**Lobbying a big -- and expensive -- business in Madison**

By WisPolitics.com

Interest groups are constantly trying to influence lawmakers and policymakers in Madison. And they spend a lot of money doing it.

Through reports filed by interest groups with the state, we can find out how much is being spent and what topics are being lobbied.

According to recently filed reports, interest groups spent $18.4 million seeking to influence the Capitol over the first six months of 2024. During that time, the Legislature wrapped up its floor work, and lawmakers turned their attention to the fall elections.

That’s up from the $16.6 million that groups spent over the first six months of 2022 as registered lobbying organizations spent just over $52 million over the first 18 months of the 2021-22 session.

So far this session, groups have racked up $57.6 million in expenses seeking to lobby the Capitol.

Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce led the way for spending over the first six months of 2024 with $448,077 in reported expenses.

The Wisconsin Realtors Association was No. 2 at $438,343, while the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation was next at $386,578. The Wisconsin Hospital Association reported $351,180 and Wisconsin Infrastructure Investment Now Inc. dropped $279,917.

Those groups are regularly the top spenders for lobbying the Capitol; they comprised the top five for all the full 2021-22 session.

Here’s an overview of the lobbying efforts by some of the top five:

\*WMC: Lobbying groups have to register any bill or issue they worked on during the period. Still, they only have to provide specifics on how much time was dedicated to the topic if it took up at least 10% of their overall effort. For the state’s largest business group, 89% of the time it spent seeking to influence the Capitol between Jan. 1 and June 30 went toward “minor efforts,” those that took up less than 10% of its overall time. It spent 11% on the topic of “workforce” over that period.

\*Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation: The ag group put 20% of its effort during the six-month period into supporting AB 860/SB 811, which sought to allow agricultural organizations to provide health coverage to its members and their families. The legislation, which also sought to exempt the proposed coverage from insurance law, received public hearings in both houses of the Legislature, but didn’t get a floor vote. The group spent another 10% of its time on AB 957/SB 952, which sought to preempt local animal ordinances. Both houses passed the bill, but Democrat Gov. Tony Evers vetoed it in March.

\*Wisconsin Hospital Association: The group put 40% of its effort into AB 1088, which sought to create an option for a “patient’s representative” to consent to an incapacitated person being admitted directly from a hospital to a nursing home or a community-based residential facility. Current law allows certain family members to provide that consent. The bill passed the Assembly, and a Senate committee backed it 5-1 in mid-April after lawmakers had already completed their regular floor periods for the year.

\*Wisconsin Infrastructure Investment Now Inc.: The expenses groups are required to report include any efforts to influence the public on legislation. Wisconsin Infrastructure Investment Now Inc. is led by longtime Capitol figure John Gard, a former GOP Assembly speaker. Dedicated to supporting infrastructure, it didn’t list any hours spent lobbying in the Capitol. It split its effort during the six-month period evenly between state highway facilities and workforce development, with all of the money it spent falling under the header of “all other lobbying expenses.”

The rest of the top 10 for lobbying expenditures between January and June were: Badger Advocates Inc., $257,451; Wisconsin Property Taxpayers Inc., $221,770; the Wisconsin Counties Association, $215,602; ATC Management Inc., $201,026; and the Wisconsin Insurance

 Alliance, $183,096.*The Capitol Report is written by editorial staff at WisPolitics.com, a nonpartisan, Madison-based news service that specializes in coverage of government and politics and is distributed for publication by members of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association.*

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