

OPINION

SARASOTA-MANATEE

Herald-Tribune

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EDITORIALS

Representation, for a price

Lobbying — for businesses, citizens and governments — is a growth industry

The quality of representative government is in inverse proportion to the sum spent on lobbyists.

That's a political theory we conjured up in reaction to the Herald-Tribune article headlined "In Tallahassee, lobbyists earning more this year."

Lobbyists have been earning more every year — except for 2010 — since 2007, according to the article by Gary Fineout. Indeed, lobbying has been one of the few growth industries in Florida during and after the recession.

In the first six months of this year, lobbyists seeking to influence the state Legislature were paid almost \$65 million, according to financial disclosure reports cited by Fineout. That amount represents a \$2 million gain compared with lobbyists' income in the first half of last year.

It's not clear whether those amounts are accurate, because registered lobbyists don't have to report exact payments; they can use a range of figures. Plus, even though a state



State Farm Insurance lobbyist Mark Delegal, right, talks to state Senate Banking and Insurance Committee Chairman Garrett S. Richter, R-Naples, during the 2011 legislative session in Tallahassee.

PHOTO | COLIN HACKLEY

so do environmental organizations. Retailers, farmers, restaurant owners, beer-and-wine distributors, lawyers, bankers, cops — they all have lobbyists. And, yes, so do media groups and their allies who seek to keep

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

'F' for USF campus idea

Regarding the article "Senator pushes to make local USF campus independent of Tampa":

As a taxpayer, I believe that state Sen. Mike Bennett's idea for an independent University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee is wrong. All that will do is dilute funds available for an already underfunded university system.

The State University System needs to continue to develop our current programs so that the Florida university system is one of the best in the nation, before the system expands with "new" universities or major programs. Let's get our own house in order first.

Ross P. Alander Longboat Key

Ron Paul too old to run

A recent letter states that Ron Paul is being ignored by media, while he has a message that resonates with young people. Such young people must be easily charmed by grandpas. Paul is one year older than Sen. John McCain (almost to the day), and McCain was considered by many voters as too old a presidential candidate at 72, back in 2008. Paul will be past 77 in November 2012. I will not argue about his basic intelligence, or not too intelligent ideas.

The main issue with Paul is that I do not want to gamble that a man of his age can effectively handle the rigorous job of president of the United States.

Charles Sargent Sarasota

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