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Lobbyists courted lawmakers with free food, baseball tickets at conferences

<http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/politics/2017/09/12/lobbyists-courted-lawmakers-free-food-baseball-tickets-conferences/612024001/>

As part of out-of-town educational conferences, lobbyists routinely court Tennessee lawmakers with free dinner, drinks and baseball tickets — a practice largely prohibited in the Volunteer State.

Under state law, lawmakers can accept the freebies at out-of-state conferences, which since 2009 have cost Tennessee taxpayers \$1.2 million, provided they are related to the conference itself.

Lobbyists can even pay for events labeled "state night" for lawmakers. And little disclosure is required — unlike the rules in place for how lobbyists interact with lawmakers at the Capitol.

"You can't buy a legislator a Coke in Tennessee," said a Tennessee lobbyist who represents fewer than a dozen companies.

The practice at out-of-state conferences is increasingly widespread, too, including at conferences this year in Boston and Denver, according to multiple interviews with lobbyists, lawmakers and legislative staff.

Dinner, drinks and a ballgame

In Denver, a group of Tennessee lobbyists hosted state lawmakers for a "delegate dinner" at Elway's — owned by Broncos football legend John Elway — which offers a \$64 porterhouse steak and a \$58 rack of lamb.

On the final night of the same three-day American Legislative Exchange Council conference, lobbyists hosted lawmakers for a private dinner at Ocean Prime, a seafood and steakhouse chain with locations throughout the country that sells \$49 twin lobster tails. At one of the tables, there was talk of the merits of allowing medical marijuana in Tennessee.

While in Boston for the four-day gathering of the National Conference of State Legislatures, most Tennessee lawmakers rejected an opportunity to shoot hoops on the floor of the home of the Celtics.

Instead, many opted for a three-hour "state night" private cruise in the city's harbor. The multilevel boat hosted more than two dozen Tennessee lawmakers, staffers and lobbyists and featured an open bar and free food.

To get access, attendees needed to send an RSVP to Anna Richardson and Holly Salmons, two Tennessee lobbyists who combined represent more than 60 organizations, by June 30 and present a ticket while boarding.

Other events didn't require an RSVP.

Some lawmakers went to Nico Ristorante, which boasts Italian fare, with other more informal gatherings held at Atlantic Beer Garden and the aptly named craft cocktail bar Drink.

Although some legislators refused to let lobbyists pay for their food and drinks at the conferences in Boston and Denver, others were just fine with the freebies.

A group of lobbyists hosted several Tennessee lawmakers at Fenway Park for a game between the Boston Red Sox and the Chicago White Sox. One group of lawmakers sat in seats the team sells for nearly \$190 apiece.

The seats for the Red Sox game were separate from a larger group organized by the conference itself.

Attending baseball games has become a staple at conferences. Some lawmakers pay for their seats. Others do not.

Sen. Bo Watson, R-Hixson, who attended the conference in Boston, said although he did not attend a baseball game, any lawmakers who did should pay for their own tickets.

State law bans lobbyists from giving lawmakers gifts, including food and drinks. But there are loopholes that allow lobbyists to cover lawmaker costs for just about any purchase at out-of-state conferences.

"I wouldn't say it's all the time (the lawmakers) are not paying. They sometimes do or try to even it out," said a longtime Tennessee lobbyist.

All of this is possible because of vague laws that also have allowed legislators to potentially use campaign funds to cover expenses already paid for by the state and use donor money on questionable items, according to investigations by the USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee.

Feeling like a 'space alien'

Under state law, lawmakers can accept any "entertainment, food, refreshments, meals, beverages, goody bags, or admission tickets" at out-of-state conferences provided they are related to the conference.

The law specifically allows events labeled "state night or other events for attendees of the conference" to be paid for by lobbyists.

There is no definition for "state night" in the law, which was amended in 2008 by Sen. Reggie Tate, D-Memphis, and nine House lawmakers — five Democrats and four Republicans.

Tate, who has refused to answer questions about his travel, has accounted for nearly \$104,000, or 8 percent, of the total travel by all Tennessee lawmakers since 2009 — the most of any state legislator.

One of the amended bill's sponsors, Rep. Ulysses Jones, a Memphis Democrat, said at the time he felt like a "space alien" while attending conferences, according to The Tennessean's archives. He said while other attendees ate dinner he sat in his room and watched TV due to the state's strict ethics law, which he sought to change.

