

# CAPITOL INSIDE

## TEXAS LOBBY POWER RANKINGS 2021

### ★ HIRED GUNS

- 1 **Mike Toomey**  
Texas Lobby Partners, Texas House, Chief of Staff to Govs. Rick Perry and Bill Clements
- 2 **Neal T. "Buddy" Jones**  
HillCo Partners, Texas House, Texas House Speaker Gib Lewis Chief of Staff
- 3 **Robert Miller**  
Locke Lord, Houston METRO Chairman, Texas Senate Aide
- 4 **Daniel Hodge**  
DTH Strategies, Chief of Staff and Campaign Manager for Greg Abbott as Governor and Attorney General
- 5 **Lara Keel**  
LLK LLC, Texas Senate Aide
- 6 **John Pitts**  
Texas Star Alliance, Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock General Counsel
- 7 **Gavin Massingill**  
Carriage House Partners, Texas House Speaker Dennis Bonnen Chief of Staff
- 8 **Jay Howard**  
HillCo Partners, Son of State Representative and Senator and Federal Insurance Administrator
- 9 **Mindy Ellmer**  
Texas House and Senate Aide, Gov. Bill Clements Aide, State Rep. Charlie Geren Wife
- 10 **David White**  
Public Blueprint, Comptrollers Glenn Hegar and Susan Combs Senior Advisor
- 11 **Sabrina Thomas Brown**  
Sabrina T. Brown Consulting, Texas House Aide
- 12 **James Mathis**  
Carriage House Partners, John Sharp Campaign Manager
- 13 **Carol McGarah**  
Blackridge, Texas Senate Aide
- 14 **Mark Vane**  
Husch Blackwell, Texas House Legislative Director
- 15 **Jim Grace**  
Grace & McEwan, U.S. Navy Lieutenant, Afghanistan Veteran
- 16 **Royce Poinsett**  
Poinsett PLLC, Gov. Rick Perry, Speaker Tom Craddick, Gov. George W. Bush and U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison Advisor
- 17 **Mark Malone**  
M Group Strategies, TXU Executive
- 18 **Steve & Amy Bresnen**  
Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock General Counsel, Chief Deputy Comptroller
- 19 **Jesse Ancira**  
Speaker Joe Straus Chief of Staff, Taylor Mayor, FBI Agent
- 20 **Marc Rodriguez**  
San Antonio Government Affairs Manager and Chamber Executive
- 21 **Deirdre Delisi**  
Delisi Communications, Gov. Rick Perry Chief of Staff and Campaign Manager, TTC Chair
- 22 **Bruce Scott**  
Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst Advisor, Texas Senate Aide
- 23 **Brandy Marty Marquez**  
Public Utility Commissioner, Gov. Rick Perry Chief of Staff
- 24 **Billy Phenix**  
Phenix & Saenz, Gov. Rick Perry, Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock and State Senate Advisor
- 25 **Craig Chick**  
Foley & Lardner, Speaker Joe Straus Advisor, Texas House and Senate Aide
- 26 **Carrie Simmons**  
Texas Capitol Group, Texas House GOP Caucus Director, State Senator Larry Taylor Aide
- 27 **Michelle Wittenburg**

## Soldier of Covid War Surges into First as Austin Lobby Navigates New World

**Mike Hailey**  
Capitol Inside  
February 9, 2021

Partisan Democrats went ballistic last spring when Governor Greg Abbott enlisted veteran lobbyist Mike Toomey to manage the reboot of the Texas economy that had been on life support for a month in the baby stages of the coronavirus crisis. The Democrats contended that Toomey would be in prime position to help his wealthy allies with the special assignment that could pay major dividends for an already lucrative lobby practice when he returned to the private sector eventually. They were dead right on both points. But they missed it on the motives.

A former state lawmaker who'd served as chief of staff for Republican Governors Bill Clements and Rick Perry, Toomey wasn't in it for the money when he signed on as the chief operating officer for the Strike Force to Open Texas from the initial COVID-19 lockdown. That's always been a secondary consideration for Mike the Knife - the moniker that his conservative Democratic colleagues bestowed on him as the Texas House Appropriations Committee's only truly effective member during the 1980s when the state was in the fiscal tank.

