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[Warren Campaign Receives Thousands From Bain Executive, State Lobbyist](#)

Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D., Mass.), who has positioned herself as a crusader against corporate interests, received thousands of dollars from corporations, according to her latest FEC filing.

Warren has been floated as a potential 2020 presidential candidate and has frequently [slammed](#) Republicans for the financial support their campaigns receive from corporations and the wealthy. While she has [opposed](#) the *Citizens United* Supreme Court ruling that allows corporations to pay for political messages, she has also said she [supports capitalism](#), and her campaign coffers have benefitted.

Warren's Senate reelection campaign received \$5,400 from Jonathan Lavine, the chief investment officer of Bain Capital Credit and co-managing partner of Bain Capital, and \$5,400 from his wife, Jeannie, [according](#) to the FEC July 15 quarterly report.

Earlier this month, Warren sharply [criticized](#) investors' actions in the Toys "R" Us bankruptcy case, which included Bain.

"When an outside group with a lot of money can come into a place like Toys 'R' Us and vacuum up all the value and leave the employees, leave the pensioners, leave the small-trade, the folks who help supply the business ... and take all the value and leave nothing for anyone else, then capitalism doesn't work. Markets don't work," Warren said.

She also received \$1,000 from Daniel O'Connell, president and CEO of the Massachusetts Competitive Partnership, which the *Boston Globe* [describes](#) as "the state's most powerful business group." O'Connell is a liaison between the group's members and state-government power brokers in Boston. The partnership [includes](#) CEOs of Putnam Investments, Raytheon, Mass Mutual, John Hancock, Bank Of America, Fidelity Investments, and Liberty Mutual.

In addition to corporate interests, Warren also received campaign contributions from "[longtime lobbyist](#)" Lawrence B. Rasky, the chairman of Rasky Baerlein, Inc, one of the "[busiest](#)" lobbying firms in Massachusetts. Rasky and his wife, Carolyn, both donated \$5,400 each to Warren's campaign. Rasky is not a federal registered lobbyist.

Still, Warren has continued to use anti-corporate rhetoric as she campaigns for re-election.

"Right now this government works great for anyone who can hire an army of lobbyists and lawyers, but it doesn't work so well for everyone else. But we're going to change that. It's only when all of us speak up that we're going to make our government work for the people," Warren said last month.

[David v. Goliath: Power companies dwarf solar in lobbying fight over SC's energy future](#)

Deep-pocketed power companies outspent the solar industry nearly \$3 to \$1 as part of [an intensive lobbying effort](#) during an S.C. legislative session that included efforts to curb rooftop solar's expansion in the state.

Electric utilities spent nearly \$523,000 from January through May to hire more than three dozen lobbyists to advocate for them at the State House as lawmakers decided what to do about solar incentives and a failed nuclear project.

Those utilities also poured more than \$300,000 in contributions into state election campaigns through May of this year, largely to Republican incumbents, according to disclosure reports compiled by the National Institute on Money in Politics.

The solar industry, which saw the nuclear fiasco as an opportunity to expand its footprint in the state, was outspent badly and lost. It spent more than \$177,000 to hire 11 lobbyists during the 2018 legislative session.

"Solar consumers are in a David versus Goliath battle with the big power monopolies," said Matt Moore, chairman of the Palmetto Conservative Solar Coalition industry group.

But the traditional utilities and solar companies weren't the only ones spending tens of thousands this year to try to influence legislators. The state's electric cooperatives, trying to weigh in on the future of the state-owned Santee Cooper utility, spent almost \$239,000 on 25 lobbyists.

Selling a deal

Cayce-based SCANA and its would-be acquirer, Dominion Energy of Virginia, account for most of the lobbying done by utilities in the most recent legislative session, which ended last month.

The two utilities have been engaged in a marketing campaign trying to win support from the public and legislators for Dominion's proposed \$14.6 billion buyout of SCANA. SCANA, the parent company of SCE&G, has taken heat for abandoning construction on two nuclear reactors in Fairfield County in July 2017 that have cost SCE&G customers \$2 billion in higher rates so far and could cost billions more.

SCANA, with customers in the Midlands and Lowcountry, spent \$111,782 and hired eight registered lobbyists for the legislative session. Dominion doubled its S.C. lobbying staff to 10, spending \$120,500 during just the first five months of 2018 compared to more than \$51,000 for all of last year.

