

Reports Detail Monetary Reach Of Lobbyists At State House

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PROVIDENCE — Dominick Ruggerio wore two hats last year, as both the Senate majority whip and administrator of an arm of the Laborers International Union of North America, with a wage-and-benefit package worth a total of \$185,226, including \$140,922 in pay.

Once again, he was not the only Rhode Island lawmaker drawing a salary, consulting fee or teaching stipend from one of the corporate, organized labor and agenda-driven interest groups that populate the State House lobbying corps. And once again, he was not the only state Senator on organized labor's payroll.

As a field representative for the Rhode Island Laborers District Council, Sen. Frank Ciccone, D-Providence, had a \$174,324.93 compensation package that included \$104,324 in pay. He netted another \$18,361 in salary alone as business manager for Local 808, the Laborers' affiliate that represents state court workers.

Some — but not all — of this information is available in the disclosure reports filed in recent weeks with the secretary of state's office by that relatively small coterie of lobbyists whose employers acknowledge having given something of value or, perhaps, a consulting fee or salary to a state legislator.

According to the most recent reports filed by groups as disparate as MetLife Insurance, Care New England and the New England Laborers Labor-Management Trust:

- Sen. John Tassoni, D-Smithfield, drew \$113,411 in salary and severance pay from the largest state employees union — Council 94, American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees — before he and the union parted ways last year.
- State Rep. David Segal, D-Providence, netted \$4,274 in consulting fees and travel reimbursements from FairVote, the advocacy group promoting passage of bills to strip the governor of his power to fill U.S. Senate vacancies, allow the pre-registration of voters not yet old enough to vote, make Rhode Island part of a movement to scuttle the Electoral College, and elect future presidents and vice presidents by popular vote.
- House Majority Leader Gordon D. Fox, D-Providence, drew \$8,316 in pay for teaching at Johnson & Wales University, and Rep. Patricia Serpa, D-West Warwick, \$13,925 for her role at the school.

- Providence College paid House Majority Whip Peter Kilmartin, D-Pawtucket, \$1,750, and Senate Majority Leader Daniel Connors, D-Cumberland, \$3,500 for teaching courses.
- Pawtucket Rep. William San Bento's insurance company received \$30,485 in commissions from MetLife. Barrington Sen. David Bates' insurance company received premiums totaling \$7,261 from lobbyists William Farrell and Lenette and Robert Boisselle for Quincy Mutual Insurance. He estimates his commissions at 17 percent.
- Bristol Rep. Douglas Gablinske's real estate appraisal business banked more than three-dozen payments, totaling \$14,125 from Rhode Island Housing, the quasi-public agency that runs housing programs for the state.

According to the reports, Local 121 — the downtown Providence eatery owned by Sen. Joshua Miller, D-Cranston — remains a favored locale among some groups for fundraisers. The Rhode Island Medical Society reportedly spent \$884 at his restaurant on a dinner meeting, and the left-leaning advocacy group known as Ocean State Action, \$1,150 on “food for organizational fundraiser event.”

The reports were an outgrowth of the scandal that surrounded former Sen. John A. Celona, a flamboyant North Providence Democrat who once had power over the life and death of health-care legislation at the State House. He went to jail after pleading guilty in August 2005 to federal influence-peddling charges, revolving around a series of alleged schemes in which three major health-care companies directly and indirectly gave Celona money and gifts, totaling \$319,203 — plus a free trip to a golf tournament in San Diego. The three companies were the Woonsocket-based CVS pharmacy chain, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island and Roger Williams Medical Center.

In the years since, Rhode Island lobbyists and the companies and interest groups for which they work have become accustomed to routinely reporting annually what, in prior years, was not always known or reported.

There are still gaps.

As a lawyer for the Rhode Island arm of the Laborers union, Darren Corrente discloses the details of Ciccone's compensation package annually in response to Journal inquiries, but says he is not even able to manually file an online report containing this information with the secretary of state's office because the entities that employ Ciccone do not have registered lobbyists at the State House.

The entity that employs Ruggiero has a mouthful of a name: New England Laborers Labor-Management Cooperative Trust.

At this point, 151 of the lobbyists — and the companies and interest groups that employed them — are delinquent in filing the disclosure reports that were due on Jan. 15. In total, there were 388 legislative lobbyists, 357 entities with lobbyists and 34 lobbying firms registered for the 2009 legislative session.

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