviewed Academy of Management Journal found

that several big companies that had announced ambitious [sustainability](#) goals later retreated when profits decreased or top executives changed.

Legislation ambitious enough to make a difference at a time when fossil fuel emissions are [hitting an all-time high](#) and climate change appears to be happening [faster and more intensely than previously thought](#) faces yet another hurdle. The false belief that scientists are not yet certain about humanity's role in global warming all but dominates the Republican Party and undergirds the Trump administration's environmental, national security and energy policies. Meanwhile, Democrats have failed to rally around a bold climate plan, instead intermittently producing legislation to set renewable energy goals with no clear roadmap on how to achieve them. Even the most purportedly hawkish Democrats on climate change have proposed conservative policies to deal with it, including a [carbon tax](#) that would have lowered the corporate tax rate by 6 percent and a [cap-and-dividend bill](#) that would have returned carbon revenues to Americans in the form of a rebate.

An insurgent group of progressive candidates running in the 2018 midterm elections could shift the debate within Democratic policy circles. Some House candidates – including [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) of New York, Randy Bryce of Wisconsin and Kaniela Ing of Hawaii – are calling for a [Green New Deal](#), a massive government spending plan to build up renewable energy production and create potentially millions of federally backed middle-class jobs. Some left-leaning think tanks are also drafting proposals to [nationalize and dismantle publicly traded fossil fuel giants](#).

But at a time when rising floods, droughts, heat waves, storms and wildfires afflict the country – causing a [record \\$306 billion](#) in damages last year – radical action seems far past due.

“We are already much farther down the road than we ever should have allowed,” said Michael Mann, a climate scientist at Pennsylvania State University. “This is the true cost of the climate change denial campaign.”

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### [Andrew Cuomo donor gave \\$1 67 times to drive down average donation, boost 'grassroots' credentials](#)

Always be a man of the people; especially if you can game the system to look like one.

At least since Sen. Bernard Sanders turned it into a talking point that the average donation to his 2016 presidential campaign was \$27, politicians have touted a small figure as proof they run a grassroots campaign and aren't the product of a few big donors.

According to a [report](#) Tuesday in The New York Times, the campaign of [Gov. Andrew Cuomo](#) took it to a new level, taking absurdly small amounts of money from people to make the average donation size smaller.

Some of those donors were dedicated though.

The Times reported that in the run-up to the reporting deadline, donor Christopher Kim contributed 69 times. But 67 of those donations were of \$1 each.

Mr. Kim's ties to the Cuomo team aren't just the tiny donation. According to the filing documents, he has the same address as [Cuomo](#) campaign aide Julia Yang.

“We appreciate his enthusiasm,” campaign spokeswoman Abbey Collins told the Times. “Going forward, we'll put measures in place to count contributions like this differently.”

But he was not alone. The Times reported that “a line of aides, relatives, roommates, allies, appointees and lobbyists” were shown on the filing documents giving such nominal sums as \$1 and \$5.

“Other small donors included the father of one of [Mr. Cuomo](#)’s spokeswomen (who gave \$1), the lobbyist father of [Mr. Cuomo](#)’s top aide (who gave \$10), as well as others who share addresses with [Mr. Cuomo](#)’s paid campaign staff,” the Times wrote.

Not that some such folk eschewed the big donations.

The Times cited the case of Jayne C. Keyes, whom [Mr. Cuomo](#) appointed to the state arts council and whose husband is a former top aide to [Mr. Cuomo](#)’s father, former Gov. Mario Cuomo. According to the Times, she gave the younger [Mr. Cuomo](#) a hefty \$20,000 on July 9.

“Days later, she followed that up with two more donations — for \$5 each,” the Times wrote.

Mathematically, such gifts would increase the number of donations while hardly affecting the amount raised, which would lower the average donation size.

Indeed before the full report was released, the Cuomo campaign had boasted Monday that 57 percent of the raw number of contributions were for \$250 or less and the commonest amount was \$5.

In a Democratic primary in which he is being challenged from the left by socialist actress Cynthia Nixon, [Mr. Cuomo](#) could use some statistics to minimize his status as one of his party’s biggest fundraisers sitting atop a \$31 million war chest, most of it, the Times reported, coming from big donors.

According to the Times, the Cuomo campaign raised \$6 million in the first half of the year, but just 1 percent of that amount came from people who gave \$250 or less.