Dominion spokesman Chet Wade said the increased lobbying expense was needed to educate lawmakers about why the proposed Dominion-SCANA merger "is the best solution for customers, the state and South Carolina's long-term energy needs."

"It's a long conversation on complicated topics that takes a lot of education, and we will keep pursuing that outreach," Wade said.

SCANA and Dominion also [unsuccessfully lobbied lawmakers](#) to keep them from cutting SCE&G's electric rates. Dominion has said lawmakers, in passing that 15 percent rate cut last month, were gambling with ratepayers' money.

An SCE&G spokesman did not return a message seeking comment Tuesday.

A new player

Charlotte-based Duke Energy, which has customers in the Upstate and Pee Dee, spent \$136,176 on nine registered lobbyists during the 2018 session — the same number it has employed since January 2014.

Both Duke and SCANA long have been among the biggest lobbyists and contributors at the State House.

New to the mix this year was Florida-based NextEra Energy, which spent \$59,500 to hire nine S.C. lobbyists, including former S.C. lawmakers Harry Cato and Tommy Moore.

NextEra's first S.C. lobbyist registered with the state less than a month after news broke that the utility was [interested in buying the state-owned Santee Cooper](#) utility, SCANA's junior partner in the failed nuclear project.

The Florida utility is also part of the Palmetto Energy Coalition. That group is pushing S.C. lawmakers to sell Santee Cooper and has criticized Dominion's proposed buyout of SCANA.

According to its website, the group seeks “a long-term, economically viable solution to the future energy challenges faced by South Carolina residents and businesses as a result of the failure of the SCANA/Santee Cooper V.C. Summer nuclear energy project.”

A spokesman for NextEra did not respond to questions Tuesday.

Meanwhile, state-owned Santee Cooper — NextEra's presumed acquisition target — hired two additional lobbyists this session, spending more than \$85,000 for four lobbyists.

Solar expansion blocked

While the V.C. Summer debate — with its often unflattering portrayal of utilities — dominated the session, those utilities were successful in blocking a bill that would have raised the [state's cap](#) on solar power to 4 percent from 2 percent, allowing more future customers to earn a credit for the excess power their rooftop solar panels produce.

After heavy lobbying by Duke and SCE&G, the Legislature refused to increase the cap on the number of people who can sell excess solar energy back to the utilities at favorable rates.

Solar-industry representatives and supporters argue the state's growing solar industry would suffer if those rates are lowered, as fewer homeowners sign up for rooftop solar, costing installers and salespeople their jobs.

However, a Duke spokesman said the cap on solar power has worked, allowing solar power to take off in South Carolina.

“The incentives that were established (by lawmakers in 2014) were never meant to be permanent, but to jump-start a nascent solar industry,” said Duke spokesman Ryan Mosier.

“The law clearly spelled out milestones ... that once reached would trigger a new conversation to establish a reasonable and fair solar policy that benefits everyone for many years to come.

“We are hopeful this current effort will lead to consensus, common-sense legislation that is fair and balances the interests of ... solar providers, energy companies and customers who use solar energy — and those who do not.”

The solar companies insist the electric utilities flexed their political muscles to ward off competition.

South Carolinians, who pay the country's highest electrical bills, deserve a choice when it comes to where they get their power, said Tyson Grinstead, a local lobbyist for Sunrun, one of the nation's biggest rooftop solar companies.

“And many are looking to solar as an available and preferable alternative to the traditional utility,” he said.

Despite the loss in this year’s legislative session, Grinstead said, “It’s only a matter of time before solar interests overcome the hurdles.”

‘Lobbying on steroids’

Senate Majority Leader Shane Massey, R-Edgefield, said this year’s session amounted to “lobbying on steroids for the energy sector.”

He said lawmakers rely on lobbyists from both sides of issues to educate them on complicated topics such as energy policy, and keep them advised about challenges facing utilities.

“(Legislators) rely on the adversarial process to figure out what the best approach is, using lobbyists to educate them by listening to competing views,” Massey said.

While solar expansion lost traction — a victory for traditional power companies — lawmakers also passed a rate cut “in the face of opposition from the energy sector,” including SCANA, Massey noted.

State Rep. Nathan Ballentine, R-Richland, who sponsored raising the cap on solar power, said he’s “never seen a fight so out of balance than the one between the ratepayers — whether SCE&G customers or rooftop solar owners — “and utilities.”

Said Ballentine, “There’s a reason why these utilities are monopolies and why they want to stay monopolies.”