Toomey took the call on covid for the thrill of the challenge and the opportunity it afforded to have a hand in shaping history in a more extraordinary way than he had in the other stops on a gold-standard resume. This was all about influence for a highly-competitive individual who's second to none when it comes to competitive instinct. But Toomey's latest tour of duty in the public arena was actually a gamble with the potential to do as much or more harm than good to his own business in light of the unprecedented uncertainty that he was trying to navigate with a shockingly incompetent federal government as a massive obstacle. The experience has raised Toomey's stock considerably nonetheless - and he's crowning the Capitol Inside Texas Lobby Power Rankings for 2021 as a result of it.

But there's a catch. It's true that Toomey's deep connection to the GOP put him in position to be the number one hired gun this year at the massive pantheon of government at 11th Street and Congress Avenue. The truth is - however - is that he's ranked first in spite of it.

The same goes for all of the other lobbyists who are inextricably tied to the Texas ruling party. They will have to be better than ever during an 87th regular session at a Capitol where their partisan affiliation may be more stigma than asset. The lobbyists who've made a living off the old-guard are persona non grata in the new GOP that Donald Trump still rules with QAnon, Oath Keepers, Proud Boys and other white supremacists as his grassroots revolutionaries. While Republicans expect to tighten their grip on the Texas Legislature with redistricting this year, that could be a delusion if the business establishment continues to distance itself from the GOP in the aftermath of the deadly riot that Trump is on trial in the U.S. Senate for inciting. GOP voter registration has been plunging in other major states where voters are required to declare their partisan status when they sign up.

The lobbyists who succeed this year will be those with the broadest peripheral vision and ability to go with the flow in a world that's no longer predictable by any measure. Those who can find ways to communicate with Republican lawmakers who've seemed scared to death should have a unique advantage at a Capitol that the FBI had designated as a potential terrorist target when they convened last month.

But Toomey faces another novel new challenge that he hadn't foreseen in his role as a covid response commander. For the first time in almost two decades, Toomey won't have Lara Keel as a partner in light of her decision to go out on her own after spending her entire lobby career in his shadow. But Keel's newfound independence is a wake up call for Toomey who no longer has the luxury of coasting with her as the number two. The amicable break-up should make them both stronger - and Keel has moved up a notch to the fifth spot on the hired guns list as a result after being ranked as highest-ranked female lobbyist in Texas for years.

Neal T. "Buddy" Jones of Hillco Partners fame is a very close second on the list of the contract lobbyists who wield the most clout representing multiple clients at the statehouse in Austin. Jones has been a fixture at the top of the list of hired guns in the Capital City in recent years - and he's arguably still the best in the business in Texas as an individual lobbyist and team leader as well.

You could make a case for Robert Miller as the most successful lobbyist in the Lone Star State as the third highest ranking hired gun on the new list after being tied for first with Jones, Toomey and Rusty Kelley at the start of the last regular session here in 2019. Miller has built the team that he directs into the best all-round lobby practice for a law firm in the Texas Capital City. A resident of Houston where his firm Locke Lord is headquartered, Miller has been one of the GOP's most prolific fundraisers in the state with connections in the highest places. But he's made it a point to have associates with significant ties to the Democrats as well. While Miller lost a valuable ally when Dennis Bonnen left the House after one term as speaker, he appears to have strong relationships on both sides of the rotunda and across the aisle.

Kelley has been a perennial name in the top five on the power chart since its debut in 2003 as one of the two original contract lobbyists here. Kelley is conspicuously missing from the current hired gun list amid speculation that he could be on the verge of broadening his horizons beyond the profession that he had a lead role in revolutionizing. Carol McGarah - the CEO at the firm Blackridge that she and Kelley run - has moved into the top 15 on the contract lobbyist list after several major victories in the 2019 session in fights on higher education and other key issues.