Although it is common for large corporations and lobbyist groups to host "state night" events like the boat cruise in Boston, the way lawmakers and lobbyists have interpreted the law allows legislators to get free food and drinks at bars and restaurants while at the conferences, sources told the USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee.

Tom Lawless, secretary of the state Registry of Election Finance, said the fact that lobbyists can foot the bill for lawmakers at out-of-state conferences skirts the spirit of the state's law. But he rejected the notion that most lawmakers were intentionally acting in a nefarious way.

"If we can buy our members of the legislature for a good steak meal, I don't care how good it is, or a bar tab, we got much bigger problems than that," Lawless said.

Instead, Lawless said, he thought the lobbyists were more likely to blame. He noted that lobbyists are likely the ones convincing lawmakers they weren't skirting the state's lobbying laws.

"They're clearly violating the spirit (of the law)," he said, adding he thought it might be a good idea to require lobbyists to disclose their expenses at conferences.

By contrast, the events lobbyists and their employees host for lawmakers for in-state events must follow much more stringent rules.

All lawmakers have to be invited, the cost per person can't exceed a certain amount — \$61 a person in 2017 — and they must file a disclosure form within 30 days after the event.

The disclosures, which are filed with the state Bureau of Ethics and Campaign Finance, contain information such as the organization or lobbyist hosting the event, the aggregate and per-person cost for the gathering and a certification that the report is accurate.

There is no such disclosure requirement for out-of-state conferences.

The disclosures of in-state events were enacted in the aftermath of Operation Tennessee Waltz, the FBI's 2005 bribery sting operation into several sitting state lawmakers.

Lawmakers avoid questions

Aside from tickets to baseball games, boat parties are commonplace. Certain lobbyists are known for their "delegate dinners" at every conference. When a conference is held in less desirable locations like Biloxi or Indianapolis, attendance among lawmakers and lobbyists decreases. Summer conferences are preferred over winter.

Conferences in larger cities are often more appealing, providing companies a pretense to hold their own meetings at the same time. The opportunity affords some clients the chance to meet lawmakers, which can be next to impossible during the breakneck speed of the legislative session.

Several lobbyists told the USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee the legislative conferences offer them an opportunity to get to know lawmakers on a more personal level while in a much less formal environment.

The conferences aren't really about creating a plan to advance or defeat a bill, said the longtime Tennessee lobbyist.

"At the end of the day, this is a relationship business," the lobbyist said. "It's all about developing some sort of common bond and trust level with the member. If you don't have that you're not going to be very effective."

In general, Tennessee lawmakers say the conferences are all business with some perks, including the numerous receptions.

State Sen. Kerry Roberts, R-Springfield, said if any constituents have a question about what a lawmaker is doing, they should ask.

"In my opinion if you go on one of these trips then you're basically giving (the media), talk radio, leadership but especially your constituents the right to ask what we're doing and how we're spending our time," he said.

The majority of the 30 House lawmakers who received advance approval to attend any of the three conferences held this summer refused to say whether they let lobbyists pay for their food, drinks and other activities.

Speaking on behalf of House Republicans, Doug Kufner said members have occasionally attended an event or dinner sponsored by a third-party organization.

"Others simply prefer to pay their own way to these gatherings," Kufner said. "Our members take their roles representing their constituents and serving the hardworking men and women of our state very seriously, and they are held to the highest ethical standards by the Tennesseans they represent."

Noting that he did not attend the boat cruise in Boston, Rep. G.A. Hardaway, D-Memphis, said he had no "desire or time to attend any lobbyist events, receptions or dinners" because he was working.

In separate statements, the eight Senate Republicans who attended a conference this year and responded to questions all denied having lobbyists pay for expenses aside from attending "state night" events.

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Lawmaker attendance

The following lawmakers said they attended receptions:

Lt. Gov. Randy McNally: state night and "other standard conference presentations where food was provided" (SLC, NCSL)

Sen. Becky Duncan Massey: "one sponsored event in which members were invited" (NCSL)

Sen. Jim Tracy: Tennessee state night (NCSL, SLC)

Sen. Ken Yager: state night dinner hosted by AT&T (SLC)

Sen. Jon Lundberg: evening event at Google's Cambridge headquarters (NCSL)

Sen. Ferrell Haile: state night boat cruise; dinner and seminar sponsored by an "education turnaround company," reimbursed organization with a personal check (NCSL)

Sen. Bo Watson: attended only events sponsored by NCSL or those in which all members were invited (NCSL)

Reps. Antonio Parkinson, Dwayne Thompson, Rick Staples: state night boat cruise (NCSL)

Note: SLC is the Southern Legislative Conference, held in Biloxi, Miss. NCSL is the National Conference of State Legislatures, held in Boston.

