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# DOT paid lobbyists \$1.5 million

*Agency dismissed them last year*

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COLUMBIA ó The South Carolina Department of Transportation paid its two Washington lobbyists and their firms a total of \$1.5 million since 2001, the agency's records show.

Former GOP Congressman John L. Napier and his firm were paid a total of \$963,000 to represent the agency before members of Congress and the U.S. DOT, the state DOT told *The Greenville News*.

Another \$628,000 was paid to Khare/Fowler Inc. for the services of former Democratic National Committee Chairman Don Fowler, DOT said.

The agency dismissed its lobbyists last year after Transportation Secretary Buck Limehouse became part of the governor's cabinet following the enactment of DOT reform legislation, said Joel Sawyer, a spokesman for Gov. Mark Sanford.

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He said the governor in 2003 signed an executive order banning cabinet agencies from using lobbyists.

"We don't think government should be in the business of paying money to lobby for more taxpayer money," he said. Sawyer said the Governor's Office operates a liaison office with one staff member in Washington but that person doesn't lobby.

Former DOT Commission Chairman Tee Hooper of Greenville, however, said the reason the commission stopped using the lobbyists was to save money.

"It was a cost-saving measure," he said. "I think they (the lobbyists) brought some value. I don't think they were bringing the value that they were getting paid. I think we can do, if not as good, close to as good a job as they were doing for us."

Limehouse told state senators last week that dismissing the lobbyists should save the agency an average of \$265,000 a year. He said he would now meet with members of the state's congressional delegation, whom he said were committed to finding money for the state's transportation needs.

Fowler, however, said trying to save money by replacing lobbyists with staff visits is "penny-wise and pound foolish."

"I think it's short-sighted for them not to have representation, whether it's us or somebody else," he said. "The state is just hurting, crying for money for transportation."

Among those who would like to keep Napier and Fowler as DOT's lobbyists is DOT Commissioner Marion Carnell of Ware Shoals, who said Limehouse told the board that terminating the lobbyists would save money.

"I thought they were doing a real good job," Carnell said. "I would like to have kept them on, myself. But I didn't have the votes."

Limehouse recommended the commission terminate the lobbyists' services last summer, officials said.

Fowler said he and Napier brought funding to the state far exceeding their fees. Among the money, he said, was a \$100 million loan for the Ravenel Bridge in Charleston, which he said came about because of his friendship with the U.S. DOT secretary at the time.

"Our goal was to maximize the amount of money that South Carolina was to get from the U.S. Department of Transportation," Fowler said.

"It would be difficult to quantify exactly what South Carolina got. But he and I were instrumental in getting the \$100 million loan to build the Ravenel Bridge in Charleston. There were a lot of people involved in that and a lot take credit for it. But I am sure we made a major contribution because of our ability to present the case for South Carolina."

Fowler said he and Napier were paid a flat monthly fee. He said his started out at \$7,000 and was increased during his time with DOT, but he didn't remember how much.

A DOT spokesman said he didn't know how much the pair were paid each month. He said the lobbyists gave periodic briefings about their work to the DOT board.

Napier said the state "received a great deal" for the fees they spent on he and Fowler.

"I think our relationship with the department was a good relationship," he said. "I don't think it serves any purpose to delineate what those successes were. I think the record pretty much speaks for itself. I think the people on that board would say at that time and that place we did what needed to be done."

He said members of Congress and their staffs should receive any credit for any funding that came to South Carolina.

Napier, who served in Congress from 1981 until 1982 and later was appointed by President Reagan as a judge on the U.S. Claims Court, said he was first contacted by former DOT Executive Director Betty Mabry and asked about representing the agency in Washington.

He said he had expressed an interest before about doing the job, and the DOT commission eventually approved. It later decided to make its lobbying team bipartisan by hiring Fowler.

Fowler said the pair worked well together and "did the state and the department a great deal of good."

Congressman Bob Inglis of Travelers Rest said the decision to terminate the lobbyists "seems like a reasonable decision to me."

"SCDOT surely has the capacity to appeal directly to the congressional delegation without going through intermediaries," he said.