Daniel Hodge might be number one on the hired guns list if the sum of the lobby contracts that are reported to the state had been the chief criteria. After being ranked two years ago as the top rising star in the Austin lobby, Hodge is a strong fourth in his debut on the hired guns chart this year as the lobbyist who's been the closest to Abbott as his campaign manager and former top aide in the governor's and attorney general offices. Hodge could wield more influence at the Capitol than anyone regardless of whether he makes \$8 million or \$8,000 - and he's making history as the highest-ranked hired gun in a first appearance on the contract lobbyist list.



Leticia Van de Putte

John Whitman



Gavin Massingill

Nelda Hunter



Amy Beard

Carl Richie



Marc Rodriguez

Shera Eichler



Jennifer McEwan

Chance Sampson

### RIISING STARS

- 1 Tommy Williams
  - 2 Leticia Van de Putte
  - 3 John Whitman
  - 4 Nelda Hunter
  - 5 Chance Sampson
- [Full List](#)

### LEGISLATORS

- 1 Stan Schlueter
  - 2 Clint Hackney
  - 3 Ron Lewis
  - 4 Curt Seidlits
  - 5 Robby Cook
- [Full List](#)

### AGENCY LEADERS

- 1 John Scott
- 2 Martin Hubert
- 3 Ryan Brannan
- 4 Chris Traylor

- Texas House Speaker Tom Craddick  
General Counsel
- 28 **Denise Davis**  
Davis Kaufman, Speaker Joe Straus Chief of Staff and General Counsel
- 29 **Drew DeBerry**  
Stalwart Strategies, Gov. Greg Abbott Advisor, TDA Deputy Commissioner
- 30 **Trent Townsend**  
Imperium Public Affairs, Texas Senate Aide
- 31 **Jay Brown**  
Jay P. Brown Consulting, Son of State Senator
- 32 **Chad Cantella**  
Chad Cantella Lobbying, Texas Star Alliance
- 33 **Michael Grimes**  
Imperium Public Affairs, Texas Senate Chief of Staff, Gov. George W. Bush Aide
- 34 **Logan Spence**  
Hance Scarborough Law Firm Partner, Lt. Governor Dan Patrick Chief of Staff
- 35 **James Clark**  
Carriage House Partners, Comptroller John Sharp
- 36 **Brian Yarbrough**  
Erben & Yarbrough
- 37 **Jay Propes**  
Congressional Aide, Trade Association Executive
- 38 **Brandon Aghamalian**  
Focused Advocacy, Texas Senate Aide, Fort Worth Public Affairs Director
- 39 **Marsha Jones**  
HillCo Partners, Texas House and Senate Aide
- 40 **Carl Richie**  
Texas Lobby Partners, Gov. Ann Richards
- 41 **Chris Shields**  
Texas Strategy Group, Gov. Bill Clements Aide and Asst. Secretary of State
- 42 **Dean & Andrea McWilliams**  
Legislative Aides to Democratic and Republican Members
- 43 **Eric Wright**  
Congress Avenue Partners, Lt. Gov. Bill Ratliff Chief of Staff
- 44 **Lisa Kaufman**  
Davis Kaufman, Texas House Speaker Joe Straus Policy Director, Texas Senate Aide
- 45 **Eric Woomer**  
State Senators Kel Seliger, Teel Bivins and Mario Gallegos Chief of Staff
- 46 **Jake Posey**  
Posey Law Firm, Texas House Regulated Industries Committee Director
- 47 **J. McCart**  
HillCo Partners, Lt. Gov. Rick Perry
- 48 **Matthew Bentley**  
Texas Lobby Partners, Gov. Rick Perry and Texas House Campaigns
- 49 **Patricia Shipton**  
Texas House Speaker Joe Straus Chief of Staff, Governor Rick Perry Legislative Liaison
- 50 **Kathy Grant**  
Texas House Aide, University of Texas pollster Jim Henson Wife
- 51 **Mark Borskey**  
Deputy Legislative Director for Gov. Rick Perry, Texas House Aide
- 52 **Amy Maxwell**  
Texas Railroad Commissioner Chief of Staff and Legal Counsel, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst Aide
- 53 **Mignon McGarry**  
State Senate Aide
- 54 **Deborah Ingersoll**  
Legislative Solutions, Key Fundraiser
- 55 **Chris Hosek**  
Texas Star Alliance, Railroad Commissioner Chief of Staff
- 56 **Denise Rose**  
Jackson Walker, Texas Senate Aide
- 57 **Amy Beard**  
Foley Lardner, Senate Asst. Sergeant at Arms
- 58 **Crystal Brown**  
Locke Lord, State Senator Carol Alvarado

