



# M U L T I S T A T E

## [Businesses, lobbyists bankroll college's fundraising drive for leadership institute at College of Southern Maryland](#)

The College of Southern Maryland has launched a fundraising campaign to establish a leadership institute it plans to name in honor of a long-serving Maryland politician with deep ties to the region.

Several entities with business before state government are ponying up to make the project a reality.

If the school can hit its financial targets, the Senate President Thomas V. Miller Jr. Center for Leadership would offer scholarships, provide training and serve as a leadership hub for the school and the surrounding community.

“We wanted to find a way to recognize him but also create a legacy so that we had something permanent to remind us of what leadership really means and how important it is,” said Michelle Goodwin, vice chairwoman of the CSM Foundation, which is spearheading the fundraising drive.

“Senator Miller is just a real testament to what it means to be a leader,” she added.

Miller, who has led the Senate since 1987, is the longest-serving Senate president in Maryland history — and he is the longest-serving Senate president in the nation. His Calvert County-based district includes a portion of southern Prince George’s County, where he continues to practice law.

The foundation is holding a fundraiser at Running Hare Vineyard in Prince Frederick on Sept. 26.

The host committee is led by the Chesapeake Potomac Healthcare Alliance — an ad hoc group that includes MedStar, Calvert Memorial Hospital and the Charles Regional Medical Center — and Marianne Harms, a philanthropist and donor to Democratic political candidates.

Also helping raise funds are more than a dozen other individuals and businesses, including an assortment of Annapolis-based lobbyists. They include CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, G.S. Proctor & Associates, Bruce C. Bereano, Washington Area New Automobile Dealers Association and Washington Gas.

Unions, agricultural concerns and prominent former Southern Maryland politicians, like ex-state Sen. Thomas M. “Mac” Middleton and former Judge John F. Slade III are also contributing.

In an interview with *Maryland Matters*, Miller (D) said he was honored that the school would want to create a leadership institute in his name.

“My whole legacy is going to be about education and the environment,” said the 76-year-old lawmaker, who has battled Stage 4 prostate cancer that has metastasized to his spine — and more recently, a case of shingles.

“Senator [Paul] Pinsky (D-Prince George’s) and I have been involved in making community college as affordable as possible,” he added.

According to the fundraising invitation, the College of Southern Maryland Foundation hopes to raise half a million dollars to launch the Miller Center for Leadership.

Donors who give \$100,000 get 12 tickets to a “VIP Reception” before the main event on Sept. 26 and will be listed on a special plaque and elsewhere.

Other donor levels — \$50,000, \$25,000, and so on — have similar recognition.

One of the most powerful men in state government, Miller said he initially expressed concern about being associated with a fundraising campaign that is targeting companies impacted by state policy.

“I was concerned about the ethics aspect of it, so [my Chief of Staff] Jake [Weissmann] talked to the [legislature’s ethics counsel] and they signed off on it,” he said. “I haven’t made one call and I haven’t solicited anybody.”

Miller also hasn’t suggested any names for the college foundation to solicit for the Sept. 26 fundraiser.

Tierra Bradford, public policy manager at Common Cause of Maryland, expressed apprehension about the CMS Foundation’s decision to solicit funds from businesses and lobbyists.

“Whenever legislators show close proximity to groups with special interests, this can read to the public that special interests groups have a major influence on policy decision making,” she said.

“Our organization is concerned when everyday people feel like their voice doesn’t matter as much as special interest groups, in our democracy.”

Miller has been a longtime booster of the University of Maryland at College Park, and the fundraising pitch had some of his friends scratching their heads about why a leadership institute in his name would be located at the College of Southern Maryland and not at the state’s flagship university.

“I’m sure once [College Park officials] hear about it, they’re going to be upset,” Miller conceded.

Goodwin insisted that CSM is eager to partner with College Park and other schools.

“We’re hoping that everybody looks at this opportunity to celebrate Mike’s leadership,” she said.

Miller acknowledged that when CSM first approached him, the pitch was to create scholarships in his name, not a leadership institute.

