

Should lobbyists register, disclose clients in Reno?



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Lobbyist Garrett Gordon talks to Reno City Councilwoman Neoma Jardon during a break at a Council meeting in 2015.(Photo: Anjeanette Damon, RGJ)Buy Photo

Last year, when the Reno City Council took up the question of whether to hand its hospital service and provider contracts solely to Renown, the room filled with hospital executives and their lobbyists to fight over the multi-million contracts.

In April, after repeatedly failing to close a deal on leasing a piece of city land while battling public perception problems, The Siegel Group hired well-liked former Sen. Dick Bryan as its lobbyist to work the Reno City Council.

And former Councilwoman Jessica Sferrazza, who ran Mayor Hillary Schieve's campaign, has launched a thriving lobbying business since leaving office, representing a client on almost every major issue before the Reno City Council recently.

But right now much of that influence peddling can happen behind the scenes, with little to no sunlight. Unless a lobbyist chooses to testify publicly on behalf of a client—and often they

choose not to—the public may never know who is being paid by whom to convince the Council to vote a certain way.

Take for instance, Uber lobbyist John Griffin. In November 2014, when the company was in a protracted legal fight with the state of Nevada, Griffin quietly worked with Schieve to bring forward a pro-Uber resolution. The resolution had no force of law; it simply trumpeted the Council's support for the company. Although Griffin sat in the audience when [the Council passed the resolution](#), he never testified publicly on the measure.

That could happen because unlike at the Nevada Legislature, the city of Las Vegas and Clark County, local lobbyists are not required to register with the city of Reno, list their clients, disclose how much they spend lobbying council members or list any potential conflicts of interest they may carry.

On Wednesday, however, the Reno City Council will consider a new ordinance that would change that.

It's the second time Schieve has tried to pass an ordinance requiring lobbyists to register and publicly list their clients. When she tried as a council member, under former Mayor Bob Cashell's tenure, she failed to win enough support.

"I have always felt disclosure is needed to be more transparent, which wasn't common practice under the last Council," Schieve said. "But times have changed drastically with our growing economy, so now more than ever the public should know who lobbies Council and for whom."

Schieve said she would also like to see the lobbyist registration list be posted live on the city's website, similar to what [the Nevada Legislature does](#).

Under the proposed ordinance, lobbyists would have to register with the city clerk and keep their client list current. They also would have to wear a lobbyist badge whenever they visit city hall.

Local lobbyists interviewed by the Reno Gazette-Journal on Monday were largely supportive of the ordinance, remarking that they have to register at the Legislature and in Las Vegas anyway.

"It's not burdensome and I commend the mayor for bringing additional transparency in her term," said Garrett Gordon, a lobbyist who represents developers and builders among others. "It's no big deal. We have to do it every where else."

Gordon ran into problems last legislative session when he informally worked on a measure that would have made the regional planning board advisory. Gordon's clients included both the Washoe County Commission, which at the time was openly antagonistic with the planning board, and a developer whose project had been turned down by the board.

Although Gordon said he was always "crystal clear" about who he represented, some were not always sure which client of his was pushing the potential change in state law when he worked to win the support of the Reno and Sparks city councils.



Hillary Schieve, center, celebrates as Jessica Sferrazza, left, reads the mayoral election results at the SoDo Restaurant on Tuesday night Nov. 4, 2014. On the right is Joel Giandalia. (Photo: Andy Barron/RGJ file)

Sferrazza, who said she supported a lobbyist disclosure ordinance when she served on the Council, said such a measure is necessary.

"I'm totally supportive," she said. "I tried to pass it when I was on the Council and didn't have the votes to do it. I think lobbyists should be identified down at city hall."

Fresh off running Schieve's mayoral campaign, Sferrazza is now one of city hall's most prolific lobbyists. She's helped clients win controversial issues before the Council, including approval for [a 273-unit housing development in Verdi](#) that is strongly opposed by residents there. Sferrazza helped that same client, Reno Land Development Co. [win approval for the Rancharrah](#) development and obtain money for affordable housing units off Mt. Rose Highway.

Sferrazza also represents Italian Capital, which is in the midst of helping to [relocate low income residents](#) being displaced for a student housing project.

It's the not the first time a mayor's political advisor has worked as a lobbyist. Chris Barrett, who ran Mayor Bob Cashell's campaigns, also lobbied for many high-profile clients with business before the City Council.

Each time one of Sferrazza's clients has business before the Council, Schieve discloses her relationship with Sferrazza.

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