



The Pay to Play Express

Nebraska's Runaway Lobbying Train

The Nebraska Lobby Bounces Back Setting a New Record:

\$20,789,181

In their recently submitted annual filings, lobbyists reported record compensation in 2021 for their labors to influence Nebraska's state government. Despite a lingering pandemic, last year's total of **\$20,789,181** was some \$2,000,000 more than that of 2020.

It is not idle chatter when someone says: "if you want to get something done at the capitol, hire a lobbyist." What they are actually saying is it will take money to get something done by state government.

In the report that follows, we'll break down the numbers to show how much money it takes and who provides it. Several things to keep in mind as you read the report:

- *Lobbyists* are the people and firms that attempt to influence the legislature on a day-to-day basis. Daily access, sweetened by campaign contributions, gifts, entertainment and meals, produces influence.
- *Principals* are the companies, organizations and individuals who hire the lobbyists to represent and advocate for their interests.
- Nebraska has no limits on lobbyists making campaign contributions. Many thousands of dollars flow from lobbyists to political campaigns. This is also true of principals, who can contribute far more.
- Note that *ordinary citizens* rarely give gifts, provide meals or entertainment to their senators. The only money they are likely to send a senator is a campaign donation of, in the majority of cases, \$20 to \$100. While they can ask a senator for a personal meeting, the only time most citizens meet their senator is at campaign events.

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REGISTERED LOBBYISTS AND PRINCIPALS

Many nonprofits have *unpaid lobbyists*, individuals who testify frequently at legislative hearings and meet with senators. These individuals pay a \$15 registration fee. The fee for a *paid lobbyist* is \$200.

During the year, the number of lobbyists changes depending on the issues before the legislature. Registrations are added and withdrawn. These are the numbers as of January 21, 2022.

Year	Compensated Lobbyists	Non- Compensated Volunteers	Principals	Volunteer Organizations
2019	405	40	585	28
2020	367	32	560	24
2021	366	39	678	27
2022	336	31	544	23

PRINCIPALS' TOTAL EXPENSES: 2000 TO 2021 (IN TEN-YEAR INTERVALS)

The expenses are listed by item and year. The Covid years are also identified Items.

Items	2000	2010	2019	2020 COVID	2021 COVID
Miscellaneous	\$171,173	\$169,401	\$328,388	\$173,115	\$204,412
Entertainment Expenses	70,173	281,745	424,976	290,087	202,556
Lodging	4,028	15,710	37,782	6,947	4,389
Travel	28,188	45,660	61,225	26,326	18,724
Office Expense	Not Reported	89,695	20,196	44,226	12,337
Lobbyist Compensation	2,727,482	11,713,360	17,935,314	17,383,723	19,259,772
Lobbyist Reimbursements	Not Reported	269,848	575,711.	604,602	545,169
Gifts	Not Reported	19,913	11,060	6,377	24,362
Tickets	Not Reported	16,422.	20,404	4,233	21,186
TOTAL	\$3,002,853	\$12,072,438	\$19,405,061	\$18,538,641	\$20,310,909

Recorded from NADC 02/09/22

PRINCIPALS' ENTERTAINMENT, GIFTS AND TICKETS

Records in the Clerk of the Legislature's office allow us to see how much principals spend on both the legislative and the executive branches of government. The category identified as "others" is not clearly explained, although a considerable amount is spent there.

Entertainment is a catchall for everything from food and beverages to golf outings and social events. *Gifts* can be anything from Christmas presents to birthday gifts. *Tickets to events* is self-explanatory. Most-visible are tickets to University of Nebraska sports events.

	2000	2010	2019	2020	2021
Entertainment For					
Legislators	\$75	\$90,363	\$120,168	\$74,576	\$70,741
Executive Branch	0	4,873	5,902	2,067	4,108
Others?	70,098	186,509	208,906	213,444	145,705
Gifts For					
Legislators	0	12,769	7,735	3,757	20,967
Executive Branch	0	702	334	74	498
Others?	0	6,442	2,989	2,546	2,915
Tickets to Events for:					
Legislators	0	13,840	19,246	3,450	19,280
Executive Branch	0	88	48	0	0
Others?	0	2,494	1,109	783	463

Recorded from NADC02/09/22

A RECORDING ERROR REVEALS MORE ABOUT LEGISLATORS' FILINGS

It is unusual to see gifts to legislators as high as \$20,967, as shown in the previous chart. We looked further and discovered that Renewable Fuels of Nebraska had made numerous errors in reporting, including reporting as gifts \$9,993 (all of the items listed in the 3rd and 4th quarters) that should have been reported as campaign contributions.