HillCo Partners has been the premier lobby shop in Austin since Jones and fellow hall-of-famer Bill Miller founded it around the turn of the century. With Jay Howard as another top 10 member on the contract lobbyist list, HillCo has been in the middle of every major fight in the Legislature with a Rolodex of marquee clients including the Dallas Cowboys and both major league baseball teams in Texas. Sports betting will be a major issue in the Legislature for the first time in the Lone Star State. HillCo will be at the forefront.

The top 10 hired guns include Gavin Massingill in his return to the lobby after a hiatus as Dennis Bonnen's chief of staff in the Texas House speaker's office. With James Mathis as a partner in the Austin lobby firm Carriage House, Massingill hit the ground in full stride as the leader of a team that the Las Vegas Sands has been assembling for a full-court press on casinos in Texas. This is his first appearance among the 10 highest rated contract lobbyists at the statehouse.

John Pitts - a former senior advisor to Democrat Bob Bullock in the lieutenant governor's office - ranks among the top 10 as the leader of a team at Texas Star Alliance that's been unrivaled in terms of policy expertise on a wide array of major fronts. Pitts has a twin brother who served as a former Republican state representative. His son, John Pitts Jr., worked for Rick Perry in the governor's office before landing at the Austin firm that his father founded and runs. But Pitts and his group are the antithesis of partisan - focusing instead on ways to build consensus on many of the biggest ticket issues facing the state.

Austin lobbyists Mindy Ellmer and David White have cracked the top 10 as well after falling just short at the outset of the regular legislative session two years ago. Ellmer is married to State Rep. Charlie Geren - a Fort Worth Republican who'd been one of the House's most powerful members for a dozen years as the Administration Committee chairman. Geren's apparent demotion on paper to the top job on the Local & Consent Calendars Committee shouldn't have any effect on his spouse as someone who'd been one of the most influential lobbyists here before the two ever were an item.

A former high-level advisor to Comptroller Glenn Hegar and his predecessor Susan Combs, White has been the Johnny Hustle of the Austin lobby in recent years, working his extensive connections with a joyous intensity with the goal of being number one with no time to waste.

Keel has been the ultimate contradiction in stereotype in a cutthroat industry that's been dominated at the top by older white men. Keel will always owe Toomey a significant debt of gratitude for taking her under his wing and serving as one of the most valuable mentors a young upstart could ever hope to have. Some aspiring young lobbyists might think Keel had lost her mind with a decision to go solo at a time when Toomey would ostensibly be making them both richer in the wake of the COVID-19 role for the governor. But Keel has a chance to flourish now as a lobbyist whose services will be in greater demand without the inevitable baggage that apprenticeships and partnerships bring.

Toomey in the meantime has responded to the unforeseen departure by rebuilding his team at the Texas Lobby Partners with the addition of veteran public advocates with ties to Democrats in Marc Rodriguez and Carl Richie. Carrie Simmons, who'd worked for Republicans at the Capitol before joining Toomey's firm, probably can expect her clout to go up as the group's youngest member and has vaulted into the top 30 as a consequence on the contract lobbyist list as a result.

Perennial top 10 hired guns Clint Hackney and Ron Lewis are ranked now as two of three highest-ranked lobbyists who used to be legislators along with former Texas House colleague Stan Schlueter - a former Baylor basketball team center who's back at the top of his game after appearing to slow down some in recent years.

Former lawmakers Tommy Williams and Leticia Van de Putte are getting mid-life career moves off the ground with a bang as the two top-rated rising stars in the Austin lobby. Williams and Van de Putte need no introductions inside the statehouse beltway where they both served in the Texas House and Senate. Williams is a Republican who was based in The Woodlands before stints as a senior advisor to Abbott and a vice-chancellor for the Texas A&M University System. Van de Putte, a San Antonio native, was the Democratic nominee for lieutenant governor in 2014 when she lost to the current incumbent Dan Patrick. Van de Putte and Williams both worked well with colleagues across the aisle as legislators and should fare well with both sides as lobbyists as well.

