

Suburbs, schools spend millions on lobbying state officials

By John Patterson | Daily Herald Staff

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SPRINGFIELD - Several suburban governments ranging from DuPage County to Harper Community College are among more than 100 local government entities that altogether spent more than \$5 million last year lobbying state officials.

At least 14 different lobbying firms received nearly \$700,000 from the Chicago area's four bus and train agencies as they pushed lawmakers for sales tax increases to stave off their own cuts and fare increases.

The voluminous research released Monday by the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform found discrepancies in the required reporting and suggested state lobbying laws be tightened.

There is no singular "gotcha" finding in the report. Instead, Illinois Campaign for Political Reform officials said it's intended to shine a light on how much local governments spend in taxpayer money lobbying the state.

"Cities of all sizes, transit agencies, school districts and many other local governments have turned to professional lobbyists for a variety of reasons," said campaign executive director Cynthia Canary, in releasing the report. "(The Illinois Campaign for Political Reform) leaves it to local taxpayers to determine whether the lobbying services were necessary and whether the fees paid to lobbyists were fair."

State law already requires lobbyists to register with the state and disclose their clients. They also must disclose how much they spend on meals, golf and other lobbying activities and which lawmakers or officials benefited.

Looking to go a step further, the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform filed dozens of legal requests with government entities across the state, seeking information on lobbying.

The DuPage County Board spent \$115,830 on two lobbying firms, making it one of the top 15 government spenders on lobbyists. The RTA topped the list, having spent \$223,600.

Fred Backfield, DuPage County's chief financial officer, said lobbyists help protect the county's interests when myriad laws ranging from zoning to construction spending are being bandied about the Capitol.

Last year, DuPage officials wanted lawmakers to approve giving the county the ability to have its own cigarette tax to balance county spending and avoid cuts and layoffs. That didn't happen, but ultimately the county got an additional sales tax as part of the mass transit bailout earlier this year.

Elsewhere, records show various school districts, villages and cities hiring lobbyists to go after specific projects.

Harper College, for instance, was pursuing a \$4.25 million grant from Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration. It also has been pushing for a four-year degree program that needs lawmakers' approval.

Schaumburg paid \$6,000 monthly to the firm of Advanced Practical Solutions to have its lobbyists press for a full interchange at Roselle Road, restoration of \$616,000 in state funding to the Woodfield Area Children's Organization and improved access at Meacham Road and I-90.

Lake Barrington paid the same lobbying firm \$24,000 to stay atop transportation and environmental issues important to the village.

Similarly, Huntley officials paid \$5,000 monthly to the Morreale Public Affairs Group to help pursue widening Route 47 and a complete interchange at I-90.

Andy Kimmel, spokesman for the Lake County Forest Preserve District, said their agency's lobbyist updates local officials about every other week and tracks proposals that could affect the district.

Spokeswoman Evelyn Schiele said College of Lake County needed a lobbyist to help secure funding for a new building at the Waukegan campus. She said the state has stopped funding capital projects for community colleges, but the lobbyist keeps CLC's story in front of lawmakers.

"The lobbyist should position the college well should the logjam break and the funding open up," she said. "The lobbyist helps tell our story."

But even the records turned over Monday reflect only a minuscule amount of the overall lobbying that goes on at the Capitol.

Canary estimated "tens of millions of dollars" are spent on behalf of corporations, labor unions and numerous special interest groups who aren't required to turn over such information.

"What the public doesn't know is what special interests in the private sector are spending to try to pass or kill legislation and to impact actions in the executive branch," Canary said.

Biggest spenders

Fifteen units of government spent more than \$100,000 on lobbying in 2007, according to the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform.

Regional Transportation Authority, \$223,600

Chicago Transit Authority, \$220,173

City Colleges of Chicago, \$213,200

Metropolitan Water Reclamation Dist., \$162,949

Pace, \$133,800

Chicago, \$127,257

Metra, \$122,004

Chicago Public Schools, \$120,000

Crestwood, \$120,000

Illinois Housing Development Authority, \$120,000

DuPage County Board, \$115,830

Southern Illinois University, \$115,000

Metropolitan Pier & Exposition Authority, \$114,951

Chicago Park District, \$110,000

Aurora, \$102,101

Suburban spending

Here is a breakdown of suburban units of government, the lobbyists they hire and their total spending on lobbying for 2007.

