



Taxpayer-Funded Lobbying Disclosure

Testimony before the Texas House State Affairs Committee on HB 433

by Chuck DeVore, Vice President of National Initiatives

In the last session, local Texas governments spent some \$41 million of taxpayer money on contract lobbyists to influence the decisions made by the people's elected state representatives.

In conducting this research, I personally reviewed thousands of Texas Ethics Commission filings from the 2017 session over the course of three days.

HB 433 is a government disclosure and transparency bill that requires local governments to detail the amount of taxpayer funds used to lobby the Legislature. It would greatly simplify the process of understanding how much taxpayer money local government is paying to influence the Legislature. It would also improve the accuracy of such assessments.

Specifically, the measure calls for every political subdivision that collects taxes, including regional mobility authorities, toll road authorities, and transit authorities to report the amount of money spent to lobby this Legislature as well as to report each person they paid who was required to register as a lobbyist under Chapter 305 of the Government Code in their comprehensive annual financial report.

This is important for taxpayers to understand if local government is being a frugal steward of the tax dollars they send them.

You may have heard about the testimony given in the other chamber regarding SB 2, a property tax reform and relief bill. Of the 29 people who testified against the bill, not one was a citizen who was not a lobbyist, an employee of local government, or a local elected official.

Late last year, Gov. Abbott made public his disapproval of government-funded lobbying when he called out the City of Tyler for intending to spend \$200,000 on lobbyists for this legislative session.

As individuals, we enjoy the natural right of free speech. This is enshrined in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution as the right to petition for a "redress of grievances." Government itself does not enjoy this right. Government has powers, not rights. Only people have rights.

Lastly, you'll be interested to note that in mid-December, we hired a well-known national polling outfit to survey 800 registered Texas voters, asking them what they thought about the practice of taxpayer-funded lobbying. The results were overwhelming: 91 percent opposed the practice, including 80 percent who strongly opposed it. Additionally, 84 percent of Hispanic voters were opposed, as were 87 percent of African-American voters.

Chuck DeVore served in the California Legislature from 2004 to 2010, was a Reagan appointee in the Pentagon, and is a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army (retired) Reserve.