**Charter Passes AT&T in Corporate Lobby Rankings as Titans Gear for Battle on Broadband Expansion**

The largest Texas-based employer might have worried that its legislative agenda could be in potential peril after a recent event at the AT&T Hotel & Conference Center in Austin where Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick suggested that he wouldn't be visiting again in the future.

Patrick indicated that he didn't plan to come back to the host site at the University of Texas as a result of its name and ownership - claiming that AT&T no longer supported Republicans. Patrick was apparently referring in part to AT&T's announcement the previous day that its political committee was suspending contributions to 147 congressional Republicans who'd voted to block the certification of Democratic President Joe Biden's election on the day of the riot that killed five at the U.S. Capitol. The vote had been the catalyst for the riot that killed five at the U.S. Capitol on January 6 after erupting at a Trump rally.

Patrick and other Republicans had been unhappy with AT&T about a decision to cancel its sponsorship of the state GOP convention last summer after a rash of revelations about racist remarks by county party chairs on social media. But Patrick's remarks last month at a Texas Public Policy Foundation conference triggered instant speculation on the prospects of bills that AT&T backed being dead on arrival in the Texas Senate this year.

The lobby team that the communications giant has in the Texas Capital City had been a perennial fixture at the top of the corporate lobby list until sliding to second at the outset of the 2021 regular session. This has nothing to do, however, with anything Patrick said or meant to say. Patrick, who's been the Trump campaign chairman in Texas for the past four years, wouldn't be able to go into WalMart, fly commercial or Google anything anymore if he'd been serious with a thinly-veiled boycott threat.

Charter Communications is ranked first this time around as a result of a substantial investment in infrastructure, legislative relations in communities and lobbying in Texas as a major force behind the push to expand access to the Internet in rural areas - one of five issues that Governor Greg Abbott has designated as legislative emergencies. Charter, which owns the cable television provider Spectrum, has a seasoned Capitol veteran with former Texas House Republican Todd Baxter directing the company's lobby teams in Texas and a long list of other states.

Charter may expect AT&T to be the most formidable of several major rivals in the fight on broadband access - one of five legislative emergencies that Governor Greg Abbott declared last week. Charter owns the cable television provider Spectrum, which used to be known as Time Warner.

H-E-B is an extremely close third behind Charter and AT&T in terms of the influence that the homegrown Texas grocery chain can expect to wield at the Capitol during the regular session that got under way three weeks ago. The H-E-B team that Dya Campos leads worked closely with the

5 Tom Suehs  
[Full List](#)

**POLITICAL CONSULTANTS**

- 1 Allen Blakemore
- 2 Ray Sullivan
- 3 Ted Delisi
- 4 Bryan Eppstein
- 5 Todd Smith  
[Full List](#)

**LOBBY TEAMS**

- 1 HillCo Partners
- 2 Texas Lobby Partners
- 3 Texas Star Alliance
- 4 Blackridge
- 5 Schlueter Group  
[Full List](#)

**LAW FIRMS**

- 1 Locke Lord
- 2 Foley & Lardner
- 3 Hance Scarborough
- 4 Husch Blackwell
- 5 Jackson Walker  
[Full List](#)

**CORPORATE**

- 1 Charter Communications
- 2 H-E-B
- 3 AT&T
- 4 Centerpoint Energy
- 5 Entergy Texas  
[Full List](#)

**PRIVATE ASSOCIATIONS**

- 1 Texas Medical Association
- 2 Texas Hospital Association
- 3 Texas Realtors Association
- 4 Texans for Lawsuit Reform
- 5 Texas Oil & Gas Association  
[Full List](#)

**PUBLIC ASSOCIATIONS**

- 1 Texas Municipal League
- 2 Texas Urban Counties
- 3 Texas School Boards
- 4 Texas School Administrators
- 5 Texas Classroom Teachers  
[Full List](#)

