



TOP HIRED GUNS

- 1 **Neal T. "Buddy" Jones**
HillCo Partners, Former State Representative, Former Executive Assistant to Speaker Gib Lewis
- 1 **Mike Toomey**
Texas Capitol Group, Former State Representative, Ex-Chief of Staff to Govs. Rick Perry and Bill Clements
- 3 **Rusty Kelley**
Blackridge, Former Executive Assistant to Speaker Billy Clayton
- 4 **Bill Messer**
Texas Capitol Group, Former State Representative, Speaker Tom Craddick Transition Team
- 5 **Gordon & Robert Johnson**
Johnson & Johnson Law Firm, Sons of legendary parliamentarian Bob Johnson, Speaker Joe Straus' Chief Political Advisor
- 6 **Walter Fisher**
Texas Capitol Group, Former Parliamentarian in Senate, Ex-Legislative Director for Texas Municipal League
- 7 **Robert Miller**
Locke Lord Bissell & Liddell, Former Houston METRO Chairman, Former State Senate Aide
- 8 **Ron Lewis**
Ron Lewis & Associates, Former State Representative
- 9 **Clint Hackney**
Clint Hackney & Company, Former State Representative
- 10 **Demetrius McDaniel**
Greenberg Traurig, Former Special Assistant to Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower
- 11 **Luis Saenz**
Former Campaign Manager for Governor Rick Perry, Ex-Assistant Secretary of State
- 12 **James Mathis**
Former John Sharp Campaign Manager
- 13 **Randy Erben**
Former Office of State-Federal Relations Director, Former Assistant Secretary of State
- 14 **Chris Shields**
Christopher S. Shields P.C., Former Aide to Governor Bill Clements and Secretary of State Jack Rains
- 15 **Steve Bresnen**
Former General Counsel to Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock

TEXAS LOBBY POWER RANKINGS 2011

- ▶ [Rising Lobby Stars](#)
- ▶ [Dynamic Lobby Duos](#)
- ▶ [Consultants Who Lobby](#)
- ▶ [Ex-State Agency Heads](#)
- ▶ [Lobbyists for Causes](#)
- ▶ [League of Their Own](#)
- ▶ [Texas Lobby Teams](#)
- ▶ [Law Firm Lobby Practices](#)
- ▶ [Private Sector Associations](#)
- ▶ [Public Sector Associations](#)
- ▶ [Corporate In-House Lobby](#)
- ▶ [Non-Profit Organizations](#)

January 19, 2011

[Professional Advocacy Association of Texas](#)

Lobbyists with Republican Connections Have Most to Gain Amid New Talent Infusion and Teams Trend

By Mike Hailey
Capitol Inside Editor

When the Texas Legislature's new Republican members arrived in Austin for their first session this month, one of the first things they learned was where to find Mike Toomey and Lara Keel. As two of the three partners at the city's most high-powered lobby shop when it comes to Republican ties, Toomey and Keel have taken most if not all of the GOP's 31 freshmen lawmakers under their wings as informal advisors on the art of passing legislation, protocol and other fundamental elements of the legislative process in Texas. In an arena that's governed by a maze of complex and serpentine operating procedures and lined with more political landmines than opportunities for early success, the wisdom and friendship that the two lobby mentors are imparting will be highly valuable as the first-term Republicans attempt to navigate their way through their legislative debuts without fouling up.

Toomey - a former Texas House member who served as chief of staff under two Republican governors including the state's current chief executive - has been one of the chief masterminds of the GOP's rise to majority party status in a state that will have more Republicans legislators at the Capitol than ever. While Toomey made headlines last year with his role in the resurrection of the Green Party on the ballot as a way to help torpedo the Democrats, the biggest impact he had on the 2010 election was arguably the part he played helping direct about \$7 million in Texans for Lawsuit Reform money to Republican state House candidates. Almost all of those went on win as the GOP picked up 22 House seats that Democrats were defending in a chamber that's had a 101-member GOP supermajority since it convened in January.

Toomey's impact in the Republican's November avalanche wasn't as whopping as President Barack Obama's and the backlash that Democratic policies in Washington triggered at the ballot box. But it was giant nonetheless - and with the way he's been following that up as a priceless information resource who's given a sense of security to the Republican's legislative rookies at a time when they have just cause to be incredibly overwhelmed - it should come as no surprise that no one is rated higher on *Capitol Inside's* Texas Lobby Power Rankings for 2011.

By the same token, no member of the Austin lobby including Toomey himself has wielded more sway in the past year than the remarkable Neal T. "Buddy" Jones, a former state representative who was one of the state's original contract lobbyists that are

Texas Lobbyist Rankings Are More Art than Science: Power Gauge Ingredients

The Texas Lobby Power Rankings are a highly subjective attempt to gauge the level of influence that the professionals who specialize in legislative advocacy can expect to have on the regular session that convenes for five months in odd-numbered years.