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### **[Guilty, Again: Dean Skelos, Former Senate Leader, Is Convicted of Corruption in Retrial](#)**

Dean G. Skelos, once one of the most powerful figures in New York State politics, was found guilty of bribery, extortion and conspiracy on Tuesday, the latest in a drumbeat of corruption convictions to roil Albany in a heated election year.

The verdict itself was not necessarily a surprise, as a different jury had found Mr. Skelos, the former leader of the State Senate, and his son [guilty on the same charges](#) in 2015 before the convictions were [overturned](#). But its timing — on the heels of three other successful Albany-focused prosecutions this year, including one last week in the courtroom next door — fed the perception that the culture of ethical neglect in the state capital had reached its nadir.

Within an hour of the conviction, political candidates and government watchdog groups were already lobbing criticism of Albany’s seemingly intractable webs of money and power — and of the power brokers, including Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, who they said had not done enough to untangle them.

The jury in Federal District Court in Manhattan deliberated for three days before finding Mr. Skelos and his son, Adam, guilty on all eight counts. Prosecutors said the older Mr. Skelos, the former leader of the Senate’s Republican majority, had wielded his political clout to pressure business executives to send his son about \$300,000 for a patchwork of no-show or low-show jobs.

As the verdict was read in a packed courtroom, Mr. Skelos stared straight ahead; his son rested his forehead on clenched fists. After the jury was dismissed, the two men embraced briefly and whispered to each other. The former senator flashed a brief, small smile at his supporters.

Neither one spoke to reporters. G. Robert Gage Jr., a lawyer for the older Mr. Skelos, declined to comment. John J. Kenney, a lawyer for Adam Skelos, said he was “severely disappointed.”

In repudiating Mr. Skelos, who made the unexpected decision to [testify in his own defense](#), the jury also appeared to reject his description of Albany as a haven of collaboration, public service and old-fashioned hard work, where the grandson of an immigrant could ascend to the pinnacle of state government.

Instead, jurors may have been swayed by prosecutors’ descriptions of Mr. Skelos’s nearly unparalleled influence as one of Albany’s “three men in a room,” who, along with Mr. Cuomo and the former Assembly speaker, Sheldon Silver — who was himself [convicted in a retrial](#) in May — controlled lucrative state contracts and hobnobbed regularly with lobbyists and millionaire donors.

Mr. Cuomo was not connected to any evidence in the trials of Mr. Skelos and Mr. Silver. Nor was the governor accused of wrongdoing in either of the two other major corruption trials this year, even though they led to the convictions of [Joseph Percoco](#), once one of Mr. Cuomo’s top aides, and [Alain Kaloyeros](#), Mr. Cuomo’s former economic point person.

Nonetheless, the string of convictions has fueled speculation about fallout in the Democratic primary for governor in September, especially after Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s upset primary victory over Representative Joseph Crowley helped illustrate the vulnerability of some career politicians.

In the wake of the verdicts in the cases of Mr. Kaloyeros and Mr. Skelos, Mr. Cuomo’s political opponents said the governor had hobbled the state’s ethics oversight and never delivered on promises of procurement reform. They pointed to glowing statements Mr. Cuomo had made about Mr. Percoco and Mr. Kaloyeros, and also tied the governor to Todd R. Howe, a former lobbyist who had facilitated many of the schemes.

“Dean Skelos and Sheldon Silver have been convicted, while Andrew Cuomo continues to bend the rules, break the law and defraud taxpayers seemingly without consequence,” said Marc Molinaro, the Republican candidate for governor.

The convictions also made for ready talking points in the race for New York attorney general, with Zephyr Teachout and Letitia James, both candidates for the post, pointing to the office’s power to prosecute public corruption in Albany.

Mr. Skelos and his son had been granted a retrial after winning an appeal of their convictions last year in the wake of a 2016 Supreme Court decision involving Bob McDonnell, the former Republican governor of Virginia, that [limited the definition](#) of public corruption.

The appeals panel ruled that the judge’s instructions to the jury had been too broad, possibly inviting jurors to convict the Skeloses on behavior that was not unlawful. Prosecutors had immediately vowed to bring the case again, calling their evidence “overwhelming” even in the face of the narrowed definition.

Other than Mr. Skelos’s three days on the witness stand, much of the testimony in the retrial hewed closely to that of the original. Prosecutors said that Mr. Skelos, soon after ascending to

the Senate leadership in 2010, began hounding executives at several different companies to send money to his son. All the companies were seeking legislation that could make or break their business prospects, and Mr. Skelos made clear that he would kill the bills unless the executives complied with his demands, prosecutors said.

