

Top DNC Committee Is Packed With Fossil Fuel and Bank Lobbyists



Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chairman Tom Perez looks on during the DNC summer meeting on August 23, 2019, in San Francisco, California. Justin Sullivan / Getty Images

By [David Moore](#), [Sludge](#) Published February 27, 2020

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It's likely that going into the Democratic National Convention in July, none of the presidential candidates will have the outright majority of pledged delegates needed to secure the nomination on the first ballot. If that's the case, Democratic National Committee members and other unelected superdelegates will be allowed to vote on a second ballot to choose the nominee.

Despite the pivotal role the DNC is likely to play in selecting who runs against President Trump, there is

little public knowledge of who runs the party and who the superdelegates are.

Sludge has reviewed a full list of 447 voting DNC members as of August 2019 to create the first public profile of the members and their potential conflicts of interest from their work outside of the party. In this article — the first in a series — we look at the members of the Executive Committee, the DNC's top governing body.

The Executive Committee, led by DNC Chairman Tom Perez and nine party officers, appoints the co-chairs and the majority of members on the DNC's four standing committees: Rules and Bylaws, Budget



and Finance, Credentials, and Resolutions. The committee also would decide whether to advance any proposed rule changes from the Convention Rules Committee, such as changes to the superdelegate voting process, to the standing Rules and Bylaws Committee for final approval.

Of the 47 Executive Committee members and DNC officers, Sludge found that 17 have backgrounds in promoting corporate interests: 13 are currently registered lobbyists for for-profit companies, principals at consulting firms with corporate clients, or corporate lawyers; three were corporate lobbyists or corporate lawyers in the last six years, and one was a corporate lobbyist in the past.

Several of the members of the Executive Committee were appointed by Perez in an October 2017 purge after his narrow election as chair and his picks did not require approval from other DNC members before joining the committee. The committee, which is tasked with meeting the most frequently of DNC bodies at four times per year, is also required by the bylaws “to keep a record of its proceedings which shall be available to the public,” though no minutes are made available online by the DNC. Several DNC members told Sludge they do not receive prior consultation from the chair regarding the committee’s agendas and decision process.

The DNC does not make its membership available to the public; for this research, Sludge obtained a copy of the membership list from a DNC member. These lobbyists and consultants, as well as their corporate clients, stand to benefit from their power to decide which candidates the national party supports and, through their committee positions, how the DNC budget is allocated and which messages receive promotion.

Here are the party leaders with backgrounds in corporate lobbying and consulting who Tom Perez has appointed to king-making positions on the Executive Committee.

Tonio Burgos — DNC member from New Jersey

Burgos, who is also a member of the standing Committee on Budget and Finance and one of Perez’s nominees to the Convention Credentials Committee, is a prominent corporate lobbyist in New Jersey and

New York with his firm of over 30 years, [Tonio Burgos & Associates](#). In Albany, one of Burgos’ highest-profile clients has been the Fortune 500 oil and gas company Williams Companies, which paid Burgos’ firm nearly [\\$1 million](#) for lobbying from 2007 to 2016, according to the non-profit Public Accountability Initiative. Williams Companies has [long sought](#) to build a fracked-gas pipeline extending from New Jersey’s Raritan Bay under New York Harbor, a proposal actively opposed by the [Stop The Williams Pipeline](#) coalition of environmental groups. After serving as a top aide and appointments secretary for former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, Burgos became a major donor to his son, current Gov. Andrew Cuomo, giving at least \$85,800 personally to Andrew Cuomo’s campaigns and another \$201,800 through his lobbying firm as of Aug. 2018, according to [PAI](#).

In addition to past fossil fuel industry clients such as National Grid and NRG, Burgos’ 2018 New Jersey lobbying disclosure form lists clients including American Airlines and insurance company AIG. Over in New York, Burgos reported lobbying for dozens of clients, including Pfizer, EmblemHealth, and Verizon, in addition to the Tulsa-based Williams Companies.

Minyon Moore — at-large DNC member

Moore is a [principal](#) at public affairs and lobbying firm Dewey Square Group, where she “leads DSG’s State and Local Affairs and Multicultural Strategies practices with clients ranging from the Fortune 100 to startup non-profits seeking counsel.” DSG’s current [clients](#) include McDonald’s, Sony Pictures, and Lyft. Dewey Square Group has worked with multiple clients in the health insurance industry to block changes to Medicare Advantage that were needed to finance to Affordable Care Act, including an effort to place fake letters to the editor in local newspapers, according to a report from [The Intercept](#), noted by Kevin Gosztola on [Twitter](#). Moore is also a member of the standing Rules and Bylaws Committee and one of Perez’s nominees to the Convention Credentials Committee.