The ratings are based on observations and opinions offered by a small and informal group of people who are bona fide experts on the Texas Capitol lobby. None of the group's members know who the others are.

- Frank Santos**
16 Santos Alliances, Former National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators Consultant, Former State House Aide
- Galt Graydon**
17 Graydon Group, Former Texas Senate Aide
- Stan Schlueter**
18 The Schlueter Group, Former State Representative
- Lara Keel**
19 Texas Capitol Group, Former State Senate Aide, Married to State Auditor John Keel
- Yuniedth Midence Steen**
20 Locke Lord Bissell & Liddell, Former State Senate Aide
- Nora Del Bosque**
21 Former State House Aide and Appropriations Committee Clerk, Sister is Speaker Tom Craddick's Chief of Staff Nancy Fisher
- Marc Rodriguez**
22 Former City of San Antonio Intergovernmental Relations Manager, Ex-San Antonio Chamber of Commerce VP for Government Affairs, Ex-Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Chair
- Gaylord Armstrong**
23 McGinnis Lochridge & Kilgore, Former Aide to U.S. Rep. Bob Poague and U.S. Rep. Ray Roberts
- John Pitts**
24 Arnold & Porter Law Firm Consultant, Ex-General Counsel to Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock, Twin Brother to House Appropriations Chairman Jim Pitts
- Dean & Andrea McWilliams**
25 Former Legislative Aides to Democratic and Republican Members
- Gaylord Armstrong**
26 McGinnis Lochridge & Kilgore, Former Aide to U.S. Rep. Bob Poague and U.S. Rep. Ray Roberts
- Keith Strama**
27 Beatty Bangle Strama, Former Texas House Aide
- Kathy Hutto**
28 Jackson Walker, Former Sunset Advisory Commission Staff
- Bill Pewitt**
29 Bill Pewitt & Associates, Technology and Health Care
- Eric Wright**
30 Former Chief of Staff to State Senator Bill Ratliff, Ex-Senate Finance Committee Director
- Billy Phenix**
31 Texas Capitol Group, Former Aide to Gov. Rick Perry, Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock and State Senator Buster Brown
- Mindy Ellmer**
32 Former Bracewell & Giuliani Consultant, Ex-State House Aide, Ex-Aide to Governor Bill Clements

affectionately referred to simply as hired guns. What did Jones do to share the number one ranking on the lobby power chart with Toomey this year? Jones earned that distinction partly the old fashioned way as the co-founder and leader of a mega-powerful lobby group with a political action committee that doled out tons of money to legislative candidates and a client list that's longer than the drive back to his hometown of Hillsboro and loaded with marquee names ranging from Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones to H.E.B. grocery store empire CEO Charles Butt. But Jones' demonstrated his muscle in unconventional ways as well. He spearheaded a furious networking crusade among legislators and lobbyists to keep their alma matter Baylor University from being left out in the cold if the Big 12 Conference unraveled as it appeared to destined to do for several days in June. Jones found time that same month for his firm HillCo Partners to file a lawsuit accusing two former associates of conspiring to steal high-dollar clients and proprietary information when they left to join an upstart rival firm.

The legal dispute shook the Austin lobby down to its core before it was settled in the hallways of the court house the day it was supposed to be tried. And it sent a loud and clear message that could have long-term effects on the way the lobby here operates: Don't Mess with Buddy Jones and HillCo or be prepared to face the wrath of Hades if you do.

But beyond Jones and Toomey and the other lobbyists who've been fixtures in the higher echelons of the power chart for years, the rankings in 2011 reflect the growing presence and clout that a newer generation of public affairs professionals have now at the Capitol as the proverbial torch is passed to them. Keel is a prime example - having been elevated to partnership status with lobby titans Bill Messer and Toomey in the star-studded group they lead at the same time she's become the go-to lobbyist for Republican women legislators at the Capitol where there are twice as many of them as there were two years ago. Keel - as a result - has vaulted into the top 20 on the hired gun lobby list after being ranked a rising star lobbyists just four years ago. So has another up-and-coming woman lobbyist - Yuniedth Midence Steen - a former chief of staff for a Democratic state senator who's a member of the law firm that she represents as a key player in a lobby group that leans significantly Republican. Midence Steen, whose first name is pronounced Jen-yet, jumped from the rising stars list in 2007 to a spot two years ago on the hired gun chart where she's also ranked among the 20 most powerful lobbyists in Texas as the session kicks off this year.