The school was founded in 1958 as Charles County Community College, and Miller recalled that he was instrumental in bringing Southern Maryland legislators, political leaders and school officials together in the late 1990s to create the College of Southern Maryland.

“In the Senate lounge we brought together the principals from all three [Southern Maryland] counties, Democrats and Republicans, and we were able to create this College of Southern Maryland, this tri-county effort, and it was difficult, because Charles County had it all. They weren’t sure what they were getting by adding St. Mary’s and Calvert.”

The College of Southern Maryland was born on July 1, 2000.

## [Handwritten note extends Obetz contract with ex-lobbyist John Raphael](#)

Former [Columbus City Hall lobbyist John Raphael](#) had been receiving steady consulting payments over eight months, totaling \$45,000, from the village of Obetz when the checks stopped arriving in his mailbox.

He had emailed the village another invoice on June 28, representing what it owed him for July, but Obetz Finance Director Matt Cramblit emailed back 27 minutes later, balking.

“Did we extend the contract?” Cramblit asked, referring to an agreement with Raphael signed by village Administrator Rod Davisson and Cramblit in mid-November [that had expired when it reached its \\$45,000](#) limit in June.

More than three weeks later, on July 22, Raphael emailed back: “Yes, July2 (sic) Rod said he was going to He’s been busy, probably forgot.”

But on July 29, Raphael was still pressing Cramblit for money, apparently still lacking a contract.

“Matt, haven’t received July payment,” Raphael wrote Cramblit. “Please advise.”

“Will you please forward me your signed agreement, or extension?” Cramblit emailed back 16 minutes later.

“On July 2, in Rods office he said he was extending the contract thru August,” Raphael replied about 20 minutes later. “... Told me he would handle it.”

By the end of the week, the village had cut a check to Raphael for an additional \$10,000, bank records obtained by The Dispatch through the Ohio Public Records Act show.

But when asked to see the contract that the check was written against, Davisson could point only to a handwritten note in blue marker at the top of one of Raphael’s invoices that said only: “EXTENSION 8-10K 9-5K 10-5K 11-5K 12-5K OK,” atop a squiggled, undated signature.

That cleared the way for an additional \$30,000, Davisson said.

“It’s a legitimate extension of an existing contract,” Davisson wrote in an email last week. “The new terms regarding payment amounts, timing, and expiration are clearly delineated on the extension (and) everything else remains the same.”

In 2016 Raphael, [who once lobbied Columbus officials](#) while representing many major city contractors, [began serving a 15-month federal sentence](#) after pleading guilty to one count of extorting campaign contributions from Redflex, a vendor of red-light cameras. Redflex executives who cooperated with federal prosecutors [said the payments to Raphael were bribes intended for elected officials as the company sought to secure business contracts with the city](#). No [city officials were charged](#) with wrongdoing.

“This is like watching a mom-and-pop store that does its cash accounting out of a cigar box,” said Ned Hill, a professor of economic development policy, public policy and finance with Ohio State University’s John Glenn College of Public Affairs. “It may be perfectly legal; it’s just way too casual.”

Almost 300 pages of Obetz records obtained by The Dispatch, including legal documents and emails, also show:

– On July 10, a Jacksonville, Florida, law firm, Adams and Reese, sent Raphael a letter of engagement offering to represent Obetz through him in a case dealing with a closed railroad crossing the village wants to reopen. “We will report to and take direction from you,” attorney Timothy Volpe wrote to Raphael, offering to bill Obetz up to \$775 per hour billed in six-minute increments.

– Raphael appears to have begun working for the village months before he had a contract. Emails indicate that he was making calls to officials, including U.S. Rep. Joyce Beatty, D-Jefferson Township, and taking photos in August and September of 2018. An unsigned draft engagement letter that Raphael sent to Obetz outlines that he would begin work on Oct. 1, 2018, for \$5,000 a month. He eventually started in mid-November, but he was paid \$10,000 — double his monthly rate — for the first month.