The Inquirer
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Elect them, then lobby them: Two firms blur the worlds of policy and politics in Harrisburg

<http://www.philly.com/philly/news/politics/state/elect-them-then-lobby-them-two-firms-blur-the-worlds-of-policy-and-politics-in-harrisburg-20170911.html>

In the last three years, the campaign arm of a powerful Harrisburg lobbying firm has helped elect or reelect a third of the Republicans who now dominate the Pennsylvania Senate.

Across the Capitol in the House, the campaign offshoot of another lobbying firm has helped nearly half the GOP members who hold a commanding majority in that chamber.

Once they get their candidates into office, both firms then lobby them on behalf of a long list of special interests.

Critics call it the lobbying world's version of the double dip. They have pushed, with little success, to ban the practice, arguing that it perpetuates a culture of favoritism and undue access in Harrisburg and normalizes chummy relationships between lobbyists and lawmakers.

Founders of the two firms counter that their work is legal and protected by the First Amendment.

What is unequivocal: Legislative measures to ban the practice — including one as recently as this summer — have stalled or failed.

“Lobbyists have a defined benefit for what they do for their clients — and it should be totally separate from campaigns,” said Rep. Brandon Neuman (D., Washington), the latest lawmaker to seek a ban. “It’s a public-perception issue and it’s a good-government issue.”

For years, lobbying in Pennsylvania was a secretive business, and more recently attracted scrutiny from federal investigators. A decade-old law strengthened registration and reporting requirements for lobbyists and their clients, but the state still lags behind others in transparency and accountability, according to an analysis of lobbying laws compiled by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Among Harrisburg's high-powered partnerships, only two have well-established campaign arms that, for the last decade, have dominated the market on both electing and lobbying Republicans who drive public policy.

Long, Nyquist & Associates, a lobbying firm run by onetime top Senate staffers Mike Long and Todd Nyquist, has a sister company called LN Consulting that manages campaigns for offices ranging from Congress to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

Its founders maintain deep ties to Senate Republican leaders and, campaign records show, many GOP senators turn to LN Consulting for election help. Of the 34 Republicans in the 50-seat Senate, LN Consulting has helped run the political campaigns of 11 senators.

Maverick Strategies, a lobbying firm founded by Harrisburg-area political consultant Ray Zaborney, has a political arm called Red Maverick Media and a fund-raising offshoot, Maverick Finance, founded and run by his wife, Jen.

Maverick's political work runs the gamut, but a sizable chunk is dedicated to electing Republicans to the House. Maverick has worked for 57 of the 121 GOP members in the 203-seat House. Maverick's campaign and fund-raising arms also worked on the campaigns of 16 senators.

That has translated into big money.

Together, LN Consulting, Red Maverick, and Maverick Finance have been paid at least \$9.8 million since Jan. 1, 2014, by legislative candidates, the state party, state legislative campaign committees and PACs, an Inquirer/Daily News/Post Gazette analysis shows.

That includes political work for many of the legislature's leaders, among them, Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati (R., Jefferson), Senate Majority Leader Jake Corman (R., Centre), House Speaker Mike Turzai (R., Allegheny), and House Majority Leader Dave Reed (R., Indiana).

During that same period, lobbying disclosure reports show, Long Nyquist and Zaborney's clients have spent tens of millions of dollars fighting against or pushing legislation. Their clients range from casinos to the Catholic Church, and from power-plant owners to medical-marijuana growers.

It is not clear which legislators they spent the most money on, or how much they spent on them. That is because Pennsylvania's lobbying disclosure law, unlike other states, lacks the teeth to require private interests — or their lobbyists — to disclose such details.

Campaign records help fill in a part of the picture: Long Nyquist and Zaborney's lobbying firms have PACs that, since 2014, have donated \$425,961, largely to Republican state legislators and campaign committees that support them.

Adav Noti, senior director of trial litigation for the Campaign Legal Center, a nonpartisan group of election-law experts based in Washington, said few companies handle both campaigning and lobbying.