**Jaime Harrison** — DNC Counselor and Associate Chair

Harrison, the chair of the South Carolina Democratic Party from May 2013 to April 2017, is currently running as the Democratic nominee for U.S. Senate against Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham. From 2008 to November 2016, he was a principal at the Podesta Group, which at the time was run by Hillary Clinton bundler Tony Podesta, where his lobbying clients included Lockheed Martin, Wells Fargo, BP America, Merck, Bank of America, and others. One of his clients, American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, which represents coal companies like Murray Energy and Peabody Energy, fought against President Obama's Clean Power plan and other climate-related regulations during the period in which Harrison was registered to lobby for them. In November 2016, Harrison [told](#) the Post and Courier, "It's how I pay back the \$160,000 of student loan debt. It's how I pay the mortgage for my grandmother. And I'm proud of my work..."

Harrison challenged Perez in the February 2017 race for DNC chair but dropped his bid and endorsed the former Secretary of Labor, [citing](#) "external pressure" on DNC members to support Perez or the other leading challenger, then-Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.).

Michael Blake — DNC Vice Chair

Blake is a New York assemblyperson from the Bronx who last year was found to have been paid [up to \\$20,000](#) in 2015 by a prominent political consulting firm, Hilltop Public Solutions, whose clients included Airbnb. In May 2015, as a freshperson, Blake [introduced](#) legislation sought by Airbnb to collect occupancy taxes from renters. Blake and Hilltop, which received \$189,000 [in April 2015](#) from Airbnb for lobbying work, claim he worked for other clients in Maryland and Iowa, though Blake was closely tied to Hilltop's then-partner, Bill Hyers. Blake is now considered among the frontrunners in a crowded primary to replace retiring Democratic Rep. Jose Serrano in the South Bronx congressional district of NY-15.

John Currie — DNC member from New Jersey

Currie, chair of the New Jersey State Democratic Committee, is also a member of the standing DNC

Credentials Committee. In 1998, Currie [lobbied](#) with First Chicago NBD Corp regarding finance and bankruptcy [issues](#) for Bank One Corporation, which merged with JPMorgan Chase in 2004. In December 2019, South Jersey Democrats [appeared to have](#) secured enough votes in the state party to replace Currie, an ally of New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, with their pick of LeRoy Jones, the Essex County Democratic Party Chair, but deals were struck to keep Currie in place for another term until 2021, enabling him to oversee this year's delegate selection process for the 2020 convention in Milwaukee. New Jersey Senate President Steve Sweeney continued to put pressure on the Murphy administration with a [bill](#) in December 2019 that would require more "shadow lobbyists" register and disclose their spending. According to his state party [bio](#), "Currie has been involved in the car business for over forty years and is a partner in General Motors new car dealerships in northern New Jersey."

Susan R. Swecker — DNC member from Virginia

Swecker, chair of Democratic Party of Virginia since 2015, is currently a consultant and president at [Dividing Waters Public Affairs, LLC](#), which, according to its website, provides "direct lobbying services at every level in Virginia." In September 2019, Swecker, acting as a consultant, [placed calls](#) to Charlottesville area state legislators with questions for a client, casino gaming company Queen of Virginia Skill & Entertainment. According to documents accessed from the the state ethics committee, Swecker [registered](#) to lobby for Mastercard in early 2014. Swecker's firm's gross income was over \$250,000 in 2017, according to a financial disclosure [form](#) signed in January 2018. Swecker is also a member of the standing Rules and Bylaws Committee.

Emmy Ruiz — at-large DNC member

A political strategist, Ruiz is currently a partner at [NEWCO](#) Strategies, based in Austin, Texas. In February 2019, Ruiz [joined](#) as senior adviser for Sen. Kamala Harris' 2020 presidential campaign. Previously, in 2016, Ruiz was Hillary Clinton's state director in Nevada and Colorado. NEWCO partner Jess O'Connell [signed up](#) in July 2019 to advise the Buttigieg campaign on early primary states.



“Immediately following the 2016 election, Emmy worked to elect Labor Secretary Tom Perez to Democratic Party National Chair,” according to NEWCO’s website. Ruiz is also a member of the standing Rules and Bylaws Committee.

Will T. Cheek — DNC member from Tennessee

Cheek, who is also a member of the standing Credentials Committee, is a partner at [Waller Law](#), where he is billed as “the go-to liquor attorney in Tennessee.” Cheek “works in concert with Waller’s Government Relations team” to draft state and local liquor legislation, the firm’s website says. Waller advertises legal services in the [healthcare](#), [financial](#), private equity, and [real estate](#) industries.

Hon. Lottie Shackelford — at-large DNC member

Shackelford is a former DNC vice chair and was mayor of Little Rock, Arkansas from 1987 through 1988. As senior executive vice president of consulting firm [Global USA](#), Shackelford’s past lobbying [clients](#) include Allstate Insurance (2008), Hyundai (2008-2011), and FM Policy Focus, a coalition also known as FM Watch [comprised](#) of financial industry trade groups that represent the largest banks in America (2000-2008). In 2006, Shackelford lobbied for Strategic Communication Company on “taxes pertaining to oil and gas companies,” according to records maintained by ProPublica. Shackelford is also a co-chair of the DNC’s standing Credentials Committee.