[Tammy Baldwin Surpasses \\$200,000 in Bundled Contributions From D.C. Lobbyists](#)

Baldwin, who has pushed to limit special interests, received a majority from J Street PAC

Democratic senator Tammy Baldwin (Wis.), who has pushed to limit the influence of special interests during her first term in the Senate, has raked in more than \$200,000 in bundled contributions this cycle from lobbyists at two far-left organizations, filings show.

Individuals at the J Street PAC, a D.C.-based Middle East advocacy group that was one of the most ardent supporters of President Obama's Iran nuclear deal, and the League of Conservation Voters, an environmental group also based in D.C., supplied the money to Baldwin's campaign.

Prior to the campaign's most recent filings, lobbyists at J Street bundled \$120,098.83 in donations for Baldwin. During the second quarter, which spans from April 1 to June 30, Baldwin's campaign took in an additional \$37,623.66 from lobbyists at the group, according to the campaign's [most recent filings](#) to the Federal Election Commission.

J Street is often referred to as an "anti-Israel group" by supporters of the Jewish state.

The organization poured [millions](#) into a public relations campaign blitz backing Obama's Iran nuclear deal, which was called a "historic mistake" by the Israeli government, and has come under fire in the past for inviting speakers to conferences who compared Guantanamo Bay to Auschwitz while another described Israel as a "whore."

The controversy led Michael Oren, the Israeli ambassador to the United States, to back out of speaking at the conference. Thirteen senators and congressmen removed their names from the event's host committee.

Lobbyists at the League of Conservation Voters have [bundled](#) \$50,000 for Baldwin's campaign. Baldwin, who was first elected in 2012, accepted the contributions from the liberal lobbyists despite pushing for legislation aimed at curtailing the influence of special interests during her first term in the Senate.

"Hardworking American families are struggling to get ahead and they can't afford to have special interests in a cozy relationship with the government," Baldwin [said](#) in 2016 when pushing an anti-special interest legislation package. "We need to make sure that government officials are working on behalf of the public interest and our common good."

Last year, Baldwin [introduced](#) legislation aimed at slowing the revolving door between the pharmaceutical industry and federal agencies.

Baldwin's campaign website additionally has a "Taking on Special Interests" section that boasts of her push to blunt certain sectors.

"Tammy is putting Wisconsin first and standing up to powerful special interests who want Washington to keep working for them—not Wisconsin," the [site states](#). "That's why it's no surprise that corporate special interests, billionaire megadonors, and shady Super PACs have made Tammy their top priority and have flooded Wisconsin with millions in outside spending against her."

"No matter how much secret money these special interests spend, Tammy will continue doing right by Wisconsinites and work to reduce the influence of special interest money in our government and our elections."

Baldwin's campaign did not return a request for comment on the bundled lobbyist contributions.

[Cincinnati firm lobbies for taxpayers – and companies that want their money](#)

Government Strategies Group does lobbying work for both FC Cincinnati and Hamilton County. Some say that's a conflict of interest, but the firm and most top county officials say they keep the work separate. The Enquirer

Early last November, Hamilton County's official spokeswoman, Anne Sesler, edited an opinion piece and sent out a press release for county commissioners about FC Cincinnati's "stadium needs."

Two months later, Sesler talked about those stadium needs at a community meeting – this time as the official spokeswoman for FC Cincinnati.

County Commissioner Chris Monzel remembers being confused when he found out about Sesler's comments on behalf of the team. Who, he wondered, was she working for? County commissioners or FC Cincinnati?

The answer was both.

That's because Government Strategies Group, a Cincinnati firm for which Sesler is a consultant, is paid by both Hamilton County and FC Cincinnati to handle their lobbying and communications work. The county hired her in 2017 and the team hired her in January.

"It was concerning when I heard about it," Monzel said of the firm's dual roles. "It definitely looks like a conflict of interest."

The conflict, as Monzel and some others see it, exists because the interests of FC Cincinnati and Hamilton County are not the same: FC Cincinnati needed \$15 million last year for a stadium parking garage and Hamilton County taxpayers picked up the tab.

The team, the firm, Sesler and several county officials say they've gone to great lengths to avoid conflicts by keeping Government Strategies' work for the county separate from its work for FC Cincinnati.

They say Government Strategies does not lobby the county on behalf of FC Cincinnati and that Sesler no longer participates in business related to the soccer team in her job as county spokeswoman.