– Although Davisson said that Raphael’s lobbying doesn’t involve the [Columbus Crew SC leaving its Obetz practice facility for proposed new practice operations at Mapfre Stadium in Columbus](#), documents show that Raphael sent Davisson state plans on [reorganizing parking around Mapfre](#) to support the plan to create a city of Columbus recreation facility there.

Raphael’s original contract states that it can be “amended or modified only by a writing executed by the duly authorized officers of the parties hereto,” and that it can’t be “changed, modified, or altered except by an instrument, in writing, signed by both parties.”

Davisson said those words mean that he is empowered to unilaterally extend the contract by writing notes in blue marker on a Raphael invoice. [The village board isn’t required to approve the contract.](#)

The blue notes might have made the payments legal, but “I don’t know that it’s advisable,” said Trevor Brown, dean of OSU’s Glenn College, who specializes in public contracting and managing vendors.

“You throw 10 bad \$100,000 contracts out there, and there’s a good portion of your budget,” Brown said. “You’re just exposing yourself to a lot of risk, and more importantly, you don’t have a lot of transparency here.”

As for the engagement letter from the Florida law firm stating that Raphael would direct their work on behalf of the village, Davisson said it was “an error.”

“Because John was the liaison to find appropriate representation in Florida and made the necessary introductions, the firm mistakenly put his name on the proposed engagement letter,” Davisson said.

Asked why a lobbyist, rather than the village’s law director, Stephen Smith Jr., would be in charge of hiring outside legal counsel, Davisson said: “In almost every case, counsel for the village would be responsible for hiring and managing outside counsel. In this instance, the village solicitor had a legal conflict preventing them from doing so.”

An effort to reach Smith by phone was unsuccessful.

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### [Parson’s longtime friend is a lobbyist, and their money ties could cloud governor’s bid](#)

Missouri Gov. Mike Parson and lawmaker-turned-lobbyist Steve Tilley have been friends for years, going back more than a decade to when they served together in the Missouri House.

Tilley helped Parson become chairman of the powerful House Rules Committee in 2009, and chipped in \$10,000 to Parson’s bid for state Senate in 2010. When Tilley resigned as speaker of the Missouri House in 2012 to become a political consultant and lobbyist, Parson was among his first clients.

Now, as Parson kicks off his quest to win a full term as governor in his hometown of Bolivar on Sunday, his long-standing friendship and political partnership with Tilley is once again under

So far this year, a quarter of every dollar raised to elect Parson governor in 2020 is connected to Tilley. A large chunk of that money has come from lobbying clients engaged in industries regulated by the state agencies Parson oversees — ranging from gaming to medical marijuana to low-income housing tax credits.

Before Parson took over as governor in June 2018, following the resignation of former Gov. Eric Greitens, Tilley had 25 lobbying clients. In the year since Parson took the oath of office, that number has ballooned to more than 70.

Tilley didn't respond to requests for comment, and both the governor's office and Parson's campaign insist Tilley has no role in either policy or political strategy.

Steele Shippy, Parson's campaign manager and former spokesman for the governor's office, dismissed any notion that political donations come with strings attached.

"Anyone who makes a campaign contribution and expects anything for it will be disappointed," Shippy said in an email.

But those close to the governor say that while he has no formal role, Tilley has Parson's ear and maintains considerable sway behind the scenes thanks in part to close relationships with top staffers like Aaron Willard -- who served as Tilley's chief of staff in the House and now has the same job for Parson.

Parson's opponents, most notably Democratic state Auditor Nicole Galloway, will "almost certainly use this information to raise voters' doubts about the integrity of the governor's campaign and allies," said Dave Robertson, chair of the political science department at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Whether or not it will ultimately move voters is unclear, but Robertson said the relationship is "ready-made for a negative TV ad, radio ad, or mailer raising suspicions about the governors' relationship with big time lobbyists and funders."

### **'FRIENDS FOR A LONG TIME'**

During an interview with The Star shortly before the 2019 legislative session, Parson acknowledged he and Tilley have been "friends for a long time."

Their friendship doesn't owe itself to geography—Parson is from southwest Missouri and Tilley from Perryville, about an hour south of St. Louis—or generational ties. Parson, who turns 64 later this month, is 16 years older than Tilley.