By 2015, the companies had sent Adam Skelos more than \$300,000, ostensibly for consulting or employment contracts, even though he did not bring in any clients, often did not show up to work and even threatened to smash in a supervisor's head, prosecutors said.

Mr. Skelos, while conceding that he had asked the officials for help, testified that those requests were never tied to his position as majority leader. He said he had asked as a friend and devoted father, downplayed his influence in Albany, and recounted his attempts to steer his son to success — despite his son's temper, volatility and, at times, open hostility.

Prosecutors accused Mr. Skelos of repeating the repertoire he had played for decades in the State Legislature.

“He used a lot of phrases that sounded like they'd make a nice campaign slogan,” Thomas McKay, a prosecutor, said in his [closing arguments](#) of the ex-senator's testimony. But “he was all talk.”

Robert Khuzami, the deputy United States attorney for the Southern District of New York, emphasized the by-now familiar nature of Albany convictions; the office has made cracking down on corruption in state government a priority in recent years.

“Yet again, a New York jury heard a sordid tale of bribery, extortion, and the abuse of power by a powerful public official of this state,” Mr. Khuzami said in a statement. “And yet again, a jury responded with a unanimous verdict of guilt, in this case of Dean Skelos and his son Adam — sending the resounding message that political corruption will not be tolerated.”

Judge Kimba M. Wood set sentencing for Oct. 24. In the original trial, she had sentenced the elder Mr. Skelos to [five years in prison](#), and his son to six and a half.

Judge Wood made clear that she expected the senator to find himself facing incarceration once more. “I doubt that the outcome is a surprise,” she told his lawyer.

Afterward, Mr. Skelos and his son, whose lawyers had spent the previous weeks [describing their close bond](#), exited the courthouse separately.

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### **[Connecticut Democrats lose their gubernatorial rainmaker](#)**

What is a governor worth to a state party in terms of campaign cash? In the case of Gov. Dannel P. Malloy and the Connecticut Democrats, the answer at this point in the election cycle lies somewhere in the neighborhood of \$1.4 million.

Without an incumbent governor seeking re-election, individual contributions to the Democratic Party are down 58 percent from four years ago, when Malloy was a candidate seeking every possible advantage in a tough fight for a second term. Conversely, with Malloy as rainmaker in 2014, the party saw a 62 percent increase in individual contributions over 2010.

The numbers are a reflection of one of the oldest and most enduring dynamics in politics: Even in an era of so-called clean elections in Connecticut, when state contractors are barred from contributing directly to state campaigns, money will still find its way to power.

“Money does flow to power. It’s that simple,” said Richard Foley, a former Republican state chairman and state legislator. “We can bemoan that, and I did when I was on the outside. And you can celebrate it, and I did when I was on the inside.”

The arrival and pending departure of Malloy, whose fundraising on behalf of the party for the 2014 election sparked a Republican complaint that led to Democrats paying the largest penalty ever obtained by the State Elections Enforcement Commission, offer a measure of that dynamic.

Party finances are tabulated by the Federal Election Commission in two-year election cycles, with the current calendar beginning Jan. 1, 2017. An examination of FEC records shows that:

- At this point in the 2010 cycle, when Democrats had not held the governor’s office for two decades, individual donors to its main campaign account had given the party \$897,673.
- At the same point in 2014, with Malloy as a rainmaking governor, the number jumped to \$2.4 million — an increase of \$1.5 million.
- This year, the contributions are back to \$1 million, a loss of \$1.4 million.

It wasn’t supposed to be this way in Connecticut, a state that made a concerted effort in 2005 to loosen the ties between political power and campaign cash in the wake of a corruption scandal that forced the resignation of Republican Gov. John G. Rowland.

At the urging of his GOP successor, Gov. M. Jodi Rell, the General Assembly passed a law banning state contractors from contributing to state campaigns. The provision was an element of a broader reform in 2005 that created the Citizens’ Election Program, a voluntary system of publicly financing campaigns of candidates for state office.

Rowland resigned amid an impeachment inquiry into, among other things, his administration’s cozy relationship with William A. Tomasso, a state contractor whose family’s companies won more than \$100 million in state contracts while Rowland was governor. Rowland pleaded guilty to a corruption charge related to a bid-rigging conspiracy.