"The complications are largely ones of perception as opposed to ones of reality," said Chip Gerhardt, the firm's president and founder.

But relationships can be complicated in the world of lobbying and communications, and FC Cincinnati and Hamilton County aren't the only Government Strategies clients with interests that sometimes overlap.

The firm's work with Hamilton County, in particular, creates challenges because Government Strategies represents a wide range of clients that either do business with the county or may one day want to. Some of those clients also compete with Hamilton County for state tax dollars to help build projects, such as FC Cincinnati's stadium.

"That's the problem you have when you hire a county lobbyist who is also lobbying for these other entities," said Jeff Capell, a Blue Ash councilman and opponent of the FC Cincinnati stadium deal. "You're supposed to be lobbying for county priorities."

Government Strategies' clients have included the Cincinnati Museum Center, the Reds, the Metro bus system, the Cincinnati Zoo, major construction companies, U.S. Bank Arena, Children's Hospital Medical Center, Duke Energy and others.

Monzel, a Republican who voted for Government Strategies' contract this year, shares those concerns and said he's unlikely to support renewing the contract next year. The county pays the firm \$174,000 a year, \$90,000 for lobbying and \$84,000 for Sesler's public affairs work.

The two Democratic commissioners, Todd Portune and Denise Driehaus, said they're happy with Government Strategies and are unaware of conflicts created by the firm's work for FC Cincinnati or other clients.

"No one from Government Strategies ever tried to put any pressure on us to do anything," Driehaus said of the stadium parking garage deal, which all three commissioners approved. "The county commissioners did what's best for the county."

Ties go beyond FC Cincinnati

Government Strategies, which has worked for the county for more than four years, is respected and politically connected in Cincinnati and Columbus.

Gerhardt, a Republican, is a member of the Hamilton County Board of Elections, and Sesler, a Democrat, is on the Cincinnati Planning Commission. Other Government Strategies associates serve on volunteer boards throughout the region.

Because the firm is in demand, it has multiple ties to some of the biggest projects in town. And sometimes, as with FC Cincinnati and Hamilton County, the relationships can get complicated:

- Gerhardt and Jim Benedict, Government Strategies' vice president, lobbied City Council last year to support the \$550 million expansion of Children's Hospital into Avondale, despite resistance from some in the neighborhood. Sesler, who said she was not involved in the lobbying work, voted for the expansion as a member of the Planning Commission, which unanimously approved it.
- Gerhardt and Benedict lobby for the owners of U.S. Bank Arena, while Sesler has done public affairs work for them in the past. Last year, the arena pitched a \$370 million renovation that would need the support of another Government Strategies client: the Hamilton County commissioners. The commissioners would have to put a tax on the ballot, but they've been cool to the idea.
- Government Strategies represented the Cincinnati Museum Center in 2014 when it sought to raise \$170 million from a countywide sales tax to help renovate the historic building. Hamilton County commissioners put the sales tax on the ballot that year and continue to oversee the collection and spending of the tax, which voters approved. Government Strategies added the county as a lobbying client in 2015.

Gerhardt and Sesler said they pay close attention to how work for one client could overlap with the interests of another, though they said conflicts rarely happen.

"We take protocol and disclosure and transparency seriously, especially in this realm, with public dollars involved," Gerhardt said.

In the case of FC Cincinnati, Sesler said, she didn't start working for the team until after commissioners approved the parking garage and she now recuses herself from county meetings related to the team.

"Anything that happens with FC, I don't get involved with it at all," she said. "I'm very sensitive to the perception."

Sesler said she had similar concerns last year when the Children's Hospital expansion went before the Planning Commission. She asked the city solicitor's office for an opinion on whether she could vote.

The solicitor's chief counsel, Roshani de Soyza Hardin, said Sesler could participate because her connection to the lobbying work was "sufficiently remote."

One of the most outspoken opponents of the hospital expansion, however, said Sesler should have disclosed the firm's relationship with the hospital to everyone with a stake in the vote, not just to the solicitor.

"Everything should be above board," said Patricia Milton, president of the Avondale Community Council. "Months later, we find out about this relationship. It's very unfortunate, but it seems to be par for the course in Cincinnati."

Milton said the relationship fuels the perception that a relatively small group of powerful people makes things happen in Cincinnati, whether the rest of the community likes it or not.

"They do whatever they need to do to get things done," she said.

Gerhardt said if anyone's work for the firm creates even the appearance of a conflict, the person discloses it, as Sesler did on the Planning Commission.

