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Weekly Lobbying Articles

August 10, 2017

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

August 4, 2017

Missouri's lieutenant governor is lone statewide official who takes lobbyists gifts

http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/missouri-s-lieutenant-governor-is-lone-statewide-official-who-takes/article_237d7e06-5077-5492-9890-7d59d9ad37ce.html

JEFFERSON CITY • When it comes to accepting gifts from lobbyists, Missouri's lieutenant governor stands alone.

Unlike other statewide elected officials, Lt. Gov. Mike Parson accepts freebies from the platoon of lobbyists that patrol the Capitol corridors, records show.

According to data compiled by the Missouri Ethics Commission, the Republican from Bolivar has received meals and gifts worth \$2,752 since taking office in January.

That includes \$1,350 worth of commemorative coins from lobbyist Jorgen Schlemeier, who represents an alphabet soup of trade groups and organizations ranging from the state's auto dealers to the St. Louis Zoo.

And it includes more than a dozen meals with other lobbyists, including former House Speaker Steve Tilley and former Senate President Pro Tem Tom Dempsey.

Parson, who earns a taxpayer-paid salary of \$86,400, did not respond to multiple requests for comment. His predecessor, Republican Peter Kinder, also accepted lobbyist gifts.

Parson's decision to take such gifts stands in contrast to other statewide officials, who do not accept gifts from lobbyists.

As a candidate for governor, Republican Eric Greitens called for a prohibition on lobbyist gifts. Like previous attempts, a proposed ban won quick approval in the House in January, but floundered and ultimately fizzled in the Senate.

Upon taking office, Greitens also issued an executive order barring workers in the executive branch of government from accepting gifts or meals from lobbyists.

MEC records show Republican Treasurer Eric Schmitt, Attorney General Josh Hawley and Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft did not report accepting any freebies during their first six months in office.

Ashcroft's ban on accepting gifts extends to all Secretary of State employees.

"No one, including the secretary, may accept lobbyist gifts. The office does have a policy in place to promote transparency and remove any appearance of impropriety," Ashcroft spokeswoman Maura Browning said.

State Auditor Nicole Galloway, a Democrat, also does not accept gifts or meals.

"It's an honor to be the taxpayers' only independent watchdog and, quite frankly, I don't need free dinners and baseball tickets to serve Missourians," she said.

Parson, a former Polk County sheriff who served in both the House and Senate, ranked third among his former colleagues in how much he accepted, according to the MEC.

In the first half of 2017, only Republican state Sens. Brian Munzlinger of Williamstown and Paul Wieland of Imperial accepted more lobbyists meals and gifts. Both reported \$3,825 in spending.

The next highest were Republican Reps. Shawn Rhoads of West Plains and Kurt Bahr of St. Charles, with \$2,705 and \$2,370 in freebies respectively.

In all, lobbyists dished out a total of nearly \$350,000 worth of meals and gifts during the first half of 2017. That's down from more than \$375,000 during the same time period last year.

Of the 20 lawmakers who accepted the most meals and gifts in 2017, 11 are Republicans and nine are Democrats.

Los Angeles Times
August 6, 2017

Political Road Map: No one spends more on lobbying in Sacramento than local governments

<http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-road-map-lobbying-local-governments-20170806-story.html>

The stereotype of lobbying is that it's the exclusive domain of corporations and organized labor, groups spending huge sums of money to quietly but firmly flex their political muscles in Sacramento.

But the data don't bear that out. It's California's local governments — cities, counties and scores of other agencies — that spend the most of any sector to influence the outcome of events at the state Capitol.

It's government lobbying government, and it's paid for with taxpayer dollars.

Quarterly lobbying reports filed last week show that local and regional governments and their elected officials collectively continue to outpace all other branches of California's influence industry. Through the first six months of 2017, these government entities together spent more than \$24.3 million on lobbying in Sacramento.

That's an average of about \$135,000 for every calendar day, though much more in practice when you consider that lawmakers are generally in session just 16 days a month.