Combining the two presents "more or less the same ethical issues that you have when you have lobbyists in general who are making campaign contributions or otherwise helping officials in office. If you have somebody that's helping a candidate get elected, then when they do come around to lobby that candidate, they're going to have more access and influence than other people who are active on the same issue," Noti said.

In an interview, Zaborney said he takes pains to keep the political and lobbying sides of his businesses separate, and that he is the only staffer who works in both spheres.

He does not believe that gives him a leg up when lobbying legislators.

"I don't play golf, so I don't take members to the golf course," Zaborney said. "I don't drink, so I don't take members out for drinks. Other lobbyists do that. That doesn't give them an unfair advantage. That is just them doing their jobs."

Portraying legislators as beholden to him or anyone else is selling them short, Zaborney said: "People whose campaigns I've worked on have opposed me vigorously. And there have been times when people who I tried to defeat helped me on an issue. Legislators are strong enough to stand up for what they believe in."

Long echoed those sentiments, but also said efforts to prevent people like him from doing both campaign work and lobbying would amount to a constitutional violation.

"Courts have been clear that lobbyists are carrying out the right to petition the government for folks who have retained their services," he said. "Equally, you can't ban folks from being involved in campaigns, because courts have found that it is protected activity."

Long said concerns of undue influence betray a misunderstanding of what lobbyists do: "Lobbyists present information on behalf of our clients to members — but it's the members who make the final decision."

Critics say gauging their impact requires looking no further than the state's current budget impasse.

Talks stalled over the summer, in part because of disagreements over expanding gambling — and in particular, whether to allow bars, taverns, truck stops, and other establishments across the state with liquor licenses to house up to 40,000 slots-style machines called video gaming terminals, or VGTs.

Zaborney's lobbying firm represents pro-VGT interests; Long Nyquist's company represents the casinos who oppose them.

Republicans in the House — where Zaborney's firm does much work — supported legalizing the games. Republicans in the Senate, considered more Long Nyquist's territory, balked.

"It was the battle of the influence-peddling titans," said one Republican political consultant who spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to protect business relationships. "And it was cutthroat."

At the height of budget negotiations in late June, Neuman, the Washington County Democrat, tried to amend a lobbying-related bill to ban lobbyists from campaign work.

The vote against it was 101-98. Every Democrat voted for the ban, and all but 16 Republicans voted no. Among them: Turzai, Reed, and other leaders who have used Zaborney's firm for campaigns.

A similar measure, introduced in the Senate during its 2015-16 session, never even got a committee vote.

This year, Neuman said he believes there was support for the ban, and the vote to strike it down reflected colleagues' concerns with the wording, rather than the substance, of his amendment.

Neuman will leave the legislature at the end of the year if he wins his judicial election, but he has faith that his colleagues will pick up the issue.

"It's encouraging that there was no one speaking out against it directly," Neuman said of the short debate this summer. "That leads me to believe that people support this concept."

**Bloomberg BNA
September 7, 2017**

Bank Lobbyists Eye Red State Democrats to Move Legislation

<https://www.bna.com/bank-lobbyists-eye-n73014464295/>

Bank lobbyists are eyeing Democratic lawmakers up for reelection in 2018 from rural states as the possible key to giving small and midsize banks a break on stress tests and consumer-protection supervision.

Democrats from those states, where small banks may be the only financial services providers in many communities, could be pivotal as Republicans look for a more modest alternative to a broad overhaul of the Dodd-Frank Act.

"If those banks were to consolidate due to excessive regulatory burden, constituents living in those areas would be left without a community bank presence," Brian Cooney, senior vice president and legislative counsel for the Independent Community Bankers of America, told Bloomberg BNA. "We would hope that senators up for reelection in those states would be very supportive of community bank regulatory relief."

Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) told Bloomberg BNA Sept. 7 that he's "very optimistic that there's enough votes" on the Senate Banking Committee to get something done. "The reg reform is really important,

especially for rural areas so it's something I'm going to continue to push for," said Tester, who has also advocated for reducing stress test requirements for some midsize banks.

Tester and two other Senate Banking Committee Democrats — Heidi Heitkamp (N.D.) and Joe Donnelly (Ind.) — are up for reelection next year in states won by President Donald Trump last November. That gives them a strong incentive to find reasonable changes to support, Daniel F. C. Crowley, a financial services partner at K&L Gates, told Bloomberg BNA.

