



[SC's Graham takes aim at Harrison's lobbying history in new Senate race campaign ad](#)

Democrat Jaime Harrison's career as a lobbyist in Washington is now the focus of a new digital and television ad released on Wednesday by Republican U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, who is seeking a fourth term in the U.S. Senate.

The 30-second ad, titled "Home," specifically zeroes in on Harrison's work while a lobbyist from 2008 to 2016 for the now-defunct Podesta Group, a powerful lobbying firm co-founded by Hillary Clinton's former campaign manager, John Podesta.

Graham's campaign called the ad a significant statewide buy. The ad echoes an ongoing theme for Graham's campaign that Harrison and his supporters are not in touch with the values of South Carolinians.

"Liberal Jaime Harrison makes almost \$300,000 a year helping his mentor, Nancy Pelosi, elect Democrats in Washington. But he cashed in long before then," the ad says. "Harrison made a fortune lobbying for the Podesta Group, founded by Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman. At Podesta, Harrison lobbied for a hedge fund that foreclosed on the homes of Katrina victims. Democrat Jaime Harrison. High paid, liberal, lobbyist, wrong for South Carolina."

At the Podesta Group in 2009, Harrison lobbied for the Fortress Investment Group, a New York-based private equity firm. The firm made headlines in 2007, when the New York Times then reported that then-Democratic presidential hopeful John Edwards announced he would divest his portfolio after it was brought to light that the firm foreclosed on people who lost their homes in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

"(Harrison) shamefully took money from a 'horrible, disgusting, slimy' company and looked the other way," said T.W. Arrighi, Graham's campaign spokesman.

Harrison's campaign pushed back against Graham's campaign's claims, saying the former chairman of the S.C. Democratic Party worked in U.S. House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn's office from 2005-'07 and didn't join the Podesta Group until 2008.

The campaign also said Harrison, an associate chairman and counsel for the Democratic National Committee, earned \$160,000 in 2019, not the nearly \$300,000 as stated in Graham's ad. The \$280,000 figure cited in the ad was for 20 months worth of income.

"After 25 years in Washington, Lindsey Graham has changed so much he'll attack a South Carolinian who has lived the American Dream — during a national healthcare crisis," said Harrison's campaign spokesperson, Guy King. "Lindsey puts himself first by playing political

games in Washington and taking luxury overseas trips paid for by special interest donors to his campaign. If Lindsey doesn't feel the need to put politics aside to aid South Carolinians suffering, when will he?"

The Senate race between Graham and Harrison has become more competitive ahead of Nov. 3.

Recent polls have the race tied, and Monday the race ratings group Cook Political Report shifted the race to "lean Republican."

Both candidates also have raised record amounts of cash, fueled mostly by money raised from out of state that's been then illustrated by the ad battle between Graham and Harrison. The ad buys are only set to intensify as both campaigns reserved more than \$1 million in ad time for the month of August.

[Private equity giant Blackstone hires pro-Trump lobbyist David Urban to target Pentagon, State Department](#)

One of the largest private equity firms in the world has hired a lobbyist with deep ties to President Donald Trump, with the intention of targeting the Department of Defense and State Department.

Blackstone, a massive investment firm that has more than \$500 billion in assets under management, brought on David Urban earlier this year to join its ranks of outside lobbyists, according to a disclosure report. Urban is president of the American Continental Group, a Washington, D.C.-based lobbying firm.

He is also a member of Trump's reelection advisory committee and was a key architect of the president's successful campaign in Pennsylvania during the 2016 run.

Since Urban registered to lobby for Blackstone's administrative services arm in February, the firm has paid at least \$120,000 for the Trump ally to engage with the Department of Defense and State Department on what the disclosures call "issues related to military preparedness and training."

Blackstone's CEO is Steve Schwarzman, who recently gave \$3 million to the pro-Trump super PAC America First Action, and has been a close confidant of the president's since his inauguration.

After repeated requests for comment, neither Blackstone nor Urban would say what they're hoping to see from either the Pentagon or the State Department. The company doesn't have any publicly listed government contracts, and its known investments don't appear to have direct links to the defense industry.

Blackstone does have a "veterans network," according to its website. The network launched in 2019.

“It gives transitioning military personnel the support and guidance needed to enter the financial services industry,” Blackstone’s website said. “Once our veterans are at Blackstone, the network provides an extended community to not only act as a support system, but to better educate our employees.”

Blackstone lobbyists contacted the Pentagon and State Department in 2014, according to the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics. However, since then there is no sign that Blackstone representatives have engaged with them and there are no lobbying reports showing that the private equity giant has, in fact, ever spoken with officials from those agencies through lobbyists until Urban was hired.