Christine Pelosi — DNC member from California

Pelosi, who is U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s daughter, is also a member of the standing Resolutions Committee. Pelosi is a San Francisco-based Democratic strategist and, according to LinkedIn, has been a [partner](#) at IMPACTfirm since 2017. IMPACTfirm does not have a working website, but an [archived version](#) of the site describes it as “an advocacy firm with decades of community, government and business experience.” She is a cofounder and vice chair of the DNC [Veterans & Military Families council](#), and is chair of the California Democratic Party’s Women’s Caucus. In

2016, Pelosi joined the then-director of progressive group MoveOn in calling for reforms that would reduce the influence of unelected superdelegates in party’s nominating processes, such as preventing them from casting votes on the first nominating ballot at the convention unless pledged delegates had already picked a majority winner. According to her Netroots Nation speaker [bio](#), she has served as prosecutor in San Francisco, special counsel in the Clinton-Gore administration, and chief of staff on Capitol Hill.

Belkis (Bel) W. Leong-Hong — DNC member from Maryland

Leong-Hong is currently the founder, president and CEO at Knowledge Advantage, a consulting firm founded in 1999 with [clients](#) that have included GE Capital Financial, Lockheed Martin, the Department of Homeland Security, and multiple federal financial contractors. According to her Asian American and Pacific Islanders PAC bio [page](#), “She is a Trustee of the MD State Democratic Party, and is a member of the MDP Executive Council, a member of the Business Council, the Leadership Council, and the Women Leadership Network of MD.” Leong-Hong is also a member of the standing Credentials Committee.

Mark Mallory — DNC member from Ohio

The former [mayor](#) of Cincinnati from December 2005 to the end of 2013 (reelected once), Mallory is currently a consultant with his firm Mark Mallory & Assoc., which is based in Cincinnati. One client that [hired](#) him in February 2018 to interact with city government was Major League Soccer franchise FC Cincinnati.

Royce B. West — DNC member from Texas

A [Texas senator](#) since 1992 representing Dallas County, West [joined](#) the Democratic primary field in July 2019 to challenge Sen. John Cornyn (R-Tex.) in 2020. West is also a [managing partner](#) at West & Assoc., LLP, a law firm with offices in Dallas and Houston that provides corporate law and commercial litigation [services](#). In a recent Texas Tribune [profile](#), West defended his firm’s millions in legal fees from representing public entities such as school boards, downplaying potential conflicts of interest with



corporate clients such as Bank of America Securities and Lehman Brothers.

In 2011, West was the [subject](#) of a FBI search warrant for the records of his political ally, County Commissioner John Wiley Price, examining their role in plans for developing southern Dallas' inland port project. West was not charged with any crime, and in April 2017 Price was [found](#) not guilty on 7 of 11 counts, with the remaining four charges declared a mistrial after the jury deadlocked. For West, it was his second federal ethics investigation, the previous one around lobbying work in 2006-2007 for Wai-Wize, a Dallas-based telecommunications firm controlled by influential political consultant Willis E. Johnson. West was never accused of a crime. The Dallas News reported that his law firm received \$2.8 million from Dallas Independent School District for legal services between 2006 and 2010.

David Pepper — DNC member from Ohio

Pepper, chair of the Ohio Democratic Party, worked with law firms Squire Sanders and [Blank Rome](#) on commercial and business litigation until December 2014. After an underwhelming state Democratic performance in the 2018 elections, Pepper faced intra-party chatter [questioning](#) the strategic decision of a 35-day bus tour of smaller towns. A former Cincinnati city councilperson who lost in his campaign for mayor, Pepper came up short in state-wide races for auditor in 2010 and attorney general in 2014. According to Cleveland politics reporter Seth A. Richardson, 'The Ohio Democratic Party's executive committee elected Pepper as its chairman over Sharon Neuhardt, [U.S. Sen. Sherrod] Brown's preferred candidate, shortly after the 2014 election.'

DNC Officers' Corporate Ties

In addition, three DNC officers on the Executive Committee hold jobs at corporate consulting or law firms.

Hon. Karen Carter Peterson — DNC Vice-Chair for Civic Engagement and Voter Protection

Since 2014, Peterson has been [counsel](#) at Dentons, the largest corporate law firm in the world. A DNC member from Louisiana, Peterson is also a Louisiana state senator and the chair of the Louisiana

Democratic Party. Dentons' clients include oil majors, as well as insurance, real estate, banking and finance companies. At the climactic DNC member meeting of August 2018, NBC News [reported](#) that Peterson spoke out on behalf of a group of African-American and Latino opponents to the reform package, including some older party leaders. The reforms, which passed in a rushed acclimation instead of a paper ballot vote, bar unelected superdelegates from voting on the first nominating ballot at the convention (unless a candidate has already reached a majority of pledged delegates).

Bill Derrough — DNC Treasurer

[Derrough](#) is co-head of investment banking firm Moelis & Co, which he joined in 2008. The publicly-traded Moelis' [clients](#) have included the Government of Dubai, the second-largest Japanese bank, and companies in fintech, agribusiness, and media. Through Moelis' hire of Republican Eric Cantor, the