

Pharmaceutical, casino groups around top lobbyists

Written by Administrator
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Pharmaceutical companies, marijuana and casino groups and the state's largest utility are among the top spenders on lobbying as Maine's legislative session wraps up.

Maine lawmakers still have to make decisions on bills to allow recreational marijuana sales, address solar rules, increase transparency of prescription costs and allow tribal gaming. This year's legislation session is set to end in mid-April.

The top spender on lobbying continues to be a California billionaire's push for a crime victim's bill of rights in Maine. His group's spent \$30,000 this year and \$120,000 last year to lobby on such legislation, whose future is unclear.

Companies and groups from Central Maine Power to Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America to Penn National Gaming have reported spending at least \$1 million on lobbying this year, according to The Associated Press's review of lobbying reports filed this month.

HEALTH COSTS TRANSPARENCY

Maine's largest insurers and the nation's largest pharmaceutical companies have been sparring for months on a bill to require more disclosure of prescription drug costs.

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The Legislature's judiciary committee voted 7-6 this week on an amended version of Democratic Sen. Eloise Vitelli's bill. Drug companies are fighting a similar effort in California. Maine's legislation would allow Democratic Attorney General Janet Mills to levy fines against drug manufacturers that don't comply.

Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America spent thousands of dollars so far on the bill this year, and has about \$86,000 on overall lobbying in Maine since last year. A spokeswoman said Vitelli's bill could discourage new research while ignoring customers forced to pay more out-of-pocket for prescription medicine.

The bill heads to the Senate for an initial vote.

TRIBAL GAMING

Maine's tribal nations could operate tribal gaming facilities under a bill that has yet to be brought for a vote.

Groups lobbying on the bill include Oxford Casino, the Christian Civic League, the city of Bangor and Penn National Gaming, which is the owner of Hollywood Casino in Bangor. Penn National Gaming has reported spending \$9,500 opposing the bill alone this year, and Jeff Morris, the company's vice president of public affairs and government relations, said the legislation lacks a provision requiring statewide voter approval that other casinos faced.

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Democratic Rep. Rachel Talbot Ross says several Maine tribes have fought for decades to use their lands to spur economic development.

Meanwhile, Maine voters and Republican Gov. Paul LePage opposed an initiative to build a new casino in southern Maine in November.

SOLAR REGULATIONS

State reports show 15 solar and environmental groups along with Central Maine Power have lobbied lawmakers on a solar policy bill.

The bill would lift the current cap on nine participants in a community solar project while preventing utilities like CMP from charging what solar companies says amount to a new fee on solar power generated by Mainers' rooftop panels.

The legislation is currently sitting on LePage's desk. He's expected to veto the bill soon. It's received enough votes in the House and Senate to override a veto, but its future will be decided in another round of votes in early April.

Central Maine Power has reported spending nearly \$100,000 since 2017 on a number of bills, including the latest solar bill. Industrial Energy Consumer Group, which has supported policies promoting solar in Maine, has spent \$136,000 on lobbying since 2017.

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