The non-stop infusion of new blood and talent has fueled a transformation of the Austin lobby game to a team sport amid a rapid proliferation of power groups, boutique shops, law firm brigades and partnerships in the past few years. While the lobby has been tilting increasingly Republicans in correlation with the Legislature during the past decade, most of the lobbyists who fare best at the state level this year will have reasonable access to Democratic lawmakers as well. The Democrats still have the ability to block legislation in the Senate with a two-thirds rule that's under fire but unlikely to change. Across the rotunda - despite all the hype and fanfare about the GOP's first supermajority - conservative Republicans who are tea party favorites could end up being the real minority faction in a House where lockstep partisanship took a beating in Speaker Joe Straus' winning re-election bid. Despite a record low number of seats under the pink granite dome, the Democrats could wield as much clout as ever if Republicans remained split along ideological lines and leadership loyalties like they were in the House speaker's election. That would boost the stock value for lobbyists who've embraced the team concept and covered the necessary bases in doing so.

Hired Guns

The top four slots in the category of contract lobbyist who represent multiple clients give new meaning to the adage that some things never seem to change. Rusty Kelley, Bill Messer, Mike Toomey and Buddy Jones have had the top tier on the power chart all to themselves since its inception eight years ago. While Jones and Toomey rank a close first and second this time around as a result of unique circumstances described above, there's little if any separation in the amount of clout the big four in the Texas lobby exert year in and year out while showing no signs whatsoever of slowing down anytime in the foreseeable future.

The brother team of Gordon Johnson and Robert Johnson has a solid lock on the fifth spot that it occupied two years ago before House Speaker Joe Straus tapped Gordon to head up his leadership committee and to oversee the political side of his re-election bid as the chamber's presiding officer. The top ten hired guns list includes perennial member Demetrius McDaniel, the highest ranking

Our formula focuses on an array of variables including reputation for work ethic and results, the ability to raise money for campaigns, the quality and quantity of clients, the value of contracts, persuasive skills, institutional knowledge, experience in the legislative process and other factors that are unique to each individual lobbyist.

With almost 2,000 or more lobbyists expected to register at the state level between now and the session's end, we're the first to admit that some deserving lobby members will be inadvertently omitted from our power lists. We apologize for that in advance - but we also encourage those who are left off to let us know if they think they deserve to be listed or ranked higher or lower for those who prefer to lay low.

- 33 **Carol McGarah**
Blackridge, Former State Senate Aide
- Jay Howard**
- 34 HillCo Partners, Son of Former State Senator
- Gilbert Turrieta**
- 35 Former Houston Chamber of Commerce and Texas Medical Association Official, Former LBB Examiner
- J.E. "Buster" Brown**
- 36 Former State Senator, Former Senate Natural Resources Chair, Former Assistant District Attorney
- Jay Propes**
- 37 Graydon Group, Former Congressional Aide, Ex-Trade Association Executive
- Jack Erskine**
- 38 K&L Gates, Former Corporate Lawyer for Amoco and Dupont, Oil Field Clean-up Fund Architect
- Jody Richardson**
- 39 Allen Boone Humphries Robinson, Former Television Reporter, Longtime Akin Gump Member
- Nancy Fisher**
- 40 Former Chief of Staff to Ex-Speaker Tom Craddick, Former Texas Racing Commission Executive Director
- Mike Krusee**
- 41 Former State Representative
- Kathy Grant**
- 42 Former Texas Cable Television Association Government Relations Director, Former Texas House Aide
- Eric Glenn**
- 43 Schlueter Group, Former Texas House Aide, Texas Conservative Coalition Research Institute Board
- Joe Garcia**
- 44 Garcia Group, Former State Senate Aide
- Jay Brown**
- 45 Graydon Group, Son of Former State Senator, Former GOP Campaign Staffer
- Jaime Capelo**
- 46 Former State Representative
- Mario Martinez**
- 47 Mario Martinez & Associates, Former Aide to State Rep. Tom Uher
- Sabrina Thomas Brown**
- 48 Former Texas House aide and Appropriations Committee Clerk
- Mignon McGarry**
- 49 Former State Senate Aide
- Louis Bacarisse**
- 50 Former Aide to Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock and House Speaker Pete Laney
- Joey Bennett**
- 50 Former Public Strategies Inc. Lobbyist
- Mark Borskey**
- 50 Ex-Deputy Legislative Director for Gov. Rick Perry, Ex-Chief of Staff to State Rep. Mike Krusee

African-American lobbyist in Austin, along with Walter Fisher, a former Senate parliamentarian who served under four lieutenant governors. McDaniel is a longtime Akin Gum attorney who joined the Greenberg Traurig law firm's Austin office three years ago. Fisher, a former Texas Municipal League lobbyist, is a founding member of the Texas Capitol Group that includes Messer, Toomey and Keel.