All three signaled their willingness to break ranks today. They joined two other committee Democrats to vote in favor of Randal Quarles' nomination to be vice chairman for supervision at the Federal Reserve. The committee voted 17-6 in favor of the nomination.

Heitkamp, who appeared on stage with Trump at an event in North Dakota one day earlier, was also the sole Democrat to support Joseph Otting's nomination to run the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, which was approved 13-10 by the committee.

"We've been working on this for four years, building good coalitions for small-lender relief from Dodd-Frank," she told Bloomberg BNA. "It is a bipartisan effort, and I am looking forward to getting something done yet this year."

Heitkamp has also backed easing mortgage disclosure rules for small banks and called for simplifying the Volcker Rule, which bans proprietary trading by lenders. Donnelly has supported efforts to raise the threshold that subjects a bank to exams and supervision by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Senators have already been reaching across the aisle to give banks a break on CFPB regulations. Donnelly has previously introduced legislation (S. 1499) that would raise the threshold from \$10 billion to \$50 billion as the minimum asset size for a bank to come under CFPB supervision. The Indiana Democrat also led a bipartisan letter in July to bureau Director Richard Cordray advocating a tailored regulatory approach to smaller institutions. Heitkamp and Sen. Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) teamed on a bill (S. 1310) this year that would raise the thresholds for the number of home loans a bank can originate before being subject to CFPB reporting requirements under the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act. Reducing the demands of stress testing on midsize banks is another area where there is support in both parties. Banks with assets \$10 billion and up are required by Dodd-Frank to run stress tests on their balance sheets. Tester and Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) offered a bill (S. 1139) to raise the asset threshold on the Dodd-Frank tests to \$50 billion.

Such a move would spare 72 midsize banks from a supervisory regime that lobbyists say was intended for larger institutions.

Senate Banking Chairman Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), has been working with the panel's top Democrat Sen. Sherrod Brown (Ohio) to find bipartisan solutions that address overregulation.

Tampering with Dodd-Frank has been considered taboo among Democrats. The Choice Act (H.R. 10), comprehensive legislation to revamp Dodd-Frank, passed the House in June, but without any Democratic support.

House Financial Services Committee Chairman Jeb Hensarling (R-Texas), chief backer of the Choice Act, has said he's willing to break up the package into smaller component bills, according to Thomas Quaadman, executive vice president of the U.S. Chamber Center for Capital Markets Competitiveness. "We expect to see a lot of activity," Quaadman told Bloomberg BNA, including more hearings and new legislation, to "really get the gears going."

The agenda on Capitol Hill has been packed all year and promises to remain so. In addition, housing finance overhaul is a big-ticket item for Crapo.

Wholesale changes to the Dodd-Frank are a lower priority, especially given that most would have to go through regular order, requiring 60 votes and the support of some Senate Democrats.

Tester said he has talked with Crapo about both a housing finance bill and help for community banks.

Crapo told reporters Sept. 7 that helping community banks “is one of my highest priorities.”

“We continue to negotiate, and I feel very positive about it,” Crapo said.

The lack of progress has been a disappointment for banking groups eager to take advantage of a sympathetic White House and Republican control of both houses of Congress. “There’s been minimal movement and, of course, it’s frustrating,” James Ballentine, executive vice president of congressional relations and political affairs at American Bankers Association, told Bloomberg BNA. “It just requires us to use as many different tactics as we can to move legislation through.”

Some Senate aides aren’t sure when a Dodd-Frank package will be unveiled by the committee. The snail’s pace of congressional output has some Senate aides privately grouching about the prospects of getting any financial overhaul bills to Trump’s desk.

Brian Gardner, a managing director at Keefe, Bruyette & Woods, told Bloomberg BNA he’s “skeptical” that the Brown-Crapo effort will gain traction unless it’s strongly limited to community banks.

And other Democrats will look to Brown, who is also up for 2018 reelection in a state Trump won but has vowed to oppose many proposed changes to Dodd-Frank.

“Republicans have to attract at least eight Democrats,” Gardner said. “In order to get some of those eight, I actually think you have to have ranking member Brown on board.”

Regular order, though, isn’t the only way to proceed on rule relief for banks. Supporters hope to push breaks for banks through the appropriations process, attach their bills to must-pass legislative vehicles, or sidestep Capitol Hill and directly lobby regulators for changes. “You have to be nimble to get regulatory relief measures through,” Ballentine said.

