

Groups spent \$18M lobbying Capitol during first half of 2021

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Groups spent \$18 million to lobby the Capitol during the first six months of the year, a slight uptick from the last time a budget was before lawmakers, according to a WisPolitics.com check of lobbying reports.

Though interest groups spent \$132,651 more during the first part of 2021, they put in 2,830 fewer hours lobbying with the Capitol still under COVID-related restrictions for much of the period.

The spending includes not only time spent in the Capitol but communications as well as preparation for lobbying such as research or studies that go into their efforts.

The usual suspects topped spending on lobbying expenses during the period, including Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce at No. 1 with \$404,539 spent. The group also was No. 1 for the first six months of 2019 at \$414,184.

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WMC's reports to the Ethics Commission shows it spent 12 percent of its time on AB 1, which sought to address a host of issues related to COVID-19. The bill went back and forth between the two houses as numerous changes were made before Gov. Tony Evers vetoed the bill.

The group also spent 10 percent of its time on workforce training. The bulk of its time was spent on "minor efforts," which are those that account for less than 10 percent of the organization's time.

WMC's Scott Manley said neither effort should be a surprise considering the group's emphasis on the state's workforce and the business liability protections that were in

AB 1. Those protections were later approved in different legislation.

There were still some restrictions on access to the Capitol during part of the period. Still, Manley said the biggest change during the period was the group more often spoke with lawmakers' staff rather than legislators than they typically would.

"Actually, we did a lot more in-person lobbying the first six months of this year than we did the last six months of 2020, which was quite a bit of lobbying over Zoom and a lot of phone calls," Manley said.

The Wisconsin Realtors Association was No. 2 for spending at \$391,026. All of its time fell under the "minor efforts" header. The group has reported taking positions on nearly 100 bills so far this session, and it was No. 1 for hours spent lobbying at 2,633.

WRA Director of Government Affairs Joe Murray said a lot of the group's effort has been on legislation that was expected to pass in the final days of the session last year, but was put off due to COVID-19. The Senate was expected to meet for a final marathon floor day last year before canceling as the pandemic took hold.

"It was sort of starting over from the previous session with our real estate-specific bills and working the budget at the same time," Murray said.

Rounding out the top five in spending over the first half of 2021 were: the Wisconsin Hospital Association, \$367,778; Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, \$238,309; and Wisconsin Insurance Alliance, \$203,319.

The top five were largely the same as for the first half of 2019 with one exception: the Wisconsin Credit Union League was No. 4 during the first half of that year, but dropped to No. 15 to start this session.

See the list of lobbying efforts for the first half of 2021:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/210804Lobby.pdf>