Almost 400 local government groups have lobbyists, and they run the gamut from large cities to rural counties. School districts have lobbyists, too, as do some tribal governments. No level of local government appears to be too small: Santa Monica's rent control board paid \$12,246 to have someone watching the Legislature this spring, while Sonoma County's parks district has paid \$13,500 this year to do the same.

In some cases, the lobbying seems to loop back and over the same constituents. Los Angeles County has spent \$745,577 on lobbying this year — separate from the \$114,300 spent by its district attorney's office and the \$247,084 that's been spent since January by the county's Metropolitan Transportation

Authority.

And lest you think lobbying is mostly paid for by local governments a long ways from the statehouse, take note that the city of Sacramento has spent \$375,294 on lobbyists in the first half of 2017. Not only is its city hall less than a half-mile away; its mayor is the former leader of the state Senate.

Then there's the money that cities, counties and special districts spend on statewide associations that have their own cadre of professional lobbyists. San Diego County paid \$512,956 for lobbying in the first six months of the year, as well as dues that helped fuel the \$393,411 for lobbying spent by the California State Assn. of Counties.

Other groups may make headlines more often for their efforts to influence the outcome of legislation and state agency regulations, but they spend far less than California's municipal and regional governments. Labor unions spent about \$6.8 million on lobbying through June 30, while oil and gas companies spent about \$16.7 million. Only healthcare lobbying, which totaled \$23 million in the first half of 2017, came close to what was spent by local governments.

So what drives local officials to do so much lobbying of state government? Sometimes it's to make sure they're getting a piece of the larger tax revenue pie. A number of local government lobbying disclosure forms included efforts to secure funds in the new state budget and the \$52-billion transportation plan signed into law this past spring. In other cases, locals feel they have to play defense, keeping state lawmakers from imposing too many onerous new rules.

The latest lobbying reports are not an anomaly. Since 2013, local and regional governments have spent more than \$208 million to stake out the hallways and committee hearing rooms of Sacramento. It's a reminder that when lawmakers return in two weeks for their final month of work for 2017, there will be plenty of chances for them to be cajoled about the wants and needs of officials back home.

North State Journal
August 9, 2017

Campaign finance reports show candidates' cash on hand

<http://nsjonline.com/article/2017/08/campaign-finance-reports-show-candidates-cash-on-hand/>

RALEIGH — Mid-year campaign finance reports were due to the State Board of Elections and Ethics at

the end of last month and as they trickled in, the disclosures begin to shed a light on where candidates stand in off-year fundraising.

State campaign finance law restricts who can donate to statewide offices, such as legislators and the governor, and when. Because of the restrictions, most of the cash flow occurs outside of session.

Lobbyists and groups that hire lobbyists cannot directly give to statewide candidates, unless through a political action committee, but individuals can donate at any time.

Senate Leader Phil Berger has nearly \$560,000 cash on hand by the end of June, with \$357,600 collected from personal donations during session. Speaker Tim Moore's disclosure shows \$414,189 cash on hand for the top House Republican fundraiser, with nearly \$170,000 from individuals.

Political action committees for Duke Energy, Farm Bureau, Beer and Wine Wholesalers, and powerhouse consulting firm McGuire Woods maxed out to both legislative leaders just before the General Assembly went in for the long session in late January. Blue Cross Blue Shield's PAC maxed out only to Berger.

Gov. Roy Cooper isn't up for reelection until 2020, but he's using his influence to fundraise for other Democratic pursuits — including winning seats in the General Assembly to dilute the Republican's veto-proof majority.

Cooper spent a whopping \$686,437 in the last six months, including \$15,470 on "strategic consulting" services from a company based in West Hollywood, California and \$22,400 to purchase potential donor lists from Virginia and Iowa based political firms.

The governor spent more than he took in, but disclosed that he currently has \$532,147 cash on hand heading into the fall.

NBC4- Washington
August 9, 2017

Virginal Towing Operator Spent Thousands to Lobby Against Regulations

<http://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/Virginia-Towing-Company-439469823.html>

The owner of one of Northern Virginia's largest towing companies spent several thousand dollars to try to stave off a veto by Gov. Terry McAuliffe on legislation loosening towing regulations, newly filed lobbying and campaign finance records show.