**CAUSES & ISSUES**

- 1 TPPF
- 2 Raise Your Hand Texas
- 3 TTARA
- 4 Medical Marijuana
- 5 Center for Equity  
[Full List](#)

**TEXAS LOBBY HALL OF FAME**

- Don Adams
- Gaylord Armstrong
- Dick Brown
- Billy Clayton

	Chief of State in the House, State Senate
59	<b>Adam Goldman</b> Windmill Consulting, President George W. Bush Special Assistant
60	<b>Nef Partida</b> Locke Lord, Campaign Consultant for Democratic and Republican Campaigns
61	<b>John Pitts Jr.</b> Texas Star Alliance, Gov. Rick Perry Aide and Campaign Staff
62	<b>Kelly Barnes</b> HillCo Partners, Texas House Chief of Staff, Lt. Gov & Speaker Ben Barnes Grandson
63	<b>Jeri Brooks</b> One World Strategy Group, Houston Mayor Annise Parker Communications Director, City Council Aide
63	<b>Brad Shields</b> Texas Legislative Associates, Eanes School Board
64	<b>Keith Strama</b> Beatty Bangle Strama, Texas House Aide
65	<b>Mario Martinez</b> Mario Martinez & Associates, Texas House Aide
66	<b>Snapper Carr</b> Focused Advocacy General Counsel, Texas Municipal League Counsel
67	<b>Jennifer Rodriguez</b> McGuireWoods, Daughter of State Legislator and gubernatorial Advisor
68	<b>Stephanie Gibson</b> Texas Legislative Associates, Texas Retailers Association Vice President
69	<b>Rick Dennis</b> HillCo Partners, Texas House Chief of Staff
70	<b>Shannon Swan</b> Graydon Group, Texas House Chief of Staff
71	<b>Dana Chiodo</b> Dana Chiodo Legislative Consulting, Texas House and Senate Aide
71	<b>Lauren Hamner Spreen</b> Texas Railroad Commissioner Christi Craddick Chief of Staff
72	<b>Allison Billodeau</b> DTH Strategies, Governor Greg Abbott Deputy Legislative Director
73	<b>Robert Peeler</b> Longbow Partners, Texas Senate Chief of Staff, Gov. George Bush Aide
74	<b>Colin Parrish</b> Gov. Rick Perry Advisor, State Rep. Wayne Smith Chief of Staff
75	<b>Mike &amp; Shannon Meroney</b> Meroney Public Affairs, U.S. Senate Aide and Congressional Campaign Staff
76	<b>Micah Rodriguez</b> Blackridge, Senate Hispanic Caucus Director, Texas Senate Aide
77	<b>Jim Dow</b> Cross Oak Group, Texas House Aide, Obama White House
78	<b>Will Yarnell</b> Texas House Aide
79	<b>Angela Hale</b> Red Media Group, Speaker Joe Straus Communications Director, Attorney Gen. Greg Abbott Senior Advisor
80	<b>Ron Hinkle</b> Texas Department of Economic Development, Texas House Sergeant at Arms
81	<b>John Colyandro</b> San Jacinto Public Affairs, Gov. Rick Perry Advisor, Texas GOP Director, Texas Conservative Coalition
82	<b>Nora Del Bosque</b> Texas House Aide
83	<b>Cathy Dewitt</b> Schlueter Group, Texas Association of Business Vice President, John Cornyn Campaign
84	<b>Wayne Hamilton</b> San Jacinto Public Affairs, Gov. Rick Perry Advisor, Texas GOP Director
85	<b>Shayne Woodard</b> Waterloo Lobby & Advocacy, Texas Railroad Commissioner Chief of Staff
86	<b>Bill Pewitt</b> Bill Pewitt & Associates, Texas Computer

governor's staff behind the scenes in the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic as the chief force in Abbott's imposition of a statewide mask mandate in July. H-E-B owner Charles Butt has been the most prominent advocate for public education in Texas. Butt also has been one of the biggest donors to Abbott and other Republicans including new state House Speaker Dade Phelan, who received \$50,000 from the H-E-B CEO in December.

### State GOP Endorsement Could Spell Doom for Local Lobby Ban after Leaders Trashings

Conservative Republicans who want to ban taxpayer-funded lobbying in Texas have several reasons to be less than optimistic about their odds in the Texas Legislature in 2021.