Nor do they always line up on every issue, as when Parson openly supported a right-to-work law while Tilley lobbied against it.

But while their relationship has sometimes perplexed statehouse denizens, it has endured. That's been true even when it cost Parson politically, as it did when his 2012 bid for majority leader of the Senate failed, [in part out of concern among colleagues that Tilley would have too much influence](#) on the chamber.

Since he stepped down as House speaker in the summer of 2012, Tilley has garnered some controversy.

When he resigned, he still had more than \$1 million in his campaign committee. He invested a big portion of it in a Perryville bank, and later to donate to candidates, such as Parson, who then hired Tilley's consulting firm.

Lawmakers felt Tilley had found a loophole in Missouri's campaign finance laws, ultimately taking aim at his practices by passing legislation in 2016 [requiring elected officials to dissolve](#)

[their campaign committees](#) when they register with the Missouri Ethics Commission as lobbyists.

“I understand the good and the bad of people like that,” Parson said during his December interview with The Star. “It’s just like your personal life, you’ve got to separate from your friends sometimes. He represents people, sometimes for different things that I don’t agree with and you have to understand that’s business.

“But as far as him being somebody in here,” Parson continued, “I don’t even guess he’s been in my office since I’ve been here, to give you an example of that. That doesn’t mean he doesn’t call or something like that. But he’s not what I would consider an adviser that I go to and say, ‘Hey, what do you think about this?’”

## **CAMPAIGN CASH**

Tilley has been a lucrative source of campaign contributions for his friend.

Roughly 40 percent of the money Parson’s candidate committee raised during the first six months of 2019 is connected to Tilley, totaling roughly \$125,000.

Of the nearly \$987,000 raised during that period by Uniting Missouri — a political action committee created by Parson’s allies that is not subject to the state’s contribution limits — around 20 percent is connected to Tilley.

A chunk of that cash is \$50,000, raised in one day by two of Tilley’s clients in the low-income housing tax credit industry — Sterling Bank and MACO Development Co.

Another \$20,000 came from Torch Electronics, a Tilley client that operates gaming machines deemed [illegal by state gambling regulators](#).

In addition to encouraging his clients to give to Parson and Uniting Missouri, Tilley has organized fundraisers for the governor.

In March, businessman Andy Patel held a fundraiser in his Cape Girardeau home for Parson that netted the governor nearly \$50,000.

Patel said one of Tilley’s lobbying clients, OHM Concession Group, is run by some of his former employees that operate airport concession stands. They put Tilley in touch with him, and he agreed to host the event and reach out to friends and former business partners around the country to pitch in.

Much of the money raised that night came from Patel’s associates who live in Florida.

“Steve Tilley called me and I said yes I will do it,” Patel said. “I like politics but I’ve never been involved in raising money for anyone until this year.”

OHM, which did not respond to a request for comment, donated \$2,600 to Uniting Missouri that evening.

Shippy, in his email, said: “Missourians have the right to participate in the political process and support candidates who share their values.”

In many ways, it should come as no surprise that Parson is supported by the clients that Tilley represents, said Robynn Kuhlmann, a political scientist at the University of Central Missouri. His political philosophy as consistently leaned toward a “conservative regulatory position” favored by business, she said.

But that support, and his close ties to the lobbyist pushing their interests, “may not look good for some Missourians who are skeptical of government and perceive government to have corrupting attributes.”

“Lately,” Kuhlmann continued, “we’ve seen political outsiders do quite well in Missouri’s elections.”

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### **Manhattan Democrats planning coup against party boss/lobbyist Keith Wright**

Manhattan Democratic Party leaders are revolting against their borough chairman — former Assemblyman Keith Wright — and his double life as party boss and lobbyist.

A cadre of dissidents plan to force a meeting to consider a rules change that would prohibit a party chief from lobbying, according to district leader Paul Newell.

“Fundamentally a political party, particularly the Democratic Party, should not have a lobbyist as its leader,” Newell told The Post.