But the ban on state-contractor contributions came with a loophole, a consequence of a conflict between state and federal campaign finance laws. State parties have to maintain both state and federal campaign accounts, and contractors barred from giving to a party’s state account are free to write checks of up to \$10,000 to the federal account.

Federal law requires that money raised and spent in support of congressional candidates — even if the expenditures also benefit state candidates on the same ballot — be done so under federal rules. As a result, as Jonathan Harris said when he was the party’s executive director in 2013: “The federal account is our workhorse account. We run our operations, our salaries, our rent on federal dollars.”

In 2013 and 2014, contributions from state contractors flowed into the party’s federal account, many for the maximum of \$10,000. Republicans alleged that much of the money was raised specifically to benefit Malloy, not a broader get-out-the-vote effort on behalf of the party’s entire ticket that included its congressional candidates.

The complaint produced a bitter fight over the authority of the State Elections Enforcement Commission to compel the Democrats to disclose emails and other documents pertaining to the party’s fundraising. Without resolving the dispute over the commission’s subpoena authority, Democrats agreed to pay \$325,000 to settle the case, not admitting wrongdoing.

The reformers who pushed for the creation of the Citizens' Election Program say it has made positive contributions to how Connecticut elections are financed, despite the continued flow of money from state contractors and others with a financial interest in issues before the governor and General Assembly.

The public financing law was passed in 2005, but 2010 was the first year the money was available to candidates in statewide campaigns. (The program is available only to state offices, not congressional campaigns.) Malloy was the first gubernatorial candidate to qualify and be elected using the program.

Rell seemed averse to pressing for contributions for the GOP in 2005, when she was preparing for the 2006 campaign. She refused to meet with lobbyists, and undercut a longstanding GOP fundraising golf tournament, the Governor's Cup. With lobbyists in attendance, Rell refused to attend.

William A. Hamzy, who was Republican state chairman when she was preparing for a re-election campaign in 2006, said Rell never was a significant fundraiser for the party.

"It certainly was a different time," Hamzy said.

Hamzy said the public financing system has made the state parties more important today than they were in Rell's time. Public financing tends to level the playing field if an incumbent governor is participating in the program, as did Malloy and his Republican challenger, Tom Foley, in 2014. Both campaigns were limited in the general election to identical grants of \$6.5 million.

Given that limit, the ability of the state parties to essentially supplement the grants by footing the bill for a get-out-the-vote effort has become more important, Hamzy said. Unlike Super PACS, which are free to make unlimited expenditures in support of a campaign, the state parties are allowed under state law to coordinate activities with campaigns.

In 2014, the ground game established by the state Democratic Party gave Malloy an edge, one that Republicans still insist was improper.

The public financing program was pushed by a coalition of grass-roots groups, including Common Cause and the Connecticut Citizens Action Group. The groups' maintain that the reforms of 2005 have had a positive effect on state elections, encouraging newcomers to run for office and dampening the impact of special interest money, even if it cannot be eliminated.

Nick Nyhart, a long-time Connecticut activist who is president of the Every Voice Center, a national reform group, said the Citizens' Election Program clearly has lessened the dependence of public officials in Connecticut on outside money.

"It cuts the dependence of candidates, whose job is to serve the public, on the donors who have very specific interests," Nyhart said. "In Connecticut, every dollar raised from outside sources is a dollar that raises that dependency question."

Nick Balletto, the Democratic state chairman, acknowledged that fundraising is off but said the party's major fundraising dinner won't be held until October, when it might close the gap. Still, he said, "We don't have the full-scale operations that we've had in the past."

The Democrats are hardly destitute without Malloy as a rainmaker, however.

Their presumptive gubernatorial nominee is Ned Lamont, a wealthy self-funder free of the spending limits Malloy faced as a participant in the Citizens' Election Program. And it has U.S.

Sen. Chris Murphy, whose re-election campaign was holding nearly \$8 million at the beginning of April.

Murphy said he is committed to helping underwrite a coordinated campaign to identify and turn out voters on behalf of the entire ticket.

“I think that I’ll clearly bear more of a fundraising burden this year. I’ve made a pretty sizable transfer to the state party already, and I’ll make at least one more big one,” Murphy said. “But I’m also raising money (for) the state party, and I assume once we have a Democratic candidate for governor they will also be raising money (for) the state party.”

Murphy’s campaign already has transferred nearly \$300,000 to the party’s coffers.

“I’m hopeful we’ll be able to run a really well-coordinated campaign as allowed by law, where we are coordinating efforts between my campaign, the governor campaign, the legislative campaigns to target voters and get out the vote,” Murphy said. “We’ve traditionally done that in the past, and I’d like to do it better this year.”