They appeared to lose the first round in the fight last week when Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan appointed GOP State Rep. Chris Paddie of Marshall as the new chairman of the State Affairs Committee that will handle the proposal that died in the House in 2019.

Paddie was one of about two dozen Republicans who voted against the measure when 56 GOP colleagues - including the new speaker - backed a watered-down version of the bill that would prohibit cities, counties and other local public entities from hiring lobbyists to represent their interests in Austin. While the GOP majority in the Texas Senate will pass the ban if Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick demands it, it would all be for show if Paddie proves to be an insurmountable roadblock.

But the plan may not have a prayer in the House - regardless of substance, merit or possible public support - simply because the Texas Republican Party has designated it as one of its official priorities for the regular session this year. The state GOP is led by Chairman Allen West - a former Florida congressman who's attacked Governor Greg Abbott for coronavirus restrictions while branding Phelan as a traitor for appointing Democrats to chair some House committees. The party's endorsement could be the ultimate kiss of death.

### Republican Dade Phelan Major Lobby Donors Hope to Have New Texas House Speaker's Ear

They say that it's better to give than to receive. They also seem to see political donations as investments in good karma that tend to pay off eventually. That's been the way that HillCo Partners seems to see it as the original and most generous lobby shop when it comes to bankrolling campaigns for the people they lobby.

Take the case of brand new Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan - a Beaumont Republican who'll be leading the chamber when his fellow representatives return to Austin after a long winter vacation. The HillCo political action committee contributed \$55,000 to Phelan in December after he'd locked up the powerful leadership post. The only other Phelan donor in the second half of 2020 had been the Border Health PAC - a group of Rio Grande Valley doctors and hospital interests that gave him one hundred grand in December.

Powerhouse lobbyist Rusty Kelley was the second biggest Phelan giver in the Austin lobby with a \$20,000 donation two months ago. Carriage House - an Austin firm that includes Gavin Massingill as the former chief of staff for Phelan predecessor Dennis Bonnen - contributed \$15,000 to the new speaker in December as well. The Locke Lord law firm that features Robert Miller as its Texas lobby practice chairman spent almost \$11,000 on a fundraiser for the new speaker on the final day in November.

Legendary lobbyists Neal T. "Buddy" Jones and Bill Miller founded HillCo and lead a team that includes top 10 hired gun Jay Howard and a stellar supporting cast.

### Ex-House and Senate Colleagues Hit Ground Running as Abbott Connections Are New Stars Launching Pads

Tommy Williams and Leticia Van de Putte served together in the Texas House and Senate on opposite sides of the aisle for an entire decade. Williams, a Republican from The Woodlands, had been the most powerful lawmaker in the Capitol's east wing during his final regular session as the Finance Committee chairman. Van de Putte had been one of the Democrats' most influential and talented legislators who chaired the Veteran Affairs & Military Installations Committee for a dozen years before a race for lieutenant governor that she had no chance to win in 2014 with a D by her name. Their paths could be crossing now more than ever, however, as they reinvent themselves as lobbyists who are ranked here as the top two rising stars at the statehouse in Austin in the regular session's opening month.

Williams had been warming up for the midlife career move as a senior Governor Greg Abbott advisor after a stint as a vice-chancellor for the Texas A&M University System. Another Abbott alum - John Whitman - is ranked in the upper echelon of incoming lobbyists as well after several successful years as the governor's chief spokesperson. Whitman will be opening his own shop as a communications consultant after he steps down from his public post at the end of February. He'll be getting it off the ground with a glowing reference from Abbott, who called Whitman one of his most trusted advisors and said that he'd "remain forever grateful for his unparalleled service to Texas."

John Scott - one of Abbott's oldest friends and college roommates at the University of Texas - has ascended to the number one spot on the list of former state agency officials who are lobbying now. Scott shares an office with Daniel Hodge - a former Abbott chief of staff who's ranked fourth this year on the contract lobbyists list. Scott served as a top lawyer on Abbott's staff at the attorney general's office - and he came to the governor's aid with a stint as the chief financial for the Texas Health & Human Services Commission at a time when it was under fire. Scott has some very good friends who are Democrats as well.