The meeting is planned for late September or early October. Newell and his allies say they have met the requirements — 15 signatures from six different districts — to force the issue onto the agenda.

“There will be a vote,” Newell said. “I expect it to be contentious.”

Wright was overwhelmingly reelected as borough chairman on Aug. 28 during a meeting of the executive committee.

The former lawmaker has worked as a lobbyist since 2017 and is currently the government relations group director of high-powered firm, Davidoff Hutcher & Citron, a lobbying shop helmed by former City Hall fixer Sid Davidoff.

Before joining Davidoff, Wright spent 23 years as a state assemblyman and a fixture in Harlem politics. Among more notable clients are HBO, NBC Universal, Juul and T-Mobile, and four charter schools, public filings show.

Wright left the Assembly in 2016 after an unsuccessful bid to succeed a retiring Rep. Charlie Rangel. After leaving Albany, Wright faced the mandatory two-year ban on lobbying. With the restrictions fully lifted, Wright’s name began cropping up on Davidoff Hutcher & Citron’s public filings where he was listed as lobbying dozens of his former colleagues in both chambers — including many representing Manhattan.

“It’s outrageous,” one senior Albany legislator told The Post, adding that he’s often seen Wright in the the statehouse cafeteria.

While experts and elected officials noted Wright’s power as the borough’s Dem leader is limited because of Manhattan’s diverse and unwieldy political landscape, he could still frustrate re-election efforts and even recruit primary challengers. He also plays an outsized role in the election of civil and state supreme court judges.

Sid Davidoff insisted Wright does not directly lobby elected officials and that his name was added to the filings in error.

“Out of an abundance of caution, our firm adopted a policy — which we have since reversed — of registering every member of the government relations practice on every account. The forms are being amended to reflect the fact that Keith has not and will not lobby elected officials,” he told The Post. “Keith is employed at this firm as a government relations specialist and he provides outstanding guidance to our clients.”

But public filings show that Wright has targeted members of the City Council on client issues, something confirmed by Council Speaker Corey Johnson’s chief of staff Jason Goldman.

Goldman told The Post he recalled several informal conversations about menthol cigarettes with Wright during a period when the Manhattan party boss was lobbying for tobacco giant Reynolds

American. Goldman also said they have spoken about other issues, but it wasn't clear if he was being lobbied.

Wright, 64, also appears to have plenty of business in the Albany chamber where he used to work.

In one current filing Wright was listed on, the Accessories Council paid \$29,000 to the firm for lobbying directed at Manhattan Assemblywoman Linda B. Rosenthal over her plans for a [statewide ban](#) on fur products in New York.

Though Rosenthal told The Post she had no recollection of being lobbied by Wright or anyone else from Davidoff, her original bill was watered down to include an exemption for religious attire — primarily fur Shtreimel hats often worn by Hasidic Jews — around the same time. It remains in committee.

Harlem Rep. Charles Rangel, left, listens as Assemblyman Keith Wright talks to reporters after Rangel voted in New York. AP

Manhattan State Sen. Brad Hoylman was the target of two aggressive lobbying pushes by Davidoff according to filings that also listed Wright. During a period from May to June, the firm took \$15,000 from Taxi Tours and Big Bus Tours New York (Hoylman has been a tough critic of the iconic double-decker buses in the past). There was also another \$9,500 from The Town Hall performance space in Times Square officially earmarked for “scheduling tours” with the senator.

Another \$20,000 was paid out, according to filings which included Wright, by the Commercial Finance Coalition to lobby Manhattan Assemblywoman Yuh-Line Niou on a pair of finance bills she sponsored.

Wright's lobbying is perfectly legal. But a growing chorus of good-government groups have joined Wright's internal party critics in saying he must make a choice.

“For almost three years, Common Cause/NY has said Keith Wright can either be party chairman or a lobbyist but he can't have it both ways,” Susan Lerner, executive director of the group said. “The opportunities to wield his political position for personal enrichment, or use his position to advance a client's agenda present a clear conflict of interest.”

Wright did not return a Post message seeking comment.