He also said the nature of the firm's work makes it possible to represent clients with competing interests without necessarily creating a conflict for the firm. He said the firm isn't a policy maker but rather a messenger that promotes clients through lobbying and public relations.

He said that's why it's possible for Sesler to speak for both Hamilton County and FC Cincinnati.

"She's not the voice of the county. The editorial content belongs with them," Gerhardt said, referring to county officials. "I understand that people may not appreciate the nuance there, but we're not in a policy position."

'The optics look bad'

Government Strategies' contract with the county requires it to notify county officials if work for other clients creates a conflict or "the appearance of conflict." Both Gerhardt and county officials said the firm has done so, including when it went to work for FC Cincinnati.

FC Cincinnati's president, Jeff Berding, said he hired Government Strategies because he has known Gerhardt and Sesler for years and he trusts them, not because of their ties to the county.

"I couldn't think of anyone better," Berding said.

Ethical guidelines from lobbying and public relations trade associations generally give the same advice when it comes to potential conflicts: Tell clients if one exists and decide together whether it's manageable.

But perception is an issue, too. Paul Miller, president of the National Institute for Lobbying and Ethics, said taking on two clients like FC Cincinnati and Hamilton County creates challenges that some firms, including his own, would rather avoid.

"For me, the optics look bad," Miller said. "I'm not saying anyone is doing anything wrong. I just don't know how you do both without looking like there's a conflict."

Capell, the stadium opponent, said the problem goes beyond appearance. He said he's particularly concerned that Government Strategies lobbies at the state level on behalf of both FC Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Because there are limited state dollars, Capell said, Government Strategies is essentially representing clients with competing interests in a budgetary version of the Hunger Games. If one client wins, he said, another loses.

"It's like if you hire a lawyer," he said. "The person you're fighting against can't hire the same lawyer, because then they're not working for you."

Gerhardt said it's more complicated than that. He said his firm makes the best pitch it can for all its clients' projects and advocates at the state level for more money for Hamilton County overall, which would mean more money to go around for all the projects.

"It's not necessarily this one or that one," Gerhardt said. "It's, let's get the pot bigger."

This year, FC Cincinnati landed \$4 million from the state for its stadium, while Hamilton County got \$2.5 million for a drug-treatment expansion at the jail and \$2 million for The Banks project on the riverfront. Both the team and the county said they are happy with those results and with Government Strategies' work.

"Regardless of what the perception might be, we were well represented," County Administrator Jeff Aluotto said of Government Strategies. "They've done good work for us."

Portune said the county's contract with Government Strategies has been a good deal for taxpayers because Gerhardt and his staff are strong advocates for their clients.

The overlapping interests of some of those clients have more to do with Cincinnati than the firm, Portune said. The city is small enough, he said, that a busy firm like Government Strategies is bound to run into potential conflicts from time to time.

"We're a big small town," Portune said. "I think to expect that there would be no conflicts at all would be unreasonable."

[Lawmakers, Lobbyists and the Administration Join Forces to Overhaul the Endangered Species Act](#)

The Endangered Species Act, which for 45 years has safeguarded fragile wildlife while blocking ranching, logging and oil drilling on protected habitats, is coming under attack from lawmakers, the White House and industry on a scale not seen in decades, driven partly by fears that the Republicans will lose ground in November's midterm elections.

In the past two weeks, more than two dozen pieces of legislation, policy initiatives and amendments designed to weaken the law have been either introduced or voted on in Congress or proposed by the Trump administration.

The actions included a bill to strip protections from the gray wolf in Wyoming and along the western Great Lakes; a plan to keep the sage grouse, a chicken-size bird that inhabits millions of oil-rich acres in the West, from being listed as endangered for the next decade; and a measure to remove from the endangered list the American burying beetle, an orange-flecked insect that has long been the bane of oil companies that would like to drill on the land where it lives.

"It's probably the best chance that we have had in 25 years to actually make any substantial changes," said Richard Pombo, a former congressman from California who more than a decade ago led an attempt to rethink the act and is now a lobbyist whose clients include mining and water management companies.

He and others argue that the act has become skewed toward restricting economic development and Americans' livelihoods rather than protecting threatened animals.

The new push to undo the wildlife protection law comes as Republicans control the White House and both chambers of Congress, and is led by a president who has made deregulation — the loosening of not only [environmental protections](#) but [banking rules](#), car [fuel efficiency standards](#) and [fair housing enforcement](#) — a centerpiece of his administration.