Although filed in error, this report shows exactly what the public should be able to see in all gift reports; a snapshot of how and where lobbying funds are spent: Individual gifts identified complete with a date, price and where they were purchased. Meals identified by restaurant and the price paid. Without the filing error, none of the detail about specific gifts would have been public knowledge. We believe it should always be.

Renewable Fuels Nebraska is a relatively small player in the world of lobbying. In 2021 it reported spending \$33,135 on lobbying, which ranks it somewhere in the middle of the pack. Many school districts spend more than Renewable Fuels.

Renewable Fuels Gift Filing 2021

1st Quarter Item 3 (Gifts)

1/1/21 Carol Bates reimbursed for gifts for legislative reception: \$147.50
1/19/21 Bromm, Nielsen & Mines: \$1,916.66 (*should be lobbyist compensation*)
2/1/21/ Bromm, Nielsen & Mines: \$1,916,66 (*should be lobbyist compensation*)
2/17/21 Troy Breadenkamp reimbursed for gifts for legis. Reception: \$595.70
2/28/21 Pan Miller-Lunches at Billy's: \$142.53
3/1/21 Bromm, Nielsen & Mines: \$1,916.66 (*should be lobbyist compensation*)
Delivered in February: Gift boxes (1 per Senator) at \$15.17 ea.: total \$743.33

2nd Quarter Item 3

No gifts filed.

3rd Quarter Item 3

\$250.00 to John Cavanaugh for Legislature. Paid in September, 2021

4th Quarter Item 3

11/1/2021 Eliot Bostar for Legislature \$500
11/1/2021 Bruce Bostelman for Legislature \$1,000
11/1/2021 Mike Flood for Legislature \$1,000
11/1/2021 Curt Friesen for Legislature \$1,000
11/1/2021 Joni Albrecht for Legislature \$1,000
11/1/2021 Justin Wayne for Legislature \$500
11/1/2021 Linehan for Legislature \$1,000
11/1/2021 Michaela Cavanaugh for Legislature \$250
11/1/2021 Mike Moser for Legislature \$500
11/1/2021 Rich Pahls for Legislature \$500
11/1/2021 Geist for Legislature \$500

LOBBYISTS' TOTAL COMPENSATION, REIMBURSEMENTS AND EXPENSES: 2000 TO 2021 (IN TEN-YEAR INTERVALS)

Items	2000	2010	2019	2020	2021
Lobbyist Compensation	\$2,653,548	\$11,713,360.00	\$19,455,838	\$18,788,087	\$20,789,181
Lobbyist Reimbursement	Not Reported	175,528	211,016.00	173,167.00	139,527
TOTAL	\$2,653,548	\$11,888,888	\$19,666,854	\$18,961,255	\$20,928,708

LOBBYISTS' EXPENSES

Don't be confused by Compensation Paid and Reimbursement Paid. Individual lobbyists and lobbying firms often work together and compensate each other for their efforts and reimburse each other for expenses.

	2000	2010	2019	2020	2021
Miscellaneous	35,305	66,328	72,440	59,175	52,845
Entertainment Expense	58,305	153,357	151,670	116,176	110,046
Lodging	4,028	15,710	13,683	5,520.	4,604
Travel	16,165	44,521	39,209	18,023	118,464
Office Expense	Not Reported	18,787.	9,314	2,224	2,401
Lobbyist Compensation Paid	Not Reported	2,417	40,863	166,495	160,407
Lobbyist Reimbursement. Paid	Not Reported	675	744	483	2,537
Gifts Given	Not Reported	4,320	1,995	1,001	1,487
Tickets Given	Not Reported	466	0	1.20	500
TOTAL Expenses	\$114,498	\$306,584	\$329,921	\$369,101	\$353,293

