

POLITICS

AZ legislator Justin Heap discusses campaign fund email, update on Hobbs inaugural donations

Arizona state Representative Justin Heap of Mesa defended an email he sent to a lobbyist that inquired about donations to his 2022 election campaign.



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ARIZONA, USA — Newly elected Arizona state Representative Justin Heap of Mesa defended an email he sent to a lobbyist that inquired about donations to his 2022 election campaign.

According to a [story by the Washington Post](#) last month, when a lobbyist sought to meet with Heap, he wanted to know first whether the firm the lobbyist worked for donated to his campaign.

Heap is quoted in an email to the lobbyist in which Heap states, “I need to prioritize which meetings I can take... May I ask you, Did (the firm) donate to my campaign fund? And if not, why did you (or your clients) decide not to do so?”

On Monday, Heap told [12News](#) he scheduled a meeting with the lobbyist nonetheless and did nothing inappropriate.

“Out of everyone at the legislature, both houses, both parties, I took less money from lobbyists than any other person, so there’s certainly no quid pro quo or no interest or money-seeking from lobbyists on my part,” Heap said.

Brian Dille, political science professor at Mesa Community College, said Heap's email is an explicit example of a practice that is likely common at the capitol. Dille says donors get priority with many legislators.

"It's unseemly at least and it borders on unethical," Dille said, referring to Heap's email. "It's also dangerous because if you say I won't talk to you unless you give me money, it's one step away from saying I won't vote unless you give me money. That is bribery."

Heap represents portions of Mesa, Maricopa County and Pinal County. He is a member of the "freedom caucus" and ran on a platform that promotes traditional conservative causes and election reforms.

Update on Governor Hobbs Inaugural Funds

Meanwhile, Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs is giving no indication she will transfer excess funds collected for her inauguration to a state protocol fund.

Republican leaders are calling on Hobbs to transfer the money, alleging she used government resources to collect donations.

A campaign committee for Hobbs raised at least \$1.9 million for the inauguration and related events. At least \$1.6 million remains unspent and can be used for political purposes in the future, with some limitations.

As 12News previously reported, the campaign initially did [not publicize donation amounts](#). The committee released the information after inauguration events finished. It revealed [Arizona utility APS gave the maximum donation of \\$250,000](#).

Republican House Speaker Ben Toma tells 12News Arizona law prohibits using the funds to influence elections because Hobbs used state resources to procure the money.

"It is my understanding, based on publicly available information, that there are actually more funds in the Inaugural Fund that still have not been publicly disclosed," Toma stated in an email to 12News. "I'm not sure why Governor Hobbs is refusing to disclose all details about the account or transfer those funds to the state protocol fund as former governors have done."

According to Dille, it would make sense for Hobbs to "segregate" the funds further.

"It raises the issue again of the impact of money on politics," Dille said. "Has anything illegal happened? I don't think so. Has it passed the smell test? Probably not."

Hobbs declined to comment Monday. Nicole DeMont, director of the 501c3 fund, tells 12News by email they went "above and beyond all legal requirements," publicizing donors and expenses.

"Governor Hobbs has always held herself to the highest standards of transparency and accountability," said DeMont. "This level of transparency is unprecedented in Arizona, but it's what Arizonans expect and deserve from their elected officials."

12News asked DeMont to clarify exactly how much money was collected. DeMont had not responded Monday evening.

Some states has laws regulating how inaugural fund donations can be collected and spent. Arizona is not one of them.

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