The Democratic Party’s settlement with the State Elections Enforcement Commission lays out new accounting rules and other restrictions intended to keep campaign money prohibited by state law out of state campaigns. J.R. Romano, the Republican state chairman, said the GOP will be closely watching.

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### **[Top state leaders fined for illegal campaign contributions from drug company](#)**

Legislative leaders, Gov. Roy Cooper and Attorney General Josh Stein were among 37 candidates that were fined because they accepted illegal campaign contributions from the pharmaceutical company Pfizer’s political action committee.

The state elections board hasn’t yet recorded fine payments from eight of the campaigns and from Pfizer, even though the deadline was a month ago.

The contributions totaled \$53,500 and were dated during the legislature’s session, when PACs are prohibited from making campaign contributions to state office holders or candidates seeking those offices.

The campaigns of House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, and Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, both paid \$3,500 last month to the state’s forfeiture and civil penalty fund, which goes to public schools.

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Moore’s treasurer, Amy Ellis, wrote in a letter to the state elections board that the campaign was unaware that the Pfizer checks were dated during session because they were received after the session ended. Ellis seemed to take issue with the elections board investigators’ finding, writing that “we do not understand how a check can be considered a ‘contribution’ under Chapter 163 until it is actually received by a committee.”

Most of the illegal Pfizer contributions occurred in June 2016 and October 2017, when the legislature held an extra session. Each campaign was notified in early May that they must forfeit the amount of the contribution, and Pfizer was notified in April that it must pay a \$53,500 fine.

Cooper and Stein’s campaigns each paid a \$5,000 forfeiture.

Campaigns were given 30 days from the date of their May 10 letter to pay the fines, but elections board records don't yet list payments from Senate Minority Leader Dan Blue, D-Wake, Sen. Kathy Harrington, R-Gaston, former Rep. Mike Hager, R-Rutherford, Rep. Linda Johnson, R-Cabarrus, Rep. Justin Burr, R-Stanly, Sen. Floyd McKissick, D-Durham, Sen. Bill Rabon, R-Brunswick, and Sen. Tommy Tucker, R-Union.

Others who received improper Pfizer donations but have already paid their forfeitures include the campaigns of Rep. Bill Brawley, R-Mecklenburg, Sen. Brent Jackson, R-Sampson, former Sen. Andrew Brock, R-Davie, Rep. Donny Lambeth, R-Forsyth, Rep. Ken Goodman, D-Richmond, former Rep. Marilyn Avila, R-Wake, Rep. Robert Reives, D-Lee, former Sen. Angela Bryant, D-Nash, House Democratic Leader Darren Jackson, D-Wake, Rep. David Lewis, R-Harnett, Rep. Nelson Dollar, R-Wake, Rep. Ed Hanes, D-Forsyth, former Rep. Larry Hall, D-Durham, Sen. Harry Brown, R-Onslow, Rep. Jason Saine, R-Lincoln, Sen. Jerry Tillman, R-Randolph, Rep. John Bell, R-Wayne, Rep. Josh Dobson, R-McDowell, Sen. Louis Pate, R-Wayne, Rep. Chris Malone, R-Wake, Sen. Ralph Hise, R-Mitchell, Rep. Sarah Stevens, R-Surry, Sen. Terry Van Duyn, D-Buncombe, and Rep. William Brisson, R-Bladen.

This week, the N.C. Republican Party alleged a similar type of campaign violation involving a PAC donation during the recent legislative session.

The GOP's complaint filed with the state elections board says Democrat Darryl Moss, a candidate for House and the mayor of Creedmoor, had improperly received a \$2,600 contribution from Our Shot PAC on June 25. NCGOP executive director Dallas Woodhouse wrote that the party "requests a timely investigation into potential campaign finance violations." Our Shot is a PAC with ties to Rep. Graig Meyer, D-Orange, that aims to elect more Democrats to the legislature.

While not mentioned in the NCGOP complaint, Our Shot's campaign finance report lists June 25 contributions to five other Democrats running for the legislature: Erica McAdoo, Brandon Lofton, Sydney Batch, Ray Russell and Terence Everitt.

A spokeswoman for Our Shot said the session limitations don't apply to the group. "Our Shot NC is committed to complying with all campaign finance laws," Jackie Dzau said in an email. "Our understanding of the current statutes on the limitations on fundraising during Legislative session is that PACs are prohibited from making contributions if they employ or contract with lobbyists. We have no relationship with lobbyists, therefore, the basis of the complaint is not applicable to our PAC."