The Trump administration unveiled its [main effort to overhaul the Endangered Species Act](#) on Thursday, when the Interior Department and the Commerce Department proposed fundamental changes to the law. Those include a provision that for the first time could allow the economic consequences of protecting plants or animals to be considered when deciding whether or not they face extinction.

If the proposal is finalized, species that remain on the endangered list would still see their habitats protected, but it would become more difficult to list a new species for protection and easier to remove those now on the list.

The myriad proposals reflect a wish list assembled over decades by oil and gas companies, libertarians and ranchers in Western states, who have long sought to overhaul the law, arguing that it represents a costly incursion of federal regulations on their land and livelihoods. Until

now, those efforts have largely failed, even during periods when Republicans controlled both the White House and Congress.

Advocates of the environmental law agree that the proposals signal a critical moment. “The last few weeks have seen the most coordinated set of attacks on the Endangered Species Act I’ve faced since I got to Washington,” said Representative Raúl Grijalva of Arizona, the ranking Democrat on the House Natural Resources Committee. “This is a crucial test,” he said.

The Endangered Species Act was passed by Congress in 1973, and signed by President Richard Nixon at a time when using federal authority to protect threatened species was less controversial. The act has been credited with the resurgence of the American alligator, which had been hunted to near extinction for the use of its skin in purses and other goods; the gray whale, depleted by commercial fishing in parts of the Pacific Ocean; and the bald eagle, which is flourishing again after nearly disappearing from much of the United States.

The federal Fish and Wildlife Service annually spends about \$1.4 billion to protect threatened plants and animals, according to the agency’s [most recent expenditure report](#) in 2016, an amount that environmentalists say has not kept pace with the need. But industry leaders say that money is wasted protecting species that don’t need it and paying green groups’ litigation fees.

Take the case of the northern spotted owl, which has been a rallying cry for both sides of the debate since it was listed as threatened in 1990. The logging industry has long blamed the owl habitats for a crippling decline in timber harvests, sparking a vicious battle over restricting the economies and livelihoods of local communities.

But while opponents of the law cite an economic burden, there has been little comprehensive analysis of the precise economic costs or benefits of either enforcing or revising it.

“Trying to put a number on the cost to industry is incredibly challenging,” said Rebecca Epanchin-Niell, an expert on the economics of the Endangered Species Act at Resources for the Future, a nonpartisan research organization in Washington. Ms. Epanchin-Niell and several other economists noted that given the economic and geographical diversity of the industries affected — oil companies, ranchers, farmers, landowners, real estate developers and others — it is difficult to put a clear price tag on the law’s overall economic effects.

As to the economic benefits of preserving an endangered species, Ms. Epanchin-Niell pointed to what advocates for the law might describe as a “moral obligation” to guard against extinction. “Economists don’t have tools to put a price on these intangible values,” she said.

A northern spotted owl in Point Reyes, Calif.; protections for the owls led to debate over the economies of communities concentrated around timber harvests. Credit Tom Gallagher/Associated Press

Efforts in previous presidential administrations to weaken the Endangered Species Act were often met with some bipartisan resistance. But the profile of the Republican Party has changed since then. Over the past decade, [opposition to environmental regulations has become a more ingrained part of the G.O.P.’s identity](#), particularly as exemplified by President Trump.

“This is the first time that we’ve seen an orchestrated effort by the president, the Republican leaders in the House, the industry and the Interior Department all working together in a concentrated effort to eviscerate the act,” said Bruce Babbitt, who served as the interior secretary for eight years in the Clinton administration.

Opponents of the act say the current mood is simply the fruition of decades of ignored attempts to enact reasonable modifications to the law — for instance, government compensation to offset losses when landowners are unable to use portions of their property deemed critical habitat.

“Anyone who tries to do even modest reform is completely demagogued,” said Kathleen Sgamma, president of the Western Energy Alliance, a trade association for the oil and gas industry. Ms. Sgamma said environmental activists and others have also failed to understand how the law has been hurting farmers and ranchers as well as industry.

Brad Goehring, a vineyard owner from California’s Central Valley, said he is a prime example. Mr. Goehring said he can’t farm on about a quarter of his property because it is considered critical habitat for a freshwater crustacean known as the fairy shrimp.