Recorded from NADC 02/09/22

NOTE: Comparing lobbyists' compensation to lobbyists' expenses, it would appear that there is very little overhead in the lobbying world (\$20,787,181 - \$353,293 = \$20,435,888)

EFFECTS OF COVID ON LOBBYIST COMPENSATION

Ten highest compensated firms

FIRM	2019	2020 COVID	2021 COVID
Mueller/Robak.	\$1,432,282	\$1,363,349	\$1,645,683
Radcliffe/Asso	1434,238	1,304,547	1,340,799
O'Hara/Lindsay	974,070	1,040,459	903,276
Peetz/Co	806,650	836,600	827,100
Am.Comms.	640,116	641,350	694,794
Nowka/Edwards	576,385	556,316	617,107
Kissel/E+S	548,310.	551,723	656,998
Bromm/Assoc.	630,621	616,496	571,710
Zulkoski/Weber.	681,828	736,586	882,995
Husch/Blackwell.	458,597	538,700	828,500

Recoded from NADC 02/13/22

NOTE: When evaluating the compensation figures, remember that 2019 and 2021 were 90- day sessions and 2020 was a 60-day session. Also, 2021 included a special session for redistricting. On the other hand, it should be noted that masks and social distancing were required during 2020 and 2021. During 2020, six firms showed continued growth and in 2021 seven firms showed dramatic recovery.

EFFECTS OF COVID ON PRINCIPALS' SPENDING

Ten largest spenders

FIRM	2019	2020 COVID	2021 COVID
Altria Client Services	\$267,287	\$143,930	\$128,656
NE. Chamber of Com.	96,979	103,566	124,297
League of Municipalities	160,761	109,434	155,064
University of Nebraska	143,058	143,689	180,065
NE. Council of School Admin.	166,243	131,122	151,944
NE. Bankers	132,582	98,359	100,964
NE. County Official	164,728	128,152	135,067
City of Lincoln	117,601	90,200	90,200
NE. State Education Assoc.	107,302	121,457	90,900
Blue Cross Blue Shield	111,316	94,070	102,684

Recorded from NADC 02/13/22

NOTE: The reduction in entertainment spending by nearly all principals can be partially explained by the lack of dinners and banquets due to Covid. With the exception of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and the University of Nebraska, Covid seemed to be the difference-maker for the top spenders.

ENTITIES THAT SPEND TAX DOLLARS TO GET MORE TAX DOLLARS

Public Schools

Nebraska public schools have a large interest in the legislature. The Nebraska School Funding Formula determines how much money a school district receives from the state. Unfortunately, its workings are a mystery – only a handful of people are able to predict its results. There are just too many variables, and over the years the formula has been changed many times. School districts may well feel the need to employ professional lobbying firms to ensuring that the formula is working for them.

There are 272 school districts in Nebraska, but only 14 can afford to hire a lobbying firm. In the battle for state tax dollars, those 14 must believe they have an advantage, or they wouldn't spend the money. The lobbyist works for those who pay not necessarily for all the children in the state. Most small districts simply become spectators in the battle.

Public School Lobbying Expenditures

School District	2000	2010	2019	2020 COVID	2021 COVID
Adams Central	\$ 0	\$2,072	\$5,200	\$5,200.	\$5,200
Bellevue	0	80,000	54,200	54,000	54,200
Bennington	0	9,000	5,200	5,200	5,200
DC West	0	0	25,992	5,200	5,200
Elkhorn	0	20,000	28,200	28,200	28,200
Grand Island NW	0	2,081	5,200	5,200	0
Grand Island	0	26,500	33,276	34,274	35,301
Lincoln	31,201	96,186	21,600	43,400	21,600
Millard	493	65,383	67,109	64,246	70,824
Omaha	22,144	67,038	73,346	83,357	97,700
Papillion	0	20,983	39,400	39,400	39,000
Ralston	0	31,020	40,312	42,021	43,270
Springfield Platt.	0	0	14,263	42,950	15,950
Westside	4,406	25,985	5,950	8,826	11,701
Learning Com.	0	10,000	28,283	28,700	26,900

Recorded from NADC 02/15/22

NOTE: Over the years, school population growth and consolidation have increased the demand for funding. Over-reliance on local property taxes makes the need for state aid even more important.