**Tampa Bay Times
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Hernando commission to debate ordinance requiring lobbyists to register

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/hernando-commission-to-debate-ordinance-requiring-lobbyists-to-register/2336384>

A method to publicly identify those who lobby the county's top decision makers, including the County Commission and other leaders, could soon be in place.

On Tuesday, Sept. 12, the commission will consider an ordinance that would require those who would gain directly or indirectly from county decisions to register and for logs to be kept of their communications with county officials.

In addition, lobbyists would not be able to make their pitches through private text messages, on private cellphones or via private emails, which cannot be easily viewed under public records laws.

The issue was raised by county Commissioner John Allocco last month, and the idea prompted a spirited discussion among commissioners, who on numerous issues in recent meetings have been divided.

Allocco said that with Hernando County growing and businesses hoping to expand in the area, he thought the time had come for Hernando to enact a lobbying ordinance similar to ones in other growing

communities around Florida. Hernando, he said, "lacks transparency when it comes to lobbying interests."

Residents, he said, have "a right to know" when someone with something to gain is working to influence those who make decisions.

Commission Chairman Wayne Dukes noted that the last time he heard the discussion, it was led by state Rep. Blaise Ingoglia, who also is Hernando County's Republican committeeman and head of the state Republican Party.

"Did (Ingoglia) tell you to say that?" Dukes asked Allocco, who succeeded Ingoglia as chairman of the county's Republican Executive Committee.

"No, he didn't," Allocco said.

Commissioner Steve Champion asked which counties have lobbying ordinances. "Blue counties? Really blue counties?"

"I guess you guys aren't capable of thinking on your own, so you assume everybody else doesn't," Allocco shot back.

Commissioner Nick Nicholson said he wanted to take the issue a step further and create an ordinance that would prevent people who were trying to sell the county on something from talking to commissioners at all. He said he often tells people who email him that they need to talk to the county administrator or a county department head.

"I don't want to listen to them," Nicholson said.

Allocco said he just wanted records to be kept so that the community knows who is lobbying county officials.

Champion noted that the definition of a lobbyist could be fairly broad.

"Who is a lobbyist? There's a lot of good-old-boy club members who like to talk to everybody," he said. "I would consider them lobbyists when they own banks or real estate firms."

In recent years, the public and commissioners who are not involved in private conversations with politically influential business leaders — including SunTrust Bank executive Jim Kimbrough and Realtor Gary Schraut — have been critical of the influence those people exert when meeting one on one with commissioners.

Other questions were raised when business leaders, including officials at Cemex, lobbied commissioners several years ago over expanded mining west of Brooksville.

County Attorney Garth Collier said the definition of a lobbyist generally covers anyone with a financial interest who talks to board members.

"I'd say it's a slippery slope," Champion said, "because what if a business wants to talk to every commissioner, is there a problem with that?"

"There's no problem with it," Allocco said. "It's just that everybody sitting here should be able to know if company XYZ has reached out."

He noted that commissioners have had meetings with various companies at the government center. Champion said one recent example of a business talking to all commissioners was when the contract for Republic Services was proposed for expansion.

But Champion said there is another way to track influence.

"We can look at campaign contributions and tell exactly who's lobbying who," he said. "I was doing that on my campaign, and there was a whole lot of lobbying going on — on the other side" against his candidacy.

"This isn't anti-lobbying," Allocco said. "It's transparency. We're all about transparency on this board."

Champion said he wasn't sure he even knew any lobbyists and questioned how he would know he had talked to one. Allocco said it would be up to the lobbyists to tell county officials they were lobbying.

Dukes said the idea of lobbying has an even broader meaning.

"We had about 100 lobbyists here today telling us to fix the river," Dukes said, referring to Weeki Wachee residents in the audience who were pushing the commission to better police the Weeki Wachee River.

Champion wanted to know if there was some specific incident that sparked the interest in an ordinance.

"Where's the problem?" he asked. "Where's the breakdown? Is somebody being influenced by lobbyists somewhere?"

Said Allocco: "Taxpayers just deserve to know."

The ordinance commissioners will consider putting the investigation of potential violations in the hands of the county's code enforcement officers. A first violation would come with a warning; a second within 12 months would bring a fine of \$250. A third infraction within 12 months would bring a prohibition from lobbying for six months, and a fourth would mean a year without lobbying privileges.