Former Texas House member Ron Lewis, who's been one of Governor Rick Perry's closest friends since they served together in the lower chamber in the 1980s, ranks among the ten most powerful lobbyists in the state in 2011. Lewis - a conservative Democrat like Perry during a 16-year House stint - has raised substantial sums of cash for candidates since entering the lobby when he left the Legislature in 2002. There are signs that he's raising his game to a new level while working harder than ever on one of the more impressive client lists in town.

Houston-based attorney Robert Miller, who leads the lobby team for the Locke Lord Bissell & Liddell law firm, has moved into the top ten this year after having a pivotal role in Straus' re-election victory as a point person for fundraising in the Houston business community for House races that the speaker helped bankroll in 2010. A former state Senate aide who chaired the public transportation authority in Houston, Miller advised the Associated Republicans of Texas and the Texans for Lawsuit Reform on the funds they pumped into House battles in the state's largest city last year.

Former Texas House member Clint Hackney is the only lobbyist on the top ten hired guns list who doesn't fit into the common trends that define the power rankings in 2011. While Hackney shares office space with one other lobbyist, he's built a reputation as one of the lobby's most effective and likeable members as a solo practitioner. A lawyer who was perceived to be more liberal during an eight-year House career than Democrats from more rural districts like Jones, Messer, Lewis and the current Republican governor, Hackney checked his partisan past at the entrance to the lobby and has excellent working relationships with lawmakers across the partisan and ideological spectrum. He had a hand in Straus' winning bid for a second term as speaker by helping key clients hold fundraisers for the incumbent House leader last year.

Lobby Teams

It's no coincidence that the individual lobbyists who crown the hired guns list perennially head the most prestigious and influential lobby groups in the state's Capital City. Founded in the late 1990s by Bill Miller and Buddy Jones, HillCo Partners has been a groundbreaking enterprise that's become the blueprint essentially for the teamwork principle that an ever-expanding list of rivals have embraced and implemented with considerable success. But HillCo didn't just set the standard for lobby shops that operate on or near Congress Avenue in the Capitol's long shadow. It's remained at the forefront of the pack that it inspired with cutting-edge tactics that are bold and sometimes risky. In addition to a client list that's unrivaled in terms of the value of contracts and the star quality of the names on it, HillCo has shown a willingness to play hardball with a commitment to winning whatever the cost in a business where the competition is often cutthroat. The lawsuit that it filed last year against the new firm Focused Advocacy and a couple of ex-HillCo members who'd helped launch it was the ultimate power play in a profession where the potential for client piracy had always been part of the territory. All eyes were on HillCo to see if it was bluffing in a case that appeared to have the potential to knock down the sacred wall of client confidentiality if it actually went to court. But HillCo wasn't blinking - and minutes before the trial was set to get under way - the suit seemed to vanish suddenly into thin air when the warring firms reached a settlement in the hall outside the courtroom and returned to tell the judge about it amid smiles on both sides and handshakes.

The Texas Capitol Group, which shares the top spot on the lobby teams list with HillCo like it did in 2009, is a decidedly different operating model that makes comparisons between the two firms difficult. While HillCo plays both sides of the partisan fence with artful perfection - having been accused in recent years of being too cozy with top GOP leaders and the Democratic-dominated Mexican American Legislative Caucus at the same time - the Texas Capitol Group is certifiably Republican even though it has members like Joe Garcia with solid ties to Democrats. Toomey is arguably closer to the governor than any of his peers in the lobby. Messer was Republican Tom Craddick's top confidant during his three terms as House speaker. New Texas Capitol Group member Josh Meeks entered the lobby after his boss Republican Kip Averitt resigned from the state Senate last year.

But the Texas Capitol Group - unlike HillCo - is a collection of separate private entities that operate under the same roof as an umbrella organization that frees them to work independently and together when needed for versatility benefits. Some key players in the Texas Capitol Group like Rossanna Salazar, a former press secretary to Governor Bill Clements and Rick Perry when he was agriculture commissioner, specialize in communications and aren't even registered to lobby.

HillCo's lineup features an array of stars including Jay Howard, Marsha Jones, ex-House member Vilma Luna and Dan Pearson, the former executive director at the state's environmental agency. But most of the key players at HillCo work simply for HillCo without running independent businesses on the side. HillCo, which has opened an office in Washington D.C. as well, beefed up its Austin