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### **[New Virginia business aims to be Kickstarter for political influence](#)**

Ever wish you could hire a lobbyist, push legislation and have better access to elected representatives, all from your living room?

There's an app for that.

At least there will be soon, thanks to [a startup out of Virginia's capital](#) that aims to be a sort of Kickstarter for political influence.

Crowdlobby, the brainchild of University of Richmond law school graduates, recently raised \$35,000 and plans to launch within the next few months.

Here's how it will work: Citizens can log on and contribute to an issue they care about. It has to be a specific legislative fix, not an overarching topic like education reform. Once a minimum is

reached – \$50,000 at the state level, \$200,000 in Washington – Crowdlobby hires a lobbyist on the contributors' behalf.

“It’s really going to be a platform for the people,” said 27-year-old Samantha Biggio, one of its founders. “The idea is to make the process as transparent as possible.”

The startup was born after then-law student Heidi Drauschak worked at a prominent Richmond lobbying firm. She was shocked by the amount of influence and access lobbyists had.

“We were providing our clients with information on a weekly, if not daily, basis,” said Drauschak, who’s 25. “I was incredibly impressed with the tool that lobbying was. ... But because of the price tag, the average person never considers it as an option.”

Crowdsourcing seemed an intuitive way to solve that, she said.

Drauschak, Biggio and two other students started a beta test version of the website last summer, focusing on issues in the Virginia legislature. They’ve invested \$10,000 of their own money so far.

With the updated rollout to come, Crowdlobby will be available in all 50 states and Washington.

About half of U.S. senators and more than a third of congressional representatives become lobbyists after public office, [research has found](#), making the legislature a revolving door of the influenced and the influencers.

“We get a lot of people who say, ‘We don’t want more lobbyists, we want less,’ ” Biggio said. “But the reality is people don’t really know what they do on a daily basis ... being there to voice the perspective of their client. It’s not an inherently evil industry.”

A screenshot of the Crowdlobby website explaining the process.

There are limits to the issues citizens can submit on Crowdlobby.

It has to be specific, cannot have discriminatory impact and must be supported by 51 percent of the people it affects – applicants will have to point to polling data to demonstrate that. Biggio said they’ve compiled a list of reputable, nonpartisan sources such as Gallup from which to pull such data.

“I think we can tailor to specific issues that instead of benefiting a corporation benefit a specific portion of the population or citizens in general,” Drauschak said. “We have the ability to say, ‘Hey, we’ve been a silent majority here.’ Now we have a tool to sit at the table with corporate interests.”

Quentin Kidd, director of the Wason Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University, said Crowdlobby could become a disruptive force – if it works.

“Like Uber and Lyft disrupted traditional taxi services, which were institutionalized in society as much as lobbying is or ever was, is this going to be a disruptive agent?” Kidd said. “If so, that’s a good thing, because it opens up the influence of lobbying. It democratizes lobbying in some ways. That’s to be seen.”

Kidd said his main concern is whether groups who pool their money for a Crowdlobby campaign will be able to sustain the funds necessary to see it through.

An issue like marijuana legalization, say, “is going to require sustained lobbying over multiple years to get a bill through,” he said. “It may be that enough money can be raised in one period of time to hire a firm to lobby on behalf of an issue. But once that money runs out, is there a

sustained amount of revenue? That's what it takes to get most substantively changing legislation through a body like the General Assembly."

Biggio said Crowdlobby will initially allow people to donate to an issue for a little over a month. If the threshold is not met by then, those donors will get their money back.

Once a cause does raise minimum funding, Crowdlobby will ask potential lobbyists to submit proposals. They will send the best ones to the group and the donors will vote to choose the lobbyist.

From there people can get updates and communicate directly with the lobbyist through the app.

Drauschak expects to see average donations of \$25 to \$50, based on the \$27 average donation to the grassroots-heavy Bernie Sanders presidential campaign and average Kickstarter donations. They hope to have up to three campaigns live by the end of the year.

The only way into the lobbying world right now, Kidd said, is as a wealthy individual or through a large group, in which case you may sacrifice opinions on certain issues for others under the same umbrella. Crowdlobby could be a "novel and creative" way around that.

"We're hoping to attract every single demographic," Drauschak said. "We truly want to be a tool for the majority."