Urban is the latest Trump-linked lobbyist hired by Blackstone. The firm has also tapped Jeff Miller, a lobbyist that’s bundled more than \$2.7 million for Trump Victory, a joint fundraising operation between the Trump campaign and the Republican National Committee. Miller’s firm was paid \$90,000 by the same Blackstone office as Urban in the first quarter and an additional \$140,000 the following three months.

Miller’s team mainly focused on coronavirus relief legislation at the time. Blackstone has previously told CNBC the firm was not lobbying Congress on any of the Covid-19 loan programs and was instead using lobbyists as a way to mainly monitor the coronavirus legislation.

The payments to Miller and Urban are only pieces of Blackstone’s larger lobbying expenditures. In the first half of 2020, the firm paid lobbyists \$2.7 million, according to data gathered by CRP. That’s the most paid in the first half of a year for lobbying by Blackstone since 2012.

Beyond Urban’s direct ties to Trump himself, he has extensive experience lobbying both the DOD and State Department.

American Continental Group has made close to \$8.4 million from Urban clients including TikTok parent ByteDance, Lockheed Martin, Oracle, Raytheon, Roche and Zoom Video Communications.

[Coronavirus sidelines lobbyists at the influence industry's Super Bowl](#)

Political conventions are billed as national election pep rallies, weeks of speeches and celebrations bringing together headliners to anoint the presidential nominees and broadcast into homes across America.

But backstage, when the conventions were held in arenas with stages, was always lobbyist territory.

The quadrennial gatherings may be the Super Bowl of lobbying. And this year, the absence of in-person conventions means the lobbyists have been effectively sidelined.

"It's one gigantic schmooze-fest," said Democratic former Rep. Jim Moran of Virginia, who works as a lobbyist after having served 24 years in Congress and has attended party conventions for more than three decades. "Lobbyists are going to save a lot of money, but

they're going to lose an opportunity to have influence and socialize and meet a lot of people that you would not otherwise."

Like much of American life, Washington lobbying has been turned upside because of the coronavirus pandemic. And the conventions are no exception, leaving the influence industry to assess how it will operate when — and if — life returns to normal.

Lobbying is more than just cocktail parties; it's a multibillion-dollar industry.

Federal lobbyists reported spending \$3.51 billion in 2019, their biggest year yet, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonprofit that tracks the influence industry.

Much of the work of lobbying generally involves making the trek up Capitol Hill to meet with lawmakers and their staffs to explain a client's point of view. But with the halls of Congress closed, meetings have shifted to Zoom calls.

So with this year's conventions, lobbyists will be grappling not only with the inability to secure face time with decision makers but also with corporate clients who are trying to survive the pandemic-induced recession.

"Honestly, most lobbyists hate" the usual convention routine, said a Washington lobbyist who asked for anonymity to speak frankly about how the industry operates. "The idea that there is some lobbying benefit to wining and dining a bunch of delegates is just silly, especially in this day and age.

"Some of the first major budget cycles since COVID hit are coming up in the fall, and most will reset on January 1," the lobbyist said. "That is what most of us are thinking about right now."

'Social hubs'

Four years ago, Ron Bonjean was at the center of social activity at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, helping organize a series of concerts for hundreds of attendees complete with specialty snacks and corporate sponsors.

This year, the bar his firm rented in Milwaukee for a speech after-party at the Democratic National Convention will sit empty Tuesday night. The bipartisan lobbying shop had planned to host an event next week at the Republican convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, but the pandemic hit before it could lock down a location.

Conventions are like the end of summer camp for political types, the last hurrah before members of Congress and their consultants spread across the nation for the final push before the election.

"The conventions are the main social hubs for everyone — for lawmakers, for K Street, delegates — everyone gets a chance to see each other before they go off to campaign for the final couple months before the election," said Bonjean, a Republican strategist and partner at the bipartisan firm Rokk Solutions. "Washington is based on relationships, and that's really one of the last times you can really see people."

Lobbyists have largely already abandoned the type of lobbying that invokes images of smoky backrooms where lawmakers feast on expensive steaks and sip high-dollar whiskey. Disclosure rules and congressional ethics guidelines mean most lobbying events feature cocktails, food on a stick and no chairs.

But political conventions are prime real estate for the kind of lobbying events that comply with the myriad rules and allow attendees to avoid detailed disclosure.

Federal laws largely prohibit corporations from contributing money to political campaigns or parties. The two biggest exceptions are conventions and inaugurations, when companies are allowed to write checks or make in-kind contributions.

In 2016, Democrats raised \$69.7 million for their convention and Republicans raised \$65.7 million for theirs, according to disclosures filed with the Federal Election Commission.