The 2021 rankings reflect the separate but related impacts that the coronavirus pandemic will have on the Texas session and lobbyists for health care professionals and companies that have been at the forefront of the crisis. The Texas Medical Association is ranked number one again on the list of groups that represent private professionals and trades. The Texas Hospital Association is close behind as a consequence of the epic challenges that its members have faced with the state ablaze with COVID-19 for most of the past year.

Pfizer and in-house Austin lobbyist Amber Pearce have vaulted into the top 10 on the corporate list in light of the company's pioneering status as the creator and manufacturer of one of the two original coronavirus vaccines. Novartis Services - a Swiss firm that's teaming with Pfizer and other rivals in the production of the vaccine - ranks among the top 10 on the corporate lobby chart as well with Holli Hill as a full-time representative here.

The Texas Restaurant Association, which has Kelsey Streufert as its lead lobbyist now, is ranked higher this year on the professional organization lobby list as a result of the key role that the industry has played in the battle with covid.

### Hall of Fame Grows to 25 with Two New Members

Jerry "Nub" Donaldson
Jack Erskine
Walter Fisher
Galt Graydon
Jack Gullahorn
Gaylord Armstrong
Ed Howard
Dickie Ingram
Gordon Johnson
Robert Johnson
Neal T. "Buddy" Jones
Rusty Kelley
Gib Lewis
Demetrius McDaniel
Bill Messer
Bill Miller
Jack Roberts
Stan Schlueter
Clint Smith
Mike Toomey
Tommy Townsend

### Proactive Apology: The Best of the Rest that We Missed

As a project that was published initially on the same day in early 2003 that Capitol Inside made its debut on the Internet, the lobby rankings has mushroomed into a monstrous undertaking during the past 14 years. Accidental omissions are inevitable - as a consequence - and we apologize in advance for failing to include everyone who's worthy of mention here. That would be less likely to occur, however, if we'd known about the individuals and groups who deserved to be ranked but haven't been. So this is a two-way street - and please feel free to call it to our attention if you think you've been unjustly left out.

	Industry Council Founder	
87	<b>Joey Bennett</b> Texas Senate Aide	
88	<b>Joe Garcia</b> Texas Capitol Group, Texas Senate Chief of Staff	
89	<b>Tristan "Tris" Castañeda</b> Longbow Partners, Assistant Attorney General	
90	<b>Gilbert Turrieta</b> Houston Chamber, TMA Official and LBB Examiner	
91	<b>Fred Shannon</b> President George H.W. Bush Aide	Copyright 2003-2021 Capitol Inside
92	<b>Curtis Fuelberg</b> Texas Association of Realtors Official, Speaker Gus Mutscher Aide	
93	<b>Richard Evans</b> Schlueter Group	
94	<b>Chuck Rice</b> Chuck Rice Group, Texas Senate Aide	
95	<b>Kwame Walker</b> McGuireWoods, State Senator Royce West Legislative Director and General Counsel	
96	<b>Eddie Solis</b> HillCo Partners, Texas Comptroller, Texas Municipal Retirement System	
97	<b>Michael Jewell</b> Stratus Policy Group, Corporate Lawyer and Legislative Lobbyist	
98	<b>Wade Long</b> Texas Senate Aide	
99	<b>Robert Culley</b> Legislative Aide	
100	<b>Matt Matthews</b> Texas Senate Aide	

Jack Roberts and Clint Smith - two of the most experienced, respected and wizend public advocates at the state Capitol - are the newest members of the Texas Lobby Hall of Fame in early 2021. A former top aide for two Texas governors, Roberts worked as a deputy comptroller for Bob Bullock. He continued as a lobbyist to be one of the legendary Democrat's closest informal advisors throughout eight years as the lieutenant governor in the 1990s. Smith was a charter member of HillCo Partners - the original boutique lobby shop in Austin that wasn't a law firm practice. Smith has been on the HillCo team since Neal T "Buddy" Jones and Bill Miller created it in the late 1990s. Roberts has appeared to still be going strong as well.