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**Today | This Week**

# Ariz. cities, agencies spend big on lobbying

## **Billy House**

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WASHINGTON - Arizona cities, counties, towns, utilities, colleges and state agencies are paying millions of dollars a year to lobbyists to promote their interests in the nation's capital.

In previous eras, representing constituent interests and securing federal money for needs and projects was mostly the responsibility of an elected member of Congress.

But officials with public and quasipublic entities say that, as government has gotten more complicated and the fight for dollars more intense, they have had to turn to lobbyists to stay competitive.

The specialists have helped them prepare for grants and stay on top of important issues, not to mention win millions of dollars in federal money.

"We get a half-a-billion dollars a year from the feds," said Diane D'Angelo, spokeswoman for the Arizona Department of Transportation.

"That's a pretty good deal," she added, given "the couple of hundred thousand dollars" the agency spends on a Washington-based lobbyist over the session.

As lawmakers return to Washington this week for the start of a new two-year session, several members of Arizona's delegation say they question the extent to which localities and other public entities are turning to lobbyists for help. Gov. Janet Napolitano also maintains a full-time lobbyist at the nation's capital.

"I just sometimes wonder if they get their full money's worth," said Sen. Jon Kyl, a Republican, emphasizing that he is not singling out any public officials or individual lobbyists for criticism.

Others say that what is happening in Arizona is not unique nationally but an indictment of a system where state and local officials must also compete against high-powered lobbyists working for private interests.

## **Watchdogs worried**

There is nothing new about municipalities, utilities, colleges or even governors

banding together through various national associations that represent their mutual interests in Washington.

But government watchdog groups say they're worried about the proliferation over the past eight years of individual public entities hiring their own lobbyists, a development some of the groups attribute in part to the explosion of "earmarks."

In the past, lawmakers would fund government grant programs and then let federal and state agencies select individual recipients through a competitive application process or by a formula.

But, in recent years, lawmakers have more often determined, often without such a competitive process, who will receive such grants by earmarking money for specific recipients.

"In this environment, a couple of hundred thousand dollars for a lobbyist with special relationships and connections is seen as a good investment, given that it could bring a return of millions of dollars," said David Williams, vice president of policy for Citizens Against Government Waste, a Washington-based group.

But Williams and others say the problem with this system is that there often winds up being no real oversight or open debate in how the money is being spent.

"I wouldn't criticize Phoenix or Scottsdale or Philadelphia, Pa., or any other public entities, for feeling they need an added voice in Washington to help them navigate this system and make sure that taxpayer dollars are going back to serve their citizens," said Gary Kalman, democracy advocate at U.S. PIRG, the national office for state public interest research groups.

"Especially in an age when hundreds of millions of government dollars are being poured to private interests like Halliburton and Lockheed Martin," Kalman said.

"But you really have to look at this system and ask whether this is how we want our government to work."

## **A sound investment**

For the public and quasi-public entities, spending taxpayer or ratepayer dollars for their own lobbyists is viewed as a fair trade-off toward potentially securing millions more in federal dollars, as well as other favorable government decisions.

D'Angelo, the ADOT spokeswoman, said the agency's lobbyists in Washington are specialists in transportation issues who "educate our Arizona congressional delegation, keeping them abreast of up-to-the-minute issues in Arizona."

They also regularly meet with administration officials.

The full-time staffer that Napolitano has maintained in Washington since 2004, Brian deVallance, also has paid off, said the governor's spokeswoman, Jeanine L'Ecuyer.

L'Ecuyer credited deVallance for helping minimize Arizona's hit in the recent base-closure process, including the protection of Luke Air Force Base.

DeVallance also played a key role in developing the rationale and legal arguments presented to then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and others in the Bush administration for deploying National Guard troops to the border, L'Ecuyer said.

Christine Farley, Northern Arizona University's director of governmental affairs, said the \$120,000 the university is paying to the Phoenix-based lobbying firm of Hamilton, Gullett, Davis & Roman LLC is also worth the investment.

Farley said the firm's work is instrumental in keeping the university aware of what federal grants are becoming available, how the awarding process will work, and how to be competitive.

## **Lawmakers doubtful**

Rep. Ed Pastor, D-Ariz., who sits on the House Appropriations Committee, says he suspects some public entities in Arizona feel added pressure to hire a lobbyist because several members of the state's congressional delegation, though not him, refuse to participate in earmarking.

Pastor, however, says he finds it better to work directly with mayors, city council members, town supervisors, educators, the governor and state agencies on their requests, and that, "sometimes, lobbyists just get in the way."

Rep. Trent Franks, R-Ariz., said he believes the growing use of lobbyists by public entities "has the effect of increasing pressure on all members of Congress to appropriate dollars that are not even really within the federal purview, much less a government priority."

Kyl said he understands why municipalities, universities and other public entities believe they need to have an ability to better influence actions in Washington, given the amount of their funding that now comes from federal sources and the highly technical and specialized issues that are sometimes involved.

But he said that, in his opinion, some of this reliance on lobbyists "is unnecessary, and overblown."

**Reach the reporter at 1-(202)-906-8136. Read his blog on Washington politics at [dcblog.azcentral.com](http://dcblog.azcentral.com).**

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