In exchange for the donations, the parties offered sponsors perks like suites in the arenas where the acceptance speeches were given and backstage access for executives.

Conventions don't just bring together Washington types. Delegations are often composed of local and state government officials, making for prime opportunities for lobbyists to talk to decision-makers at every level of government.

The gatherings also mark when corporations tend to start thinking about what the future will look like if the out-of-power party wins. Former Vice President Joe Biden's large lead over President Donald Trump is fueling such speculation this year, several lobbyists said.

"The uncertainty of the election absolutely has kept a focus on contingency planning by companies and trade associations about what they need," Bonjean said.

The conventions offer opportunities for candidates further down the ballot to pick up donations from lobbyists and activists in other states.

"A convention is a large mass gathering where the entire political network of players gets together and members go not just to endorse the candidates but to, frankly, to meet people, to raise money, to gain further political support beyond their own congressional district and state," Moran said. "That's simply not going to happen, and I think the ramifications have yet to be figured out and obviously yet to be seen."

'Moneyball moment'

Just as the pandemic has made it nearly impossible for lobbyists to arrange face-to-face interactions, the economic fallout is making face time more imperative for companies.

And some lobbyists worry that if they can't do their jobs in a pandemic, companies assessing tight budgets will begin to question whether their services are needed when the crisis is over.

Even as Congress has struggled to agree on unemployment payments and school funding, connected companies have largely been able to secure the assistance they wanted. Even lobbying shops were able to benefit from the Paycheck Protection Program.

"The need to have a strong presence in Washington right now during the pandemic is at a premium, because the major industries have been impacted and need to get to members to express different policy needs," Bonjean said.

Lobbyists largely agree that the Washington culture shift to accept Zoom calls in place of in-person meetings will remain. And some see an opportunity.

"The reality is traditional lobbying has long needed its 'Moneyball' moment," said Joe Brettell, a former congressional staffer who is now a Texas-based corporate consultant. "Firms who integrate into traditional relationship-based tactics with digital, media and online analytics will be able to create more value than ever while speaking the language so many of their clients are already using."

Lobbyists make do with virtual convention

The online format for the Democratic National Convention initially posed a major challenge for lobbyists looking to impress their clients, until they found that many were happy to give this year a pass.

Conventions are usually a hot ticket for K Street firms, with lobbyists eager to leave Washington for a few days and show off their political network to clients.

But like many things under the cloud of the coronavirus pandemic, this year is different.

"To say the client's interest is low would be an overstatement," said Heather Podesta, CEO of Invariant. "Clients are focused on core corporate issues and the COVID negotiations."

Podesta, like many other lobbyists who spoke to The Hill, said the virtual nature of the convention had created what would have been an impossible situation for those looking to offer clients first-class treatment during the four-day event.

"Nothing about Zoom says VIP," she said.

Lobbyists and their clients are staying home as presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden accepts the nomination from Delaware instead of in Milwaukee, the initial location for the quadrennial party gathering.

It's a Zoom convention, much to the chagrin of Democratic lobbyists. How it will all shake out, and what the reception will be from clients, is yet to be seen.

Former Rep. Christopher Carney (D-Pa.), a senior policy adviser at Nossaman LLP, said he will tune in if something is consequential to clients.

"I'm not going to be completely consumed every day with the convention, but I'll still have it on in the background," he said.

Bethany Bassett, senior vice president at Rasky Partners, told The Hill she will tune into events around the convention for clients and report back.

“From a lobbyist’s role, what I’m trying to do for my clients’ interests is be virtual eyes and ears and try to bridge that intersection between policy and finance for them in this completely unprecedented time,” she said.

Arshi Siddiqui, a partner at Akin Gump, added that she’s expecting a scaled-down level of participation based on client needs.

“For my day-to-day, things will be dictated by client priorities — so my guess is that my participation this year will be much more limited,” she said.

Cristina Antelo, founder and CEO of Ferox Strategies, plans to monitor relevant policy-focused speeches.

“For the policy pieces, my lobbying shop will have folks covering those campaign events and making note of anything interesting worth sharing with clients,” she said.

For some lobbyists, the level of client interest varies by policy issue.

Carney said his clients were particularly interested in Biden’s speech in Pennsylvania last month when he unveiled his \$700 billion spending plan aimed at revitalizing the manufacturing sector.

“That was very well received by my clients. Other clients that are in the defense space are actually less focused on the conventions and more focused on what’s coming out of the CARES Act,” the former congressman said.

The big question heading into this week is whether the new format will be well received and perhaps even adopted to some extent for future conventions. Lobbyists said they hope that’s not the case, noting that the conventions are where they can really show off their clout.