The University of Nebraska

The university ranks among the top ten lobbying entities. In 2021 it reported spending \$180,065 on lobbying, including \$30,000 to Peetz and Company and \$97,200 to former-Senator Heath Mello. The university often indicates that the University Foundation supplements its lobbying activity. But the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission states that once Foundation money reaches the university general fund, it becomes “public funds” and is no longer Foundation money.

University Expenditures on Entertainment, Gifts, and Tickets to Events

	2019	2020 COVID	2021 COVID
Entertainment	\$44,220	\$30,589	\$30,685
Gifts	2,391	1,804	1,782
Tickets	19,994	1,416	19,760

Recode from NADC 02/16/22

Because the university is a public entity that provides gifts and entertainment to public officials, we have better access to knowing who gets what. However, the only items disclosed by the university are tickets to university events. As a result, we can cross check the university tickets with what elected officials report on their annual Statement of Financial Interests forms. (C-1 Form) The C-1, however, only requires the disclosure of gifts over \$100. We really have no way of knowing how the \$30,685 or the \$1,782 were spent. Season tickets to university football games are valued at \$840 and two tickets to Garth Brooks are \$250.

Cross-checking the filings on tickets may reveal the reliability of senators’ reporting on other filings that we cannot. How many gifts from other principals are either overlooked or just not reported?

The chart below lists senators who accepted university tickets and the value of those tickets. Amounts in italics (*\$840*, for example) indicates those tickets that were not reported by the senator. The total value of all tickets received regardless of reporting is in the column on the right.

The C-1 reports were due on March 1, 2022. Two recipients have not yet filed.

University of Nebraska Football Tickets Given to Legislators

Senator	Season FB	Suite. Seating	Spring FB	Theater: Garth Brooks	Total NU Gift
Bostar	\$840	\$120: Buffalo.	\$40 Skybox		\$1,000 Not Reported
Brandt		\$120: Michigan			\$120
Brewer	\$840	\$120: Ohio State			\$960
J.Cavanaugh	\$840	\$120: Purdue			\$960
Clements		\$120: Purdue			\$120 Not reported
Day	\$840	\$240: Fordham	\$40: Skybox		\$1,120 Failed to File
DaBoer		\$120: Ohio State	\$20: Skybox		\$140
Erdman	\$840				\$840 Not Reported
Groene	\$840				\$840
M Hansen	\$840	\$120: Purdue			\$960
Hunt	\$840				\$840 Not Reported
Lindstrom	\$840				\$840 Not Reported
Lowe	\$840				\$840 Not Reported
McDonnell	\$840	\$120: Ohio State			\$960 Failed to File
McKinney	\$840	\$120: Buffalo			\$960 Not Reported
Morfeld	\$840	\$120: Fordham			\$960 Not Reported
Murman		\$120: Iowa			\$120 Not reported
Pahls	\$840				\$840
Pansing- Brooks	\$840	\$120: Fordham			\$960 Not Reported
Slama		\$120: Purdue			\$120 Not reported
Vargas	\$840	\$120: Iowa			\$960 Failed to File
Walz	\$840	\$120: Fordham	\$40: Skybox	\$250	\$1,250 \$250 Not reported
Wayne	\$840				\$840
Wishart	\$840			\$250	\$1,090

Recorded 03/20/22 as reported by NADC, the Clerk's office and UN

In the past more than 90 additional staff members have been given free \$20 tickets to the spring game.

The ticket prices shown here are those reported by the university on their filings with the Accountability and Disclosure Commission. The public is often required to make a donation to the University Foundation in addition to the season ticket price. This, of course, does not apply to senators. In past years, the university has provided \$20 parking passes along with special seating. This did not appear on the reports for 2021.

The total value of university tickets given to senators is \$18,640. The total value reported by senators is \$6,660.

The total amount **not reported** by senators is **\$11,980**.