Unit of Government	Lobbyists	Contract	Total	*ICPR number of \$32,220 corrected by Naperville officials
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Source: Illinois Campaign

Aurora Civic Center	Zack Stamp Ltd. John Holub	\$1,500 \$1,500	\$3,000
Aurora	Dan Shomon, Inc.	\$102,101	\$102,101
Bartlett	Cullen & Assoc Dan Shomon, Inc.	\$62,500 \$5,436	\$67,936
Carpentersville Dist. 300	300 Hinshaw & Culbertson	\$28,347	\$28,347
College of DuPage	V.A. Persico Consulting Paula Johnson Perdue	\$24,480 \$24,480	\$48,960
College of Lake County	Jeffrey A. Dixon Paul Williams	\$25,191 \$12,000	\$37,191
Cook County commissioners	Morrill & Assoc.	\$40,082	\$40,082
Cook County state's attorney	Gerardo Dejesus Reyes	\$41,666	\$41,666
Des Plaines	All-Circo, Inc	\$73,333	\$73,333
DuPage County Board	Hadfield Consulting VA Persico Consulting	\$79,999 \$35,831	\$115,830
DuPage Board of Health	John Wyma & Assoc.	\$88,000	\$88,000
DuPage Election Commission	Sorling, Northrup et.al.	\$33,000	\$33,000
DuPage recorder's office	Capitol Consulting Illinois	\$18,000	\$18,000
DuPage Forest Preserve	PAR Sol. / Govt. Nav. Illinois Govt. Consulting	\$48,833 \$26,500	\$75,333
DuPage state's attorney	Roger C. Marquart & Co.	\$36,000	\$36,000
Elgin Community College	Adv. Practical Solutions	\$47,500	\$47,500
Elgin	Steven Nemerovski	\$27,500	\$27,500
Elgin Dist. U-46	Luking & Assoc.	\$24,000	\$24,000
Glendale Heights	Fidelity Consulting Group	\$15,000	\$15,000
Glenview	Cullen & Assoc.	\$40,000	\$40,000
Harper College	Adv. Practical Solutions MichelleTeresa Olson	\$60,000 \$24,000	\$84,000
Huntley	Morreale Public Affairs	\$45,000	\$45,000
Lake Barrington	Adv. Practical Solutions	\$24,000	\$24,000
Lake County Forest Preserve	Kolkmeier Consulting	\$21,000	\$21,000
Lombard	Marquardt & Co.	\$46,000	\$46,000

for Political Reform,
except where noted

Naperville	Govt. Affairs Specialists	\$60,000*	\$32,220
Rosemont	Michael A. Cohen	\$25,000	\$25,000
Schaumburg	Adv. Practical Solutions	\$60,283	\$60,283
Waukegan	Dist.. 66 Hinshaw & Culbertson	\$15,888	\$15,888
West Chicago	Marquardt & Co.	\$18,000	\$18,000
Wheaton	Govt. Consulting Solutions	\$36,000	\$36,000

DuPage officials defend lobbyist spending

By Jake Griffin | Daily Herald Staff

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DuPage County officials say the hundreds of thousands of dollars they spent on lobbyists last year is a value buy.

"We spend \$18,000 a year to make sure we get our fair say in matters of the state," said West Chicago Mayor Michael Kwasman. "Last year, our lobbyist got us out of the water commission, which got us back \$1.6 million. That's not a bad return on our investment."

Even some former critics of lobbyist spending are seeing the light.

"It's money well spent," said Naperville City Councilman Richard Furstenau. "The last time I was complaining a lot because we were spending \$35,000 a year and getting nothing for it."

Naperville switched lobbyists in 2006 and authorized an annual contract of \$60,000 for Government Affairs Specialists, city officials said. Furstenau said the lobbyists have been instrumental in pushing through bills important to the city as well as other bonuses.

"They've got all kinds of access to the Democrats (who control the General Assembly)," he added.

Many government officials said they got more bang for their buck last year because of the extra long legislative session.

In 2007, six DuPage County governments combined to spend more than \$360,000 on lobbyists, according to a report released Monday by the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform. The county board, health board, election commission, recorder, forest preserve and state's attorney were listed in the report.

The DuPage County Board topped that list at \$115,830 on two lobbying firms.

"The bottom line is it was certainly a very good investment this year because the (mass transit) bill passed," said county board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom.

That bill raised the county's sales tax by half a percentage point and provided emergency funding for public safety jobs that would have been cut otherwise.

Schillerstrom said neither he nor the county board had control over lobbyist spending by other entities.

"Some of them probably need lobbyists more than others do," he said. "We may not need as many lobbyists as we have, but elected officials certainly have the authority to hire them and we really don't have any legal say over any of them. Any power we have would be political."

He argued the fact that just because only the Cook County Board and state's attorney's office hired lobbyists in 2007, didn't mean it was being run better.

"I would put the way DuPage is being run any day against how Cook County is being run and we're going to come out pretty far ahead," he said.

DuPage County State's Attorney Joseph Birkett said his annual bill of \$36,000 for Roger C. Marquardt & Co.'s lobbying services is a bargain.

"I've had over 120 pieces of legislation that I've actually gotten passed, and I actually get the compliment often that I get this all done with so little," he said.