“Think of the ramifications where you owe the bank money, you have loans to pay off and you’re told you can’t use all your property,” he said. Mr. Goehring ran for Congress as a Republican in 2010 in part on a platform of modifying the act.

While farmers like Mr. Goehring have for years urged Congress to enact changes, [the recent push has been led by David Bernhardt, the deputy interior secretary](#), a former oil lobbyist and lawyer whose legal clients included the Independent Petroleum Association of America.

Last December, Mr. Bernhardt convened a meeting at the Interior Department between senior political appointees and career staffers, at which he laid out his plans to streamline the law. Over the course of the spring, that plan was translated into the policy proposal unveiled on Thursday.

At the same time, on Capitol Hill, the Congressional Western Caucus, a group of House lawmakers, began coordinating a strategy. On July 12, the lawmakers unveiled a package of nine bills that, if enacted, would see more permanent changes to the law than those pushed by Mr. Bernhardt’s proposal. Legislation that is passed by Congress and signed into law by the president is less easily undone than regulatory changes.

While it is unclear if the lawmakers’ individual bills could become law this year, they also worked to add amendments to two must-pass spending bills, including the National Defense Authorization Act, which specifies the annual budget for the Pentagon.

The House-passed version of that spending bill includes provisions that would prohibit the Interior Department from putting two species of land birds, the sage grouse and the greater prairie chicken, on the endangered species list for at least 10 years. That would ensure that the habitat of those birds, encompassing millions of acres across 11 states, could remain open for oil and gas development. (The Interior Department is also moving forward with a separate regulatory plan to roll back [sage grouse protections](#).)

In past years, such provisions would likely have died in the Senate, chiefly because they were opposed by Senator John McCain, the Republican of Arizona.

But Mr. McCain today is recuperating from brain cancer and has not been active in Washington for several months. Shepherding the measure in his stead is Senator James Inhofe, the Republican of Oklahoma who has made a signature issue of advocacy on behalf of the oil industry and denying the established science of human-caused global warming.

It is expected that Mr. Inhofe will champion a provision in the House defense bill that would remove endangered species protections for the American burying beetle. The insect has a protected habitat in just four states — but one of them is Mr. Inhofe’s home state of Oklahoma.

“I think the Endangered Species Act is endangered,” said Andrew Rosenberg, director of the Union of Concerned Scientists. “They haven’t been able to do this for 20 years, but this looks like their one chance.”

Republicans also added at least nine endangered species-related amendments to the spending bill that funds the Interior Department. Among other provisions, that bill would remove the gray wolf from the endangered species list. It would also prohibit the Interior Department from reintroducing the endangered grizzly bear into the North Cascades ecosystem of Washington State, something lawmakers from the region say could threaten the area’s recreation livelihood.

Senator John Barrasso, the Republican of Wyoming who chairs the Environment Committee, introduced a draft bill that overlaps with many of the House proposals.

“We’re all aware that the Endangered Species Act hasn’t undergone any significant updates in over 40 years,” said Representative Rob Bishop, Republican of Utah and chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, in a statement. “Now is the time to modernize this antiquated law to simultaneously benefit both endangered species and the American people.”

[U.S. Oil Industry Lobbies Against Tighter Sanctions on Russia](#)

The U.S. oil and gas industry is lobbying against tighter sanctions on Russia that could impact U.S. investments there, congressional sources said on Friday.

The U.S. Senate has revived a bill, called DETER, that would allow for swift sanctions if Moscow was found meddling in future U.S. elections. Both Democrats and Republicans are looking to redress what they consider President Donald Trump's weak stance on accusations of Russian interference in the 2016 election when he met Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday.

Top U.S. energy company Exxon Mobil is among the firms that have previously opposed U.S. sanctions on Russia. Opponents claim sanctions unfairly penalize U.S. companies while allowing foreign energy rivals such as Royal Dutch Shell and BP to operate in the world's biggest oil producer.

Western powers imposed sanctions in 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Democratic Senator Chris Van Hollen told Reuters on Friday there was growing bipartisan support for his DETER bill.

When asked whether energy industry lobbyists were either opposing the bill or seeking revisions, Van Hollen said that "a range of issues need to be discussed including ... ones related to U.S. and European energy projects."

Van Hollen said that while he was willing to address "reasonable concerns" from industry representatives and other lawmakers, the legislation needed to be robust enough to discourage Moscow from meddling in future U.S. elections.

"Don't trip the wire because if you do, sanctions are automatic and harsh" should be the message, Van Hollen said.