AND NOW FOR SOME REAL MONEY:

Campaign Contributions from Political Action Committees (PACs)

PACs are organizations established by corporations, labor unions, and other special-interest groups to raise money from individuals for political causes. For many elected officials and candidates for public office, PACs are the largest source of campaign funds.

In Nebraska, as of March 9, 2021, there were 114 registered PACs. During the 2020 election cycle PACs recorded \$4,243,615 in receipts and \$3,824,196 in expenditures in Nebraska. We expect these figures to increase during the 2022 cycle.

Organizations that establish PACs may also be connected to principals that employ lobbyists who can direct contributions to candidates favorable to the principal's interests. In fact, in Nebraska 31 PACs list registered lobbyists as their treasurers.

In the 2020 election cycle, the Friends of the University PAC was one of the largest donors to legislative races. It distributed a total of \$84,750 over a large number of legislative candidates and sitting senators. The individual contributions ranged from as little as \$250 to as much as \$5,000. Those receiving \$5,000 were:

- Sen. Dorn
- Sen. McDonnell
- Sen. Stinner
- Sen. Vargas
- Sen. Wishart

Although Friends of the University is a large donor to political campaigns it has a limited number of powerful contributors. During the 2020 election cycle, all but \$750 of its total \$136,750 was provided by just nine contributors:

Contributor	Total Contributions in Calendar Year
Cassling	\$25,000
Howard Hawks	\$15,000
Henning Brothers LLC	\$1,000
John Kotouc	\$5,000
James Pillen	\$25,000
Walter Scott, Jr.	\$25,000
David D. Slosburg	\$10,000
Streak, Inc	\$5,000
Barbara Weitz	\$25,000

In 2019 Friends of the University PAC paid the lobbying firm of Peetz & Co \$30,000 for consulting and administrative work.

Nebraska is one of only 13 states with no limits on PAC campaign contributions.

NCSL records

Campaign Contributions from Principals and Corporations

Altria Client Services (Phillip Morris) spent \$539,873 on lobbying from 2019 through 2021, more than any other principal. During the same period, it contributed \$75,000 to campaigns.

Why so much money? Like most principals, Altria is protecting its interests, which include Marlboro cigarettes, cigars, pipe tobacco, chewing tobacco, e-cigarettes and cannabis. Our legislature is often dealing with legislation that can affect sales and Altria has the lobbying power to be heard.

Altria's annual income amounts to as much as \$26.15 billion. Its contributions to our elected officials from 2019 through 2021 range from as little as \$500 to \$5,000 a pop. They may give multiple contributions to the same person. The two largest recipients of Altria campaign money were:

- Governor Pete Ricketts: Seven contributions totaling \$15,500
- The Nebraska Republican Party: Five contributions totaling \$20,000

Altria Client Services LLC employs Alston Garth as an in-house lobbyist and the lobbying firms of Jensen, Rogert Associates and Radcliffe and Associates.

In 2012 when Nebraska's Campaign Finance Limitation Act was declared unconstitutional, our state lost all limits on corporate campaign contributions. Currently it is legal to limit corporate contributions, but our legislature has shown no interest in doing so.

Nebraska is one of five states with no limits on corporate campaign contributions.

NCSL records

Campaign Contributions from Lobbyists

Peetz and Company is a lobbying firm that makes contributions to political campaigns. From 2019 through 2021 it contributed \$34,029 to Nebraska state campaigns. The two largest recipients of its campaign contributions were:

- Governor Pete Ricketts: Three contributions totaling \$2,000
- Speaker Mike Hilgers: Five contributions totaling \$2,500

Lobbyists often make candidates and office holders aware of their clients' campaign contributions. Connecting the lobbyist to the client contribution may help to open some doors.

Groups of lobbyists often host fundraisers for a candidate, pooling their resources to pay for food, beverages, facilities and catering. The costs are usually distributed equally among the lobbying firms. Candidates and lobbyists must report each lobbyist share of the expense as an "In-Kind Contribution."