“I’m a big believer in FOMO being a great motivator and that people want to be in the room where it happens,” Podesta said, referring to a fear of missing out. “Four years from now, we will know how to wash our hands and how not to slobber all over each other. Hopefully we will not still be wearing masks, but we will move into a state where we can socialize again.”

Some lobbyists said that for this time around they’ll just tune in at nine o’clock every evening for the main programming, and if something interesting happens, they will write a memo for clients. Other lobbyists said clients aren’t even expecting a memo on what transpires.

But there are other events besides the prime-time coverage that lobbyists and their clients would normally be attending during a four-day convention.

The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) is holding events, like a “Meet the Senate Candidates” virtual roundtable Monday at 5:30 p.m., and a voting rights update Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Other Democratic groups like the Blue Dogs and New Dems are also expected to hold virtual events.

“Conventions were a good way for clients to be involved with not only the campaign but with various groups too, like the ideological and diversity caucuses. And now we are trying to find

other creative ways for them to get facetime or access and getting intel like hearing in advance what the platforms will be, or who will be up for this or that position,” Antelo said.

One additional wrinkle to the 2020 Democratic convention is that Biden isn’t accepting campaign donations from registered lobbyists.

“Another role that has ramped up at least for me, given the times that we’re in and given that Biden is not accepting lobbyist finance, is doubling down on House and Senate races. I’ve seen that my geographic footprint of giving is far wider than it has been in years past,” Bassett said.

For members of Congress, popping into virtual events is much easier than having to physically attend various events around the host city.

Multiple days of intense engagement with the presidential campaign, lawmakers and clients will be missed but lobbyists are accepting of the reality.

“Those of us who have been involved in the past can look back with some fondness and look forward to the excitement and the energy in the future. But the fact is, we have a responsibility in this country to protect everybody, and if having a convention is a threat, we shouldn’t do it. We can, in the case of a global pandemic, make a few sacrifices,” Carney said.

Andy Cohen to host Democratic convention after-party featuring...

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“I wouldn’t call it frustrating; I would just call it a challenge. It’s an opportunity to be nimble,” Bassett said.

Lobbyists are also finding creative ways to enjoy this convention from home.

“I think making up bingo cards and the ultimate drinking game is one way to make it through this moment,” Podesta said.

[Here are the Top 5 money-making lobbying firms in Florida](#)

Florida lobbyists pulled in an estimated quarter of a billion dollars in 2019, a record amount that marks a 22 percent increase over the past decade. They took in another \$50 million to \$80 million during the first quarter of 2020, according to public records — and insiders say the influence industry shows few signs of slowing down, even amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Personally, I’ve never been busier than I am right now,” says Jeff Kottkamp, a former lieutenant governor and current chairman of the Florida Association of Professional Lobbyists. “We’re primarily in the information business, and in this environment of uncertainty, our clients are starving for information.” Dean Cannon, a former speaker of the Florida House of Representatives and president and CEO of GrayRobinson, says government and private-sector clients alike are finding lobbyists a “useful tool” for coping with this recession, particularly as federal lawmakers have passed trillions of dollars in rescue legislation.

The firm — which operates 14 offices in Florida and one in Washington, D.C. — has put together virtual briefings on everything from the future of sports in Florida to planned school

reopenings. It's also helped clients apply for different types of relief from both the federal and state government. "Not only haven't we lost clients, but we have picked up a couple looking for ways to respond, whether it's personal protective equipment or helping cities and counties parse through the two-layer cake of federal and state monies that are available," Cannon says.

Following the 2008 financial crisis, many Florida lobbying firms saw their book of business shrink, and lobbying association dues dropped off. In July, Gov. Ron DeSantis slashed more than \$1 billion from the state budget — and next year will undoubtedly be worse.

"Lawmakers are going to have to confront a significant budget shortfall, the likes of which our leaders have never seen. We really don't know what the total will be yet," says Ron Book, a longtime lobbyist from South Florida.

Nick Iarossi, co-owner of Capital City Consulting in Tallahassee, says the pandemic is also taking a toll on another key part of the influence game — political fundraising. "COVID has certainly prevented candidates from aggressively raising political dollars and walking door to door meeting voters," he said in an e-mail. "Those who raised money early have an advantage over those who waited since COVID has made political giving more challenging. Digital outreach and TV advertising will become more important now to reach voters, which are normally the highest cost campaign components."

Following is a look at Capital City Consulting and Florida's other biggest lobbying firms, ranked by Florida earnings, and their take on how COVID is impacting Florida's political landscape.