John O'Neill, the owner of Advanced Towing, hired two of McAuliffe's longtime friends as lobbyists for \$5,000 each and made a \$1,500 campaign contribution to a Democratic state senator who initially opposed the bill but who McAuliffe said was later a key advocate in convincing him to sign it.

Those involved, including McAuliffe, said O'Neill's spending was pointless, as it was a full-court press by Democratic senators and the business community that convinced the governor to back the bill.

Advanced Towing is the dominant towing company in Arlington County and has frequently been the subject of unflattering reports of its business practices. News4 reported that the company was the subject of 155 complaints to police from 2012 to 2014.

The company was in the news in April 2015 after ESPN reporter Britt McHenry was caught on video berating an Advanced Towing employee after McHenry's car was towed.

Last year the Arlington County Board of Supervisors approved new rules designed to crack down on what supporters said were "predatory" practices by towing companies. The most significant change was that businesses would have to approve each individual tow during business hours rather than giving towing companies blanket authorization, a change known as the "second signature" provision.

Arlington is a dense urban area where parking spots are costly and often hard to come by.

Advanced Towing has repeatedly been accused of predatory practices. Drivers say they leave their vehicles for a moment to go into a store or use an ATM, and their cars disappear.

In one case, a man says the company caused \$1,200 worth of damage to his car when Advanced Towing

hailed it away, even though he had a valid parking pass. In another case, a father says he ran into CVS and left his children, age 17 and 7, in the car, only to have an Advanced Towing truck hook it up to a tow truck with the children inside. They stopped when the little boy started shouting.

Opponents of the new law said the spending highlights how businesses with deep pockets are often at an advantage politically in Virginia, which has a virtually nonexistent consumer protection lobby.

"I wish there was a stronger voice for consumers in the Commonwealth and ultimately was disappointed that we couldn't hold the line on the nominal protections we had," said Jay Fisette, an Arlington County Board member who championed the stricter regulations on towing.

The county passed its new rules late last year over the objections of the towing industry, and members of the business community. The Arlington Chamber of Commerce said the provision was a "burdensome regulation" that would hurt business owners while doing nothing to solve the county's parking shortage. Those opposed to the provision worked to push through legislation at the General Assembly earlier this year that, among other things, undid the county's second signature provision.

McAuliffe initially resisted the effort and tried unsuccessfully to gut the legislation with an amendment. Democratic Sen. Dave Marsden, who supported the bill, said McAuliffe was firmly opposed to legislation early on.

Marsden said the first time he talked with the governor he didn't get very far. "I hate towing," he said McAuliffe told him.

In early April, lawmakers rejected McAuliffe's proposed amendment, leaving him the option of vetoing the bill or signing it into law. McAuliffe took a meeting with Marsden, Sen. Barbara Favola of Arlington County, and business groups on April 24th to discuss the bill. McAuliffe said he was won over by arguments that the second signature provision was harmful to small business owners, who said the new rule was cumbersome and unworkable.

To bolster his cause, O'Neill hired three lobbyists. Two of them are longtime friends of the governor, David Jones and Chris Petersen, who had never lobbied in Virginia prior to McAuliffe taking office. Petersen, a law school friend of McAuliffe's, is also treasurer of the governor's political action

committee.

McAuliffe said Jones and Petersen didn't speak to him directly and their lobbying had no impact on his decision.

"Never talked to them," McAuliffe said.

O'Neill declined to answer questions about why he hired Petersen and Jones as lobbyists, saying only that he had information he wanted to "make sure" was passed on to the governor's office.

The extent of their lobbying efforts is unclear, as neither Petersen or Jones returned requests for comment. Petersen sent emails to some of McAuliffe's staff prior to the meeting, which contained the same talking points that the business community and towing companies had been making.

O'Neill also gave a \$1,500 on April 13 to Favola, who had voted against the bill during session. McAuliffe said Favola later advocated for the bill.

"Barbara Favola and Dave Marsden were the leaders on it," McAuliffe said.