In 2021 Peetz recorded seven such events. One was very specific:

"FOOD AND SPACE FOR EVENT,
IN-KIND SPONSORS FOR EVENT,
12 HOSTS AT 45.72,
1 HOST AT 91.44"

Translated, this means 12 lobbying firms paid \$45.72 each and one paid \$91.44 for a total of \$640.08. The event was to raise campaign funds for Senator Wendy DeBoer. We don't know who attended or how much money was raised. We don't know which lobbyist paid \$91.44. All we know is that Peetz was one of the twelve lobbyists.

Nebraska is one of 32 states that have no restrictions on lobbyist contributions or fundraisers.

NCSL Records

Lobbyists' In-session Fundraisers in Nebraska

Lobbyist-sponsored in-session fundraisers have become a tradition in Nebraska politics. Lobbyists solicit senators and arrange breakfasts or lunches most often at Billy's Restaurant, just three blocks from the capitol. Legislators are invited for a free meal while lobbyists pay at the door. Traditionally, lobbyists who attend pay \$100 at the door and may bring checks from clients. The press and the public is not invited. To ensure that the fundraisers don't conflict with each other, the lobbyists in most cases post the events on the Clerk's Calendar of Events. The list below is taken from that calendar.

It is concerning that lobbying money is changing hands while legislative bills are on the floor and votes are taken within an hour of the fundraiser.

Below is the 2022 list of in-session fundraisers recorded through April

Date	Senator	Meal	Location
Jan. 11	Sen. Lowe	Breakfast	Billy's
Jan. 28	Sen. Aguilar	Breakfast	Billy's
Feb. 2	Sen. Moser	Breakfast	Billy's
Feb. 9	Sen. Brandt	Breakfast	Billy's
Feb. 16	Sen. Hunt	Lunch	Billy's
Feb. 22	Sen. Cavanaugh	Lunch	Billy's
Feb. 28	Sen. Slama	Breakfast	Billy's
Mar. 3.	Sen. McCollister	Lunch	Billy's
Mar. 8	Sen. Morfeld	Breakfast	Billy's
Mar. 23	Sen. Sanders	Lunch	Billy's
Mar. 24	Sen. Arch	Breakfast	Billy's
Mar. 31	Sen. Albrecht	Breakfast	Billy's
Apr. 7	Sen. Riepe	Lunch	Billy's

Recorded from the Clerk's Office on 03/15/22 There is still plenty of time to schedule more in-session fund raisers.

Nebraska is one of 22 states that have no restriction on in-session fundraisers. Fifteen states allow no campaign contributions during the legislative session. Thirteen states prohibit lobbyist campaign contributions during the legislative session.

THE REVOLVING DOOR

Below is a current list of former state senators who joined the ranks of lobbyists within two years of public service. When we elect individuals, we expect them to serve the public good. As a result, they gain special knowledge and relationships. This background is a public trust. It should not be bought and sold for the benefit of special interests.

Common Cause believes there should be a two-year “cooling-off period” before public officials can become paid lobbyists. The legislature does not agree.

Former Legislators Registered as Lobbyists in 2021

Lobbyist	Years in Office	Registered asLobbyist	2021 Compensation*
Chris Abboud	1983 - 1998	2000	\$35,000
Greg Adams	2007 - 2015	2016	\$43,709
Curt Bromm	1993 - 2004	2004	\$101,635
Colby Coash	2009 - 2017	2018	\$18,000
Daniel Conrad	2007 - 2015	2015	\$35,000
Annette Dub	2007 - 2015	2015	\$8,000
Nicole Fox	2015 - 2016	2017	\$8,790
Tim Gay	2006 -2010	2011	\$144,000
Burke Haar	2011 - 2018	2019	\$37,670
Sara Howard	2012 - 2020	2021	\$3,433
Scott Lautenbaugh	2007 - 2014	22015	\$87,000
John Lindsay	1989 - 1997	1997	\$60,000
Heath Mello	2009 - 2917	2017	\$97,637
Mick Mines	2003 - 2007	2008	\$164,412
Kent Rogert	2007 - 2011	2011	\$105,000
Kenneth Schilz	2008 - 2016	2017	Although Registered Does Not Report any Lobbying Information

Recorded from NADC records 03/12/22

*Many of those listed have positions with their principals beyond lobbying. As a result, they only report compensation for the time spent in their lobbying roles.