1. Ballard Partners

Brian Ballard, President

Brian Ballard. [M. Scott Mahaskey |Politico] [M. Scott Mahaskey | Politico]

2019 COMPENSATION: Approximately \$19.5 million (\$10.6 million legislative and \$8.8 million executive branch)

ABOUT: Ballard, an attorney and one-time chief of staff to former Republican Gov. Bob Martinez, got into lobbying in 1998 when he and his former father-in-law, Jim Smith, a former Florida attorney general, launched Smith & Ballard. Smith exited in 2011, and Ballard changed the shop's name to Ballard Partners. Over the past decade, the Tallahasseebased firm has doubled its Florida business roster and has expanded to seven Florida offices staffed by more than 20 lobbyists. The firm opened a Washington, D.C., office in early 2017. A year later, Politico dubbed Ballard — who raised millions for Trump's 2016 campaign as his Florida finance chairman — the "most powerful lobbyist in Trump's Washington." Ballard Partners raked in about \$18.9 million last year from 109 federal lobbying clients, in addition to the \$19.5 million it made doing Florida lobbying. The firm has earned millions more representing international clients, such as the government of the Dominican Republic, the Republic of Kosovo and the Embassy of Qatar, among others. In April, it opened an outpost in Tel Aviv staffed by former U.S. Rep. Robert Wexler and World Bank veteran Oscar Chemerinski.

NOTABLE CLIENTS: Ballard’s Florida team represents more than 200 clients across virtually all major business sectors, including tech giants Amazon and Google, pharmaceutical heavyweights AstraZeneca and Bayer, and numerous Florida-based businesses, such as U.S. Sugar, Mosaic and Kitson-Babcock. Notable sporting industry clients include Major League Baseball, the New York Yankees, the PGA Tour, the National Basketball Association and the Tampa Bay Lightning. The firm also represents a handful of cities, university foundations and hospital systems in the thick of the COVID-19 pandemic — including Jackson Health System in Miami-Dade County, Shands Teaching Hospital and Clinics in Gainesville and Tampa General — as well as the Safety Net Hospital Alliance of Florida, which advocates for 14 of the largest hospital systems in the most densely populated regions of the state.

COVID-19 IMPACT: Dealing with multiple levels of government is essential right now, says Carol Bracy, Ballard’s Tallahassee-based vice president and managing partner. “We have to really think very strategically about how they all intersect — it’s not all Tallahassee-focused,” she says. “We’ve got a really healthy D.C. practice — a great team of professionals that really understand that federal role and all the workings of federal government and Congress and all the various funding stimulus relief packages that are coming out that helped inform our Florida team and keep us ahead of what’s happening. That has been really instrumental in helping our Floridabased clients.”

2. The Southern Group

Paul Bradshaw, Founder & Chairman

Paul Bradshaw, Founder & Chairman, The Southern Group. [Courtesy of Norma Lopez Molina] [Norma Lopez Molina]

2019 COMPENSATION: Approximately \$15.4 million (\$8.4 million legislative and \$7 million executive branch)

ABOUT: Bradshaw co-founded the Southern Strategy Group in 1998. Two decades later, the firm — rebranded last year as simply The Southern Group — is one of the nation’s largest lobbying firms, with nine offices across four southern states, including six in Florida. Affiliates include the Midwest Strategy Group in Lansing, Mich., and a Baton Rouge, La., shop that now goes by the Southern Strategy Group name. The firm has more than 25 Florida lobbyists who represent 220 clients. Like many businesses, the firm has had to find ways to do its work remotely during the pandemic and in the process created a public policy-focused COVID-19 daily newsletter that’s garnered more than 14,000 subscribers. “We also brought senior elected and appointed officials in Florida to our clients’ home offices through exclusive weekly Zoom webinars, and we spearheaded a first-of-its-kind statewide virtual education policy conference that brought together 200-plus top education policymakers, thought leaders and advocates in the state,” says Bradshaw.

NOTABLE CLIENTS: The firm represents some of the biggest names in business across the state and the country, including Apple, Airbnb, IBM, Fidelity Investments, Wells Fargo, Darden Restaurants, Ernst & Young, FedEx, Florida Blue, International Speedway and Walt Disney Parks and Resorts. It also represents a slew of cities — including Orlando, Lakeland, Sanford and Sarasota — as well as several towns, counties and universities.

COVID-19 IMPACT: Bradshaw says the pandemic has brought about behavioral changes that “otherwise would have taken many years,” especially with regard to the use technology and remote connectivity. He predicts “disruption will become the norm as public policy evolves to meet such changes, likely against the backdrop of constrained public sector budgets due to the virus’s economic impacts. Uncertainty also creates fertile ground for divisive politics, so don’t expect partisanship to diminish any time soon.”