He said he had not been directly contacted by energy lobbyists.

Lobbyists representing oil and gas firms with interests in Russia were opposing the legislation, two Senate aides said. They did not mention specific companies and spoke anonymously because private conversations were still underway.

One of the Senate aides said the U.S.-Russia Chamber of Commerce was raising concerns about the legislation.

The chamber describes itself as a non-profit organization headquartered in Houston that promotes trade between Russia and the United States. Its members include Shell, Exxon Mobil, and Chevron.

Chamber representatives and the three energy companies did not respond to requests for comment.

Exxon has already taken a hit because of sanctions. In February, the firm said it would exit some joint ventures with Russia's Rosneft.

The company still has operations in Russia, including an oil venture on an island in the North Pacific called Sakhalin.

(Reporting by Richard Cowan and Timothy Gardner, Writing by Richard Cowan; Editing by Mary Milliken and Rosalba O'Brien)

[Outgoing State Rep. Randy Davis indicted in bribery case](#)

Alabama State Rep. Randy Davis has been indicted on allegations of bribery, according to federal court documents.

Court documents show the superseding indictment filed Wednesday stems from the alleged bribery scheme that led to indictments of State Rep. Jack Williams, R-Vestavia Hills, lobbyist Marty Connors, former chairman of the state Republican Party, and Trina Health owner and CEO G. Ford Gilbert of California.

The case began in April of 2018 when a federal grand jury [returned an indictment](#) against Gilbert, whose Trina Health clinics operate diabetes treatment clinics across the world.

Davis, 66, faces three counts in the superseding indictment: one charge of conspiracy, one charge of violation of the travel act, and one charge of making a false statement.

A superseding indictment replaces the original indictment filed in the case.

Davis appeared at the Montgomery federal courthouse this afternoon. Al Agricola, one of his attorneys, said there would be no statement.

According to the indictment, a person only identified by the initials C.B. was a friend of Gilbert's. He didn't have the money to open a Trina Health affiliated clinic, so he recruited investors. C.B. had worked on business deals before with former state Rep. Mickey Hammon, but he knew Hammon didn't have the money, either. C.B. talked to Hammon about the clinic, and hoped Hammon shared the details of the Trinia clinic with his friend Davis, the indictment says. Davis didn't have the money needed, but he was interested and agreed to look for investors with Hammon.

The indictment says C.B. promised the men that whoever could recruit investors would be given a five percent ownership interest. In May 2014, the indictment says Davis accepted the deal and emailed C.B. that he hoped to "make millions on this deal."

From that month until April 2015, the indictment alleges Davis actively looked for investors. At one point in 2015, Gilbert visited C.B., Hammon, and Davis and told the men that any north Alabama Trina affiliated clinic would be profitable and also be performing a public service.

U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Alabama Louis Franklin Sr. released a statement after the indictment was issued:

"The original indictment alleged that in 2014 and 2015, Trina Health opened three clinics in Alabama. Soon thereafter, the state's largest health insurer informed Trina Health that it would not cover the treatments provided by Trina Health. Gilbert then schemed to force the insurer to change its position.

"Gilbert came up with a plan to push a bill through the Alabama Legislature's 2016 session that would require the insurer to cover the treatments. Gilbert then made payments and gave things of value to a legislator, former House of Representatives Majority Leader Micky Ray Hammon, in exchange for Hammon working behind the scenes to push the bill. Gilbert also hired co-defendant Martin Connors to act as a lobbyist on behalf of the bill. Connors knew of Gilbert's payments to the legislator.

"The new charges contained in the superseding indictment alleges that Davis also stood to gain from Trina Health's successes. According to the indictment, during 2014 and 2015, Davis tried to recruit investors to Trina Health and, as a result of doing so, he received finder's fees. After Trina Health encountered difficulties with the health insurance companies, Davis attempted to lobby the insurance company to change its position. When that failed, Davis took steps to advance the bill. For example, Davis helped to recruit a sponsor, arranged for the public hearing to be video recorded, and then spoke in favor of the bill at a public hearing."

In 2017, Davis, a four-term state legislator and a Republican from Daphne, announced he would not seek re-election. [He planned to run for Baldwin County probate judge but later dropped those plans.](#)

Davis was first elected in 2002 and reelected three times. He was a music teacher and an administrator in Mobile County and Baldwin County public schools and later an assistant professor of music at the University of Mobile until 2014.