

TEXAS VS ALASKA

The state of Alaska tackles the issue of lobbying very differently than Texas. In 2015, one ratings of regulation of lobbyists and their activities awarded Alaska the highest grade of A as best in the nation, while Texas got an F.¹ While Texas has refined its lobbying rules, the rules and the structure of the Texas Ethics Commission (TEC) have greatly limited the ability of the commission to monitor and punish lobbyists. Court rulings have made it difficult for the TEC to impose fines, while officials in Alaska have been able to issue large fines.

When it comes to defining and registering lobbyists and their activities, the two states differ in a number of areas. As the table comparing Texas with Alaska shows, Alaska's regulatory environment provides a more detailed and transparent accounting of the activities of lobbyists who attempt to influence the state government than does that of Texas. Most importantly, the follow-up is more extensive in Alaska. In Texas, lobbyists' reports are not audited, and the TEC has not been able to consistently investigate abuses and punish those who break the rules. While the TEC did fine Michael Quinn Sullivan \$10,000 in 2014 for failing to register as a lobbyist, it is telling that this was the first time a complaint alleging that a lobbyist failed to register has gone through the entire process since the commission had been created almost a quarter of a century ago.

THINKING Critically

- ★ Which provisions of Alaska's lobbyist regulations not found in Texas do you find the most attractive?
- ★ How should states balance concerns about lobbyists' freedom of speech with concerns about honest government?
- ★ How do you think such provisions would change the dynamics of money in Texas politics?

i. The Center for Public Integrity, "In Your State—Washington" and "In Your State—Texas," www.publicintegrity.org/hiredguns/iys.aspx (accessed August 11, 2010).

Lobbying in Texas and Alaska

Activity Regulated	Texas	Alaska
Register if lobbying executive branch	Yes	Yes
Register if paid to lobby	Yes	Yes
Minimum spent to qualify as a lobbyist	\$5,000	Any amount
Lobbyists file detailed registration forms within a few days of initiating lobbying activity	Yes	Yes
Employers/principals list on spending reports the compensation/salary of all lobbyists they hire	Yes	No
Lobbyists are required to file detailed spending reports, including compensation/salary information.	Yes	Yes
Employers or principals of lobbyists required to fill out spending reports	Yes	No
Citizens can access lobbying disclosure documents at no cost	Yes	Yes
Lobbying disclosure information is made available in an open data format	Yes	No
Lobbying disclosure records are independently audited	Yes	No
Penalties are imposed as necessary when lobbying reporting requirements are violated	Yes	Inconsistent

Source: Compiled by the authors from data available at Center for Public Integrity, State Integrity 2015, <https://www.publicintegrity.org/accountability/state-integrity-investigation/state-integrity-2015> (accessed July 18, 2016), and Texas Ethic Commission, Texas, "Lobbying in Texas: A Guide to the Law," June 10, 2016, https://www.ethics.state.tx.us/guides/lobby_guide.pdf (accessed July 18, 2016).