3. Capital City Consulting

Nick Iarossi and Ron LaFace Jr., Owners

Nick Iarossi and Ron LaFace Jr., owners, Capital City Consulting. [Courtesy of Mary Beth Tyson] [Mary Beth Tyson]

2019 COMPENSATION: Approximately \$12.5 million (\$7.5 million legislative and \$5 million executive branch)

ABOUT: LaFace, the son of an attorney, and Iarossi, a former legislative staffer and attorney, founded the firm in January 2003 along with Gerald Wester and Pat O’Connell, who have both since retired. Today, the shop has 12 lobbyists — six of whom are Florida-licensed attorneys, who only lobby and do not practice law. Jim Boxold, a former policy adviser to Jeb Bush and secretary of the Florida Department of Transportation under former Gov. Rick Scott, is managing partner of the firm. A couple of years ago, Capital City added a Tampa office. Earlier this year, the firm moved its Tallahassee team into a \$4.5-million headquarters on Jefferson Street across from the Capitol.

NOTABLE CLIENTS: The firm has approximately 200 clients and specializes in financial services, education, insurance, retail, information technology, procurement, appropriations, disaster management, manufacturing, gaming, telecom, utilities, environmental and regulated industries. Some heavyweights include CVS Health, the Florida Association of Health Plans, GEO Group, Florida Power & Light, Lennar Ventures, Safelite Group, the Everglades Foundation, USAA and Zurich American Insurance.

COVID-19 IMPACT: Iarossi says the firm has been busy keeping clients informed of changes resulting from executive orders, essential business lists and agency regulatory waivers. “With the executive branch operating under emergency powers, it essentially runs the state through the duration of the emergency and is very active changing policies and procuring services to respond to the pandemic and the economic crisis left in its wake,” he says. “Government is also playing a larger role right now in how businesses and individuals can survive and operate during the crisis, so our job is much more demanding in shaping those decisions.”

4. Ronald L. Book, PA

Ron Book, Founder & Owner

Ronald L. Book, founder & owner, Ron Book PA. [Courtesy of Eileen Escarda] [Eileen Escarda]

2019 COMPENSATION: Approximately \$10.1 million (\$8.6 million legislative and \$1.5 million executive branch)

ABOUT: A former senior aide to Democratic Gov. Bob Graham, Book opened his own shop in 1987 after running the governmental affairs practice at Sparber, Shevin, Shapiro, Heilbronner & Book. Two other non-lawyer lobbyists practice with him. Kelly Mallette, former senior policy adviser for the mayor of Miami, is senior director of governmental affairs. Rana Brown joined the firm 12 years ago after serving as governmental affairs director for the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce and Miami-Dade County. Wins this past session included securing funds for pay raises for direct care staff for the state's iBudget program, which helps people with disabilities live independently. Book also helped secure a \$1.8-million appropriation for Sturgeon AquaFarms that was later vetoed by DeSantis. The Northwest Florida farm, which breeds, raises and harvests beluga sturgeon, was decimated by Hurricane Michael in 2018. The team also advocated on behalf of the Florida Apartment Association for legislation rooting out fraud and abuse related to emotional support animal documentation. The bill passed both chambers and was signed by the governor in June.

NOTABLE CLIENTS: Book's firm has more than 100 clients, including 1-800 Contacts, Coca-Cola, Equifax, Gannett Media Group, GEO Group, Hard Rock Stadium and more than 20 Florida cities, most of them in South Florida. The firm also represents AshBritt, Keiser University, Auto Tag Management and Lauren's Kids, a non-profit focused on the prevention of child sexual abuse. It was started by his daughter, Lauren Book, a Democratic state senator who represents Plantation.

COVID-19 IMPACT: Book says the pandemic "has had and will continue to have a significant impact on Florida's political landscape" as the state loses revenue and there's no telling how severe the damage will be or when the state will bounce back. "With an economy that is largely reliant on tourism and sales taxes, we just don't know when people will feel good about traveling. I know that it has been reported recently that consumer confidence in Florida surpasses that of the rest of America, but it will take much more from outside of our Florida borders for tourism to again thrive. The closure was very significant for us. I also think lawmakers are going to rethink business interruption insurance and similar issues that came to light from closures."

5. Greenberg Traurig

Fred Baggett, Chairman of Tallahassee Office

Fred Baggett, chairman of the Tallahassee office of Greenberg Traurig. [Courtesy of Colin Hackley] [Colin Hackley]

2019 COMPENSATION: Approximately \$7.3 million (\$4.68 million legislative and \$2.58 million executive branch) **ABOUT:** The firm established its presence in Tallahassee in 1991 when it acquired the law firm of Roberts, Baggett, LaFace & Richard, then a 14-lawyer firm that was a prominent player in Florida's government and political landscape dating back to its founding in 1973. Today, the Tallahassee office is home to a multidisciplinary legal and government affairs team with deep Florida roots who advise clients on everything from dispute resolution and transactional representation to governmental advocacy and corporate advice. Key lobbyists included Fred Baggett, Hayden Dempsey, Gus Corbella, Fred Karlinsky, Leslie Dughi, Elizabeth Dudek and Tim Stanfield. Among the firm's big wins in 2020 was helping to secure \$75 million in Medicaid reimbursement rate increases for nursing home providers. Greenberg Traurig represented LeadingAge Florida, an association comprised of nursing homes and assisted living facilities, which was part of a broader effort to seek increased funding for the industry. The firm also represented the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council as part of a consortium effort to preserve funding for the iBudget Waiver, a health insurance program that serves about 35,000 Floridians with intellectual and developmental disabilities — and helped secure roughly \$271.5 million in additional funding for the program and an additional \$85 million to increase personal support services and other needs for people with disabilities.

NOTABLE CLIENTS: Greenberg Traurig has a roster of more than 100 clients, including Associated Industries of Florida, AT&T, Ford, the Florida Hospital Association, JM Family Enterprises, LegalZoom, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Humana and the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

COVID-19 IMPACT: "The state's revenues have significantly decreased, which will certainly impact the state budget and every industry affected by that budget. At a time when there is more demand than ever for services, health, safety and welfare programs are expected to take on an increased focus in the policy arena," says Baggett, who is also a senior member of the firm's National Government Law & Policy Practice.

Big Spenders

At least 18 companies and organizations broke the half-million dollar mark with their 2019 state lobbying spending. Exact numbers are impossible to come by because state law requires only that firms report payments in a range of values.

Company / Organization Spending

U.S. Sugar \$1.07 million – \$1.43 million

Automated HealthCare Solutions 920,008 – 1.04 million

Florida Power & Light 900,023 – 1.24 million

AT&T 870,040 – 1.3 million

Florida Crystals 915,031 – 1.3 million
AshBritt Environmental 775,000 – 854,992
FCCI 685,025 – 954,973
Safety Net Hospital Alliance of Florida 660,018 – 899,976
Florida Medical Association 600,012 – 799,980
TECO 600,005 – 729,987
K.A.S. & Associates 600,000
Florida Optometric Association 578,004 – 737,984
Seminole Tribe of Florida 565,002 – 664,990
Broward County 540,032 – 899,964
Dosal Tobacco 540,024 – 819,972
Miami-Dade County 530,020 – 769,976
Florida Justice Association 530,003 – 599,993
Florida Hospital Association 530,002 – 639,989
Source: floridalobbyist.gov

Biden aides headline DNC fundraisers with lobbyists

When Barack Obama won the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008, he barred the Democratic National Committee from accepting contributions from lobbyists in an attempt to purge their influence from his future administration.

Joe Biden doesn't appear to have the same concerns.

The DNC started accepting checks from lobbyists again in 2016 and has continued to do so as Biden prepares to accept the Democratic nomination next week. And while the Biden campaign has sworn off contributions from lobbyists, it has dispatched top staffers to headline at least four Zoom fundraisers this month benefiting the DNC and hosted by prominent Democratic lobbyists.

Steve Elmendorf, a well-known lobbyist who hosted a DNC fundraiser last week with other Democratic lobbyists at his firm, said that since the Biden campaign won't take lobbyists' checks, he has turned to giving to the DNC and state parties as the way for lobbyists to contribute to the campaign against President Donald Trump. Elmendorf has also written checks to the Wisconsin and Michigan Democratic parties and plans to give to two more battleground state parties ahead of the election, he said.

Biden has said he would implement rules to reduce the "improper influence" of lobbyists if elected, building on the Obama administration's ethics policies. But his decision to let lobbyists fund the DNC demonstrates that Biden — who has spent decades in Washington and has

deeper relationships there than Obama did when he ran in 2008 — may not be as hostile to K Street as president as Obama was.

The K Street fundraisers come as left-leaning groups press Biden not to staff his transition or administration with people who would be regulating industries they had recently worked in. But several of Biden's closest confidants over nearly half a century in politics have worked as lobbyists at some point in their careers. And while Biden has banned his campaign from accepting lobbyists' contributions, his campaign's first fundraiser was hosted by David Cohen, who oversaw Comcast's lobbying efforts at the time (though he is not a registered lobbyist himself). Biden's campaign has responded to criticism by rejecting the idea that his donors influence his decision-making.

The fundraisers have drawn top Biden staffers, including Steve Ricchetti, the campaign's chairman who is himself a former lobbyist for clients including AT&T, General Motors and Pfizer. He has appeared at three of the four events this month, according to invitations obtained by POLITICO.

