

Column

# Chad Blair: Hawaii's Surprising Number Of Lobbyists

It doesn't take a whole lot to satisfy the state's legal definition of a lobbyist.

2

---

By Chad Blair    / About 17 hours ago

Share 60

Share 5

---

In the 2008 presidential campaign Hillary Clinton [was criticized by Barack Obama](#) for defending Washington, D.C., lobbyists as people who “represent real Americans.”

I agree with Clinton on this one. As a journalist, I see and talk to Hawaii lobbyists all the time. They are looked down upon in some quarters, but most are not swamp-dwellers and many are contributing to make our government operate better.

But that doesn't mean they should go unscrutinized. It's important for the public to know who is advocating for which issues at the state level, and why. The [Hawaii State Ethics Commission](#) does just that, to an extent.



Lobbyist John Radcliffe testifying on medical aid in dying legislation at the Capitol in February.

“Hawaii’s lobbying laws let the public know who is spending money – and how much is being spent – to influence lawmakers,” says Dan Gluck, executive director of and general counsel for the Ethics Commission. “The goals are to promote integrity and the public good in the legislative process, and to increase transparency and accountability in government as a whole.”

Unfortunately, in spite of the commission’s work, useful details on lobbying in Hawaii are in short supply. But there is some helpful and interesting information.

I combed through [the most recent filings](#). One thing that surprised me was just how many lobbyists work in Hawaii, including a lot of people whose names may be familiar to Civil Beat readers.

There are 894 [lobbyist registration statements for 2017-2018](#), but some of the organizations have multiple lobbyists and some of the lobbyists have multiple clients.

Practically everyone involved in state politics knows that Bruce Coppa, Red Morris and John Radcliffe are lobbyists.

The same goes for heads of major labor unions (like Randy Perreira of the Hawaii Government Employees Association) and heads of top businesses (like Constance Lau of Hawaiian Electric).

But so too are some people you may not think of as lobbyists, such as Kat Brady and Henry Curtis (Life of the Land), Marti Townsend (Sierra Club Hawaii), Walter Yoshimitsu (Roman Catholic Church of Hawaii), Mark Fox (The Nature Conservatory), Stuart Coleman (Surfrider Foundation), Kelvin Taketa (Hawaii Community Foundation), Steve Tam (AARP Hawaii), Corie Tanida (Common Cause Hawaii), Brian Black (Civil Beat Law Center for the Public Interest), Isaac Moriwake (Earthjustice), Victor Geminiani (Hawaii Appleseed Center for Law & Justice) and Vanessa Chong (ACLU of Hawaii).



Ethics Commission Director Dan Gluck: “The goals are to promote integrity.”

That’s because [state law defines “lobbying”](#) as “communicating directly or through an agent, or soliciting others to communicate, with any official in the legislative or executive branch, for the purpose of attempting to influence legislative or administrative action or a ballot issue.”

Going deeper, a lobbyist is defined as any individual who is paid at least \$1,000 a year to lobby, or lobbies more than five hours a month or more than

10 hours a year, or who spends more than \$1,000 to lobby during any of three lobbying reporting periods each year (January-February, March-April and May-December).

In addition to corporations, unions and law firms, lobbying can be done for associations, sole proprietorships, partnerships, committees, clubs “or any other organization or a representative of a group of persons acting in concert.”

Lobbyists are required to register with the Ethics Commission, identifying the clients they represent. They must also disclose what they spend money on.

But lobbyists' expenditure statements (which call for reporting of expenses of \$25 in a day or \$150 in a reporting period) reveal very little.

State law demands much more of elected officials, who in addition to [disclosing the gifts they receive](#) also have to file public financial disclosures with the Ethics Commission and campaign disclosures with the state [Campaign Spending Commission](#).

The lobbying expense forms are vague about what a lobbyist actually spends money on. There are categories for “Gifts” and “Media Advertising,” for example, but there is no requirement to explain what the gifts are or exactly who was paid for advertising.

In fact, most lobbyists who file expense reports show that they spent *nothing at all*.

They include David Carey III and Ed Case (Outrigger); Jennifer Sabas (Kaimana Hila); Todd Apo (Howard Hughes Corporation); Jennifer Diesman (Hawaii Medica Service Association); Mufi Hannemann (Hawaii Lodging and Tourism Association); David Louie (Kobayashi Sugita and Goda); Bill Kaneko (Alston Hunt Floyd & Ing); Sherry Menor-McNamara (Chamber of Commerce Hawaii); Alan Takemoto (Monsanto); and many others.

*Coming Tuesday: A closer look at how lobbyists gain access to decision-makers*

## About the Author



Chad Blair [✈](#) [✉](#) [📡](#)

Chad Blair is the politics and opinion editor for Civil Beat. You can reach him by email at [cblair@civilbeat.org](mailto:cblair@civilbeat.org) or follow him on Twitter at [@chadblairCB](https://twitter.com/chadblairCB).

[Use the RSS feed to subscribe to Chad Blair's posts today](#)

SHOW COMMENTS

---

## THIS IS YOUR WAKE-UP CALL

Sign up for our FREE morning newsletter and face each day more informed.

Enter email

SIGN ME UP!

And don't worry, we hate spam too! You can unsubscribe any time.