Favola disputes that characterization, saying she only provided the governor with "the pros and cons" of the legislation at the April 24 meeting.

The \$1,500 donation was only the significant donation Favola, who isn't up for re-election until 2019, received in April. Overall, O'Neill gave Favola a total of \$3,000 in the first part of 2017, about 10 percent of all money she raised.

O'Neill said he's been a longtime contributor to Favola and his donations had nothing to do with the bill. Favola said O'Neill's donation did not influence her in any way. She also added that there was nothing unique in O'Neill's efforts to get McAuliffe to sign the bill.

"People who have interests in Richmond, they play the system," she said.

Florida Today
August 9, 2017

Brevard County Commission unanimously backs pursuing code of ethics

<http://www.floridatoday.com/story/news/local/2017/08/09/brevard-county-commission-unanimously-backs-pursuing-code-ethics/551917001/>

County commissioners have decided to move forward with a new code of ethics that would require lobbyists to register with the county and place restrictions on them.

The proposed ordinance also would ban former county commissioners from lobbying county officials for four years after leaving office.

Former commissioners also would be prohibited from being employed by the county at a higher salary than the county commissioner salary for four years after leaving office.

Today on the "News in 90 Seconds," host Christina LaFortune looks at a police meeting following Monday's Melbourne shooting, the identity of a drowning victim in Port Canaveral and a Defense Department grant given to a local rocket maker.

Commissioners unanimously approved what's known as "legislative intent," giving the county attorney's office direction to prepare the ordinance. The proposal then would be subject to a public hearing and final vote, likely in September.

The proposed ordinance is designed the help preserve "the integrity, honesty and transparency in government."

Commissioners decided against creating a Citizens' Advisory Committee on Ethics to review, investigate and make "probable cause" determinations on alleged ethics violations involving county employees. Under the proposal, the committee would have been able to transfer complaints to the state attorney's office for further action in cases of alleged major violations. Each of the five county commissioners would have appointed one member and one alternate to the committee.

Commissioner Kristine Isnardi said she feared that such a committee could be used as a "tool" by someone to file a "frivolous" complaint against a political opponent.

The committee could "be abused for political purposes," Isnardi said.

Commissioner Jim Barfield agreed, saying such a process could "become a political witch hunt if it's not addressed correctly."

Barfield said anyone with a concern could file a complaint with the state attorney's office or the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Isnardi noted that the Florida Commission on Ethics also is available to hear political ethics complaints.

Among the provisions supported by commissioners:

Lobbyists would need to file an annual lobbyist registration form, listing what entities they represent as a lobbyist. There would be no registration fee.

Commissioners would be prohibited from accepting gifts valued at more than \$25 over a one-year period from a lobbyist.

The use of county money for out-of-state travel must be approved by a majority of the County Commission.

Commissioners had some debate on the length of time before former commissioners could be employed by the county or lobby to the county.

Vice Chair Rita Pritchett said a two-year prohibition is "probably fine," and Commissioner Jim Barfield said he could support that as well.

But Commissioner John Tobia said he would prefer a six-year prohibition, a time span that would help prevent former commissioners from lobbying current commissioners they have served with. Eventually, commissioners agreed on a four-year time span.

During public comment on the proposal, Viera resident Pam LaSalle told commissioners the proposed code of ethics represented "a modest improvement in transparency."

But LaSalle said she wished "you all were doing more," including requiring lobbyists to provide a "contact log" of their meetings with county officials and to report their compensation. She said procurement contracts, voting conflicts and campaign finance activity also should be addressed in the code of ethics.

LaSalle also repeated her call for creating an independent inspector general position to pursue reduction and elimination of fraud, waste and mismanagement in county government.

"I like the additional community oversight," Isnardi said. "Maybe the inspector general is something we look as an alternative" to the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Ethics.

County officials who violate the ordinance could be subject to up to 60 days in jail and a fine of up to \$500. First offenders could receive a written reprimand.

Lobbyists who violate the registration rules would get a written warning for the first violation, and a fine of \$250 for the second and subsequent violations.