Bruce Reed, a senior adviser on the campaign who served as Biden's chief of staff while he was vice president, headlined one of the events with Ricchetti; Jake Sullivan, another top Biden aide, appeared with him at another.

Rufus Gifford, Biden's deputy campaign manager; Stef Feldman, the campaign's policy director; and Reed headlined a fourth fundraiser on Wednesday afternoon hosted by Democratic lobbyists at Capitol Counsel, a lobbying firm that represents clients including Comcast, Lockheed Martin, the National Football League, Walmart and the GEO Group, a private prison company, according to disclosure filings. The event sought contributions of as much as \$25,000, according to the invitation.

John D. Raffaelli, Capitol Counsel's founder and one of the hosts of the fundraiser, said the event drew about 40 or 50 people. A longtime Democratic donor, he said he was puzzled by the scrutiny that lobbyists' contributions have drawn in some corners of the party.

"The amount of money that lobbyists give is insignificant" compared to the party's megadonors, he said.

With the Biden campaign unwilling to take their checks, giving to the DNC is viewed by some Democratic lobbyists as the next best option.

"We'll do whatever we can to beat Donald Trump," said Al Mottur, another veteran lobbyist who hosted a fundraiser for the DNC last week with other Democratic lobbyists at his firm, Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck. "This is what we're able to do."

Biden's campaign referred questions about the fundraisers to the DNC, which didn't respond to a request for comment.

The DNC has stepped up its efforts to raise money on K Street in recent months, according to three lobbyists familiar with the efforts. Democratic lobbyists, meanwhile, are eager to attend the events.

“We increased our financial goal for the event a few times because of the strong demand to participate,” said Jonathan Mantz, a lobbyist at BGR Group who helped organize the fundraiser that drew Ricchetti and Reed on Tuesday evening, in a statement. “There’s an incredible amount of support in Washington and around the country for Joe Biden in November.”

“I’m pretty confident we will be doing more events like this one over the next couple months to accommodate those who couldn’t attend this event,” Mantz added.

The fundraiser drew more than 60 people, including several lobbyists at other firms, and raised about \$160,000, according to someone familiar with the matter. Mantz served as Hillary Clinton’s national finance director when she ran for president in 2008, and some other attendees had longstanding ties to the party.

“My grandfather was DNC chairman under Truman and Roosevelt, so helping the DNC was a no brainer for me,” said Tim Hannegan, a lobbyist at HLP&R Advocacy who attended the fundraiser.

The fundraisers aren’t the Biden campaign’s only outreach to K Street and corporate America. Patti Solis Doyle, a former campaign manager for Hillary Clinton who’s now a partner in the Washington office of the Brunswick Group, a consulting firm, plans to host a webinar next week featuring Gifford and Carmel Martin, a senior adviser to the Biden campaign.

“What might a Biden presidency look like?” reads an invitation for the event. “How would his policies affect business?” More than 150 people have RSVPed to the event so far, including lobbyists and Fortune 100 chief executives, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The event — which is not a fundraiser — is one of dozens of briefings Biden’s campaign is holding with labor unions, think tanks, advocacy groups and others, according to a Biden campaign aide.

The fundraisers are a shift from Biden’s last time on a presidential ticket, when Obama’s change-focused campaign forbade the party from accepting lobbyist contributions days after he clinched the nomination.

“We will not take a dime from Washington lobbyists or special interest PACs,” Obama said at the time. “We’re going to change how Washington works. They will not fund my party. They will not run our White House. And they will not drown out the voice of the American people when I’m president of the United States of America.”

The DNC reversed the policy eight years later as Obama prepared to relinquish control of the party. A party spokesman told The Washington Post at the time that the change “will ensure that we continue to have the resources and infrastructure in place to best support whoever emerges as our eventual nominee.”

Patrick Burgwinkle, a spokesperson for End Citizens United, a Democratic PAC that advocates for getting big money out of politics, said the group wasn’t overly troubled that Biden hadn’t barred the DNC from raising money from lobbyists.

“We know he will be a president for all Americans instead of the corrupt tool of corporate special interests we have in the White House today,” he said in a statement. “We encourage all Democrats to follow the vice president’s lead in rejecting corporate PAC money and applaud all Democrats who go the extra step to reject lobbyist money, too.”

Elmendorf, the Democratic lobbyist who hosted one of the recent fundraisers, said he thought the DNC was doing all it could to bolster Biden’s chances of beating Trump.

“The world is on fire here in many ways, and I think they are turning over every stone, looking under every tree, trying to find every dollar they can find,” Elmendorf said.