ALEC: AMERICAN LEGISLATIVE EXCHANGE COUNCIL

SourceWatch describes ALEC as follows:

“ALEC is a corporate bill mill. It is not just a lobby or a front group; it is much more powerful than that. Through ALEC, corporations hand state legislators their wish lists to benefit their bottom line. Corporations fund almost all of ALEC’s operations. They pay for a seat on ALEC task forces where corporate lobbyists and special interest reps vote with elected officials to approve ‘model’ bills.” (For more, see the Center for Media and Democracy’s website, ALECexposed.org.)

Over the years more than 25 Nebraska legislators have either attended ALEC meetings, become ALEC members, or served on ALEC committees.

In 2021 Governor Ricketts praised the work of ALEC and was chosen by ALEC as the Governor of the Year. Currently, Senator Linehan is the state chair of ALEC. Former ALEC State Chair Jim Smith serves on the ALEC Corporate Advisory Board.

With the support of Governor Ricketts and Senator Linehan, Jim Smith has been crossing the state promoting the “Blueprint Tax Plan.” The plan proposes a tax shift to a greater reliance on sales taxes. The Open Sky Institute, which monitors Nebraska’s tax policies, sees the plan as “a tax cut for the wealthy that would be paid for by middle- and lower-income Nebraskans.” Renee Fry, Executive Director of Open Sky, describes the plan as a “gut punch to everyday Nebraskans.”

Although Jim Smith trumpets the Blueprint Plan as a home-grown tax shift, it has all the earmarks of ALEC, including similar initiatives and bills in other states.

Current legislative participants in ALEC as reported by SourceWatch are:

- Sen. Thomas Brewer, Attended 2019 ALEC Annual Meeting
- Sen. Robert Clements, Attended 2019 ALEC Annual Meeting
- Sen. Curtis (Curt) Friesen, registered member. Attended 2019 ALEC Annual Meeting
- Sen. Brett Lindstrom, registered member
- Sen. Lou Linehan, registered member, State Chair, Attended 2019 ALEC Annual Meeting
- Sen. John Lowe, Attended 2019 ALEC Annual Meeting
- Sen. Dave Murman, Attended 2019 ALEC Annual Meeting
- Sen. John Stinne, registered member

Unreported by SourceWatch were attendance at ALEC events by Sen. Joni Albrecht in 2018 and Sen. Ben Hansen in 2021.

When Senator Jim Smith was the State Chair of ALEC he claimed 50% of the Nebraska Senators were ALEC members but he refused to list the names.

ALEC has always tried to keep the state memberships secret.

CONCLUSION

This report provides considerable financial information about the workings of Nebraska's lobby. Yet, there is so much more that we don't know. Neither lobbyists nor principals are required to disclose how much entertainment money was spent on specific senators. Only the erroneous filing by Renewable Fuels provided a glimpse behind this veil.

The values of gifts are left to the estimate of the legislators who do not report specific amounts but use only general categories: A - \$100 to \$200, B - \$200 to \$500, C - \$500 to \$1,000 or more. Gift trips to conventions often far exceed \$1,000 since they can include travel, lodging, food, and beverages as well as a registration fee.

With so many senators failing to report \$840 season tickets from the University of Nebraska, the only gifts we can cross-check, one must wonder how much else is unreported.

And when it comes to political campaign contributions, Nebraska is truly the wild west. In 2012, when Nebraska's Campaign Finance Limitation Act (CFLA) was declared unconstitutional, we lost all control. Nebraska has no contribution limits on PACs, corporations, principals, lobbyists, or even individuals. When Governor Ricketts wants to support a candidate or oppose a ballot issue, he can contribute \$10,000 or \$25,000 or more without batting an eye.

One has to wonder how important that \$20 contribution from the average citizen really is to our state officials.

In the 2018 election cycle, 48 candidates spent \$6,489,464 running for 24 unicameral seats that pay \$12,000 per year.

As we have noted, the revolving door remains open and the secret works of ALEC continue to be an unsettling mystery for our democracy.

Jack Gould Issues Chair
Common Cause Nebraska Phone: 402-310-8525
jackgould84@gmail.com