- James Clark**
50 Former Campaign Manager for John Sharp, Ex-Aide to Jim Mattox Campaign, Ex-UTS In-House
- Robert Culley**
50 Former Legislative Aide
- Dianne Delisi**
50 Former State Representative, Delisi Communications
- Pat Haggerty**
50 Former State Representative
- Robert Howden**
50 Former Texas Tax Reform Commission Staff Director, Ex-Communications Director for Gov. Rick Perry, Ex-National Federation of Independent Business Executive Director in Texas
- Deborah Ingersoll**
50 Legislative Solutions, Key Fundraiser for Campaigns
- Nick Kraj**
50 Former Aide to Ben Barnes as Speaker and Lt. Gov., Ex-Quorum Club Owner
- Kyle Janek**
50 Former State Senator, Former State Representative
- Michael Jewell**
50 Former Texas Department of Economic Development Official
- Tony Goolsby**
50 Former State Representative
- Curtis Fuelberg**
50 Former Texas Association of Realtors Official, Ex-Aide to House Speaker Gus Mutscher
- Toby Goodman**
50 Former State Representative, Former Juvenile Justice & Family Issues Committee Chairman, Ex-Republican Precinct Chair
- Mark Harkrider**
50 Former Aide to Dallas Mayor Annette Strauss
- Ron Hinkle**
50 Former State House Sergeant at Arms, Former Texas Department of Commerce Official
- Wade Long**
50 Former Texas Senate Aide
- Mike Meroney**
50 Former U.S. Senate Aide, Ex-Congressional Campaign Staffer, Ex-Huntsman Corporation Lobbyist, Ex-Public Strategies
- Gardner Pate**
50 Locke Lord Bissell & Liddell, Former Greg Abbott Campaign Operations Director
- Kraege Polan**
50 Former Legislative Aide
- Chuck Rice**
50 Chuck Rice Group, Ex-State Senate Aide, Former Texas Hospital Association Legislative Director

operation in the past year with the addition of ex-TML lobbyist Frank Sturzl, former deputy health and human services commissioner Marc Samuels and Haley Cornyn, the daughter of U.S. Senator John Cornyn.

Blackridge - the third ranking lobby team on the power chart in 2011 - sprouted three years ago when Rusty Kelley and Carol McGarah left Public Strategies to start their own independent firm. Kelley, who served as chief of staff under Billy Clayton in the House speaker's office, was one of the original hired guns like Jones and Messer. Kelley had been ranked as the number one contract lobbyists in Texas on more than one occasion - and like Jones, Toomey and Messer - he's never been rated lower than number four on the lobby power list.

The group that's led by veteran lobbyist Galt Graydon occupies the fourth spot on the lobby teams list like it did two years ago. But the Graydon Group can expect to see its stock go up considerably this year as Jay Brown's star rises to new heights in the wake of the GOP landslide at the polls last year. Brown, the son of a former GOP state senator who's a top lobbyist himself, is the Graydon Group's most visible Republican and one of the lobby's most successful members in recent years as well.

While the four top-ranked firms on the lobbyist teams list haven't changed since the session in 2009, this category sports a handful of new lobby shops that have opened for business in the past year or so. Veteran lobbyist Chris Shields, who ranks among the top 15 hired guns, has teamed up with former Craddick chief of staff Nancy Fisher and several other lobbyists including former House member David Swinford in the Texas Strategy Group - an offshoot of a national organization that's opening offices in state capitals across the country.

The list includes a new group that Republican consultant Ted Delisi has assembled with health care specialist Heather Vasek and his mother, former state House Public Health Committee chair Dianne Delisi. The most recent addition at Delisi Communications is Paul Bolinger, who worked as chief of staff and general counsel to current House Appropriations Committee Chairman Jim Pitts. The new lobby group Texas Star Alliance was formed by another Austin lobbyist with close ties to the House's lead budget writer, twin brother John Pitts, whose pulled together an impressive team of seasoned lobbyists as well.

But of all the new lobby teams that have popped up on the state political landscape in the past year or two, Focused Advocacy made the biggest splash when it drew the wrath of the Goliath firm HillCo about the time it was celebrating its grand opening. Focused Advocacy, which is led by former Texas House member and longtime TXU lobbyist Curt Seidlits, was accused of plotting with municipal lobby specialists Brandon Aghamalian and Snapper Carr to hijack clients and fiduciary data from HillCo where they'd been working before switching without a lot of warning to the new firm. While both sides remained mum on the negotiations outside a Travis County courtroom that prompted HillCo to drop the lawsuit, it appeared that both firms might have come out ahead once the fallout had settled even though there was no actual settlement. HillCo appeared to be satisfied that it was getting the information in question back. But more significantly, perhaps, HillCo drove up the point with a vengeance that anyone who threatens its turf better be prepared to face serious consequences.

Lobby groups that are led by Frank Santos, one of the preeminent hired gun lobbyists who's known for his expertise in the health care field, and former House member Stan Schlueter are not as large as some of the teams on the power list but highly potent and battle tested nonetheless. Schlueter, a former Ways and Means Committee chairman, served in the House as a conservative Democrat in the 1980s as well. Santos, who's maintained good relationships on both sides of the aisle, has been one of the highest ranking Hispanic lobbyists in Texas in recent years.

Law Firm Lobby Practices

The team that Robert Miller leads at Locke Lord Bissell & Liddell has crowned the list of the most powerful law firm lobby practices in Texas since the category was conceived seven years ago. Locke Lord - for starters - has the top law firm lobby shop in Austin because it wants to be number one and works aggressively to not only keep that distinction but to solidify its lock on it more each year.

While Locke Lord's team features a strong Republican flavor with lobbyists like Miller and Gardner Pate, a former Greg Abbott campaign staffer who's emerged in recent years as one of the foremost experts on campaign law and ethics compliance in Texas. A couple of former Locke Lord members - David Cabrales and Alan Waldrop - have signed back on with the firm after stints as an appeals judge and general counsel to Governor Rick Perry respectively.

But Locke Lord stresses a bipartisan approach that it's achieved with lobbyists like Yuniedth Midence Steen, a former chief of staff to State Senator John Whitmire, who's a member of the law firm as well and represents clients on the local and federal levels. The firm expects to strengthen its

- 50 Jack Roberts**
Former Deputy Comptroller
- Dan Shelley**
50 Former State Senator, Former State House, Ex-Legislative Director for Gov. Rick Perry
- Brad Shields**
50 Shields Legislative Associates, Former Eanes School Board President, Voice of Westlake Chapparals Football
- Patricia Shipton**
50 Former Legislative Director for Gov. Rick Perry
- 50 Bill Siebert**
Former State Representative
- Jerry Valdez**
50 Former Texas Department of Economic Development Official

relations with Democrats with the addition of Nef Partida, a political consultant who's worked on campaigns for legislators and candidates for both parties. Midence Steen is popular with lawmakers from both parties in both chambers - and she and Pate have excellent relationships with Speaker Joe Straus and his staff at the Capitol. LaBoon has been the firm's point person in the Senate.

The number two spot on the lobby law firm list is up for grabs again in 2011 after being occupied at the start of the session two years ago by a new team that Brown McCarroll had assembled in Austin. While Brown McCarroll moved into second in the wake of Akin Gump's decision to essentially pull out of the lobby business here, the firm has slipped a few slots on the list as a result of its high-profile association with Democrats like two of its members, State Senator Kirk Watson and State Rep. Pete Gallego. One of the firm's key lobbyists two years ago, former Akins Gump lawyer Jody Richardson, moved recently to the Allen Boone Humphries Robinson law firm to join forces with Joe B. Allen, Trey Lary and other members of its Austin team as part of a renewed emphasis at the Capitol. Richardson has been ranked as one of the top 50 hired gun lobbyists in Texas in recent years.

The Capitol teams at Gardere Wynne Sewell and Baker Botts made the biggest leap up the law firm lobby group list on which they're ranked second and third respectively. Gardere, which had specialized in insurance matters and cases before state agencies, has expanded its focus to a broader range of issues that the Legislature will be dealing with in 2011. Gardere has enlisted veteran lobbyist Val Perkins for a team at the Capitol that features Kim Yelkin and Mark Vane.

While the Greenberg Traurig law firm is still a relative newcomer to the lobby business at the Texas Capitol, it's Austin team got a boost last year when Terral Smith signed on as lobbyist there. Smith is a former Texas House Republican who worked as the legislative director for George W. Bush in the governor's office before a stint as Tom Craddick's chief of staff during his final term as House speaker. The Hance Scarborough lobby team has moved into the top 10 on the law firm list after hiring Cheri Huddleston, a key member of Republican State Senator Jane Nelson's staff for more than a decade.

The Austin lobby shop for the Texas-based law firm Jackson Walker turned to the Capitol's east wing for new talent as well when Deidra Garcia joined its team after four years as a legislative analyst for Republican State Senator Glenn Hegar. Jackson Walker, which may be the only law firm in Texas with an Austin lobby shop who's star player, Kathy Hutto, is not an attorney, has expanded its concentration on energy and electric generation since adding Mike Nasi to its team at the Capitol.

Rising Lobby Stars

Gavin Massingill would have been a leading contender for the rookie of the year award in his debut as lobbyist if such an award had been bestowed on a member of the Austin lobby for the legislative session in 2009. As a lobbyist for UST - the smokeless tobacco company that cigarette giant Altria acquired - the former chief of staff and legislative director for Republican State Rep. Charlie Geren played an instrumental part for the winning side in the so-called snuff tax war and other key turf fights at the Capitol that year.

While Massingill worked in tandem two years ago with Sabrina Brown, the daughter in law of former state senator and veteran lobbyist Buster Brown, the two are no longer partners as the ex-Geren aide heads into his second session at a time when his former boss will be one of the House's three or four most powerful members as the chief enforcer for Speaker Joe Straus. You could argue that Massingill is no longer a rising star in the lobby because he's been in full orbit for almost two years. But the Austin lobby has evolved into an arena where it takes more than a decade to achieve true seniority as a result of an almost non-existent turnover in a business that's very lucrative and a lot of fun if you're good at it. So Massingill will spend one more session on the rising lobby stars list on which he's perched at the top in the early stages of 2011.

While Massingill is the only returning letterman on the list of Austin lobbyists with minimal or no experience and bright futures ahead, Mary Tipps is the most unique as the only rising lobby star in 2011 who never served in the Legislature or worked as a top aide for one of its members. Tipps has received accolades for the job she's done as the executive director for the Texans for Lawsuit Reform for the past two years - and she'll be having a key role at the Capitol in 2011 when the ongoing fight between TLR and trial lawyers has the potential to be bloodier than ever. Tipps, who worked for the state's biggest spending political organization for four years as a grassroots organizer before the promotion to her current post, is ranked second on the rising lobby stars list as someone whose employer did more than any group or individual in Texas to elect a record number of Republicans who'll be pushing the TLR agenda this year.

Three of the rising lobby stars to watch this year were members of the Legislature the last time it met. Kip Averitt and David Swinford, who represented the GOP in the Senate and House respectively before resigning early last year, should make the transition through the revolving door

Public Sector Associations

The lobby teams that go to bat for local governments, educators, cops, prosecutors and other public employees and entities have wielded enormous influence at the Capitol without the luxury of the kind of cash that fuels private sector advocacy. But the public sector groups will confront one of their all-time greatest challenges in 2011 when the Legislature slashes the state budget in the face of a projected \$27 billion shortfall. Public education and health care are most vulnerable to deep spending cuts, which could have a trickle down effect that prompts big jumps in taxes at the local level and layoffs galore.

The Texas Association of Counties and the Texas Municipal League - the two groups whose lobby teams share the top spot in on the public sector association power list - have considerable muscle and will need every bit of it at the Capitol this year.

The groups that occupy the five slots on the power chart behind TML and TAC - the Texas Association of School Administrators, the Texas Classroom Teachers Association, the Texas Association of School Board, the Texas State Teachers Association and the Texas Federation of Teachers - will be going to war to keep public schools from bearing the brunt of the budget ax.

Private Sector Associations

The state budget crisis poses threats to some of the professional and trade groups that have formidable lobby teams on the front lines as well.

The lobbyists for the Texas Medical Association, which is ranked second in this particular category behind the Texans for Lawsuit Reform, will be on defense against potential cuts in doctor reimbursement rates

amid suggestions by some conservative Republicans that the state should do away with Medicaid entirely.

The Associated General Contractors of Texas lobby team, which is being led this year by former Texas House Republican Corbin Van Arsdale, will be on the alert for possible moves to erase some of the deficit by cutting back on highway construction and maintenance outlays.

Some of the other private sector organizations on the lobby power chart will be guarding against higher fees that could have a negative impact on their members' finances.

The groups that are ranked first and third on this particular list - TLR and the Texas Trial Lawyers Association - spent vast sums of money on legislative campaigns while gearing for a showdown that could reach epic proportions at the Capitol this year.

Corporate In-House

The list of corporations that have at least one full-time employee looking out for their interests in Austin is dominated at the top by firms that are in the telecommunications industry and companies in the business of making electricity, selling it and transmitting it to customers.

The pecking order for the behemoth in-house corporate teams at the Capitol looks a lot like it did two years ago with AT&T and Verizon crowning the chart while CenterPoint, TXU, American Electric Power, Reliant and Oncor are all ranked high as they gear for a session that has the potential to be huge for their high-dollar interests.

With gambling interests expected to make their most concerted push ever for casinos or slot machines at racetracks or both this year, the lobbyists who represent companies like the Landry's restaurant chain and Global Gaming will be key players at the Capitol in 2011. Global Gaming is a corporation that the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma created for its bid to buy the horse track Lone Star Park in Grand Prairie.

Non-Profits

Veteran Baylor College of Medicine lobbyist Tom Kleinworth is still one of the effective public affairs professionals in the state - and the lobby team that features Karen Johnson and Melody Melody Chatelle at the United Ways of Texas do excellent jobs as the lobby team for a group that's been ranked at the top of the non-profits list perennially. But the state fiscal crisis that the Legislature must confront has vaulted several groups that will be right in the middle of it to the top spots this year on the list of the non-profit lobbyists with

with ease. While former House member Mark Homer has the potential early baggage of the fact that he served as a Democrat, he has the personality, institutional knowledge and down home East Texas people skills that make him a natural for the lobby profession. Homer compiled a relatively conservative, pro-business voting record during a dozen years in the lower chamber before falling victim to the Republican wave in November.

The rising stars list features a couple of other Democrats - Jerry Phillips and Kurt Meachum - who are entering their second session as lobbyists after stints as top aides for former House Democratic Caucus leader Jim Dunnam and State Rep. Pete Gallego respectively. Dunnam lost his re-election bid as a victim of the GOP that buried almost all of the Democratic incumbents in competitive races last fall. Gallego came within a whisker of losing as well in a race that wasn't supposed to be a race at all. But Meachum and Phillips can expect to have influence that cuts across partisan lines with clients like Energy Future Holdings Corporation, Texas Cable Association and the firm that represents the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma and the company it created as a vehicle to purchase a major horse racing track in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Dynamic Lobby Duos

A burgeoning number of tag-team lobbyists at the Capitol has inspired the creation of a new category that recognizes the mini-team approach that some lobbyists who eschew the notion that quantity fosters quality in their work. The brothers who work out of the Johnson & Johnson law firm - Gordon and Rob - have enjoyed substantial success as a tandem lobby team even though the former has been on leave while operating the controls of Speaker Joe Straus political machine. But the brother who's more imposing physically doesn't need to be involved in the daily lobby grind to have a positive effect on the family business because his long shadow as Straus' right hand ally is always there in the room even when he's not.

Randy Erben and Brian Yarbrough have been one of the Capitol's most successful partnerships for more than a decade as well. Erben, an attorney, launched the lobby business from an Austin law firm that he opened in the early 1990s after stints as an assistant secretary of state, director of the Texas Office of State-Federal Relations and assistant secretary of housing and urban development under the first President George Bush. The Erben-Yarbrough team is a close second behind the Johnson brothers in the top lobby duo department.

The pair of veteran political professionals who run the firm McWilliams & Associates have been one of the Capitol's top lobby teams since Dean McWilliams entered the business in 1999 after the Republican state senator he worked for lost a re-election bid. The former Senate aide's wife, Andrea McWilliams, had gotten a head start in the lobby profession as a former legislative staffer who'd been associated more with Democrats. The high-profile couple who've been lobby partners for 11 out of the 17 years they've been married have amassed a long list of clients with contracts of unrivaled reported value - and their story has been featured in magazines and newspapers that circulate inside the Capitol beltway.

Political Consultants, Causes and Converted Bureaucrats

With a record number of GOP lawmakers in Austin for the Legislature's biennial gathering this year, it should probably come as no major surprise that all of the political pros on the consultants who lobby list work for Republican campaigns in between sessions. Almost.

GOP strategists Reggie Bashur and Bryan Eppstein top the list of the most powerful lobbyists who double as campaign advisors while Republican consultants Todd Smith, Ted Delisi and Jason Johnson are close behind. The consultants who lobby club would have a Republican monopoly if Chuck McDonald, a former press secretary to Democrat Ann Richards in the governor's office, wasn't on the list. But McDonald's clients since Richards left office have included the Texans for Lawsuit Reform, which bills itself as bipartisan but is perceived to be highly Republican.

The list of former state agency heads who lobby has a new name on the leader board with the emergence of Albert Hawkins as emergence through the revolving door after one of the most distinguished public service careers in Texas history. Hawkins most recent tour of duty came as the state's health and human services commissioner - a job that he accepted after returning to Texas after several years as a senior fiscal advisor in the second Bush White House. Hawkins served as Bush's chief budget director in the governor's office after launching his career as a Legislative Budget Board analyst.

The final category for lobbyists who don't work for corporations, private trade associations, public sector organizations or non-profit groups has a new name in the top slot as well. Suzii Paynter, the director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, is ranked first on the lobbyists for causes list as a battle-tested activist who faces an imposing challenge as a key leader of anti-gambling forces at a time when casino and slot machine proponents are planning their most intense push yet for an

the most sway at the Capitol.

With more Republican legislators than ever, the Texas Public Policy Foundation team that includes former House members Talmadge Heflin and Arlene Wohlgemuth tops the non-profit lobby list at this point in 2011. The Capitol group at the Center of Public Policy Priorities is ranked second as the lobby team that will be speaking out for Texans who can't afford some basic needs much less lobbyists. The Texas Taxpayers and Research Association duo that features two of the state's leading budget experts, Bill Allaway and Dale Craymer, is ranked third as a lobby team that will be looking out for the interests of businesses that are members of the group they represent.

expansion of legalized wagering across the state. Paynter ranked second in this particular department two years ago. But she moved into the number one slot after Cathie Adams, the perennial leader on the lobbyists for causes list, gave her job with the Texas Eagle Forum after winning the job of Texas Republican Party chair in late 2009. Adams fell short in her bid for a full term as party chair last summer, however, so don't be surprised if you see her back on this chart at some point in the future.

Copyright 2003-2011 Capitol Inside

Photocopying, printing, or reproducing in any other form in whole or in part is a violation of federal copyright law and is strictly prohibited without the publisher's consent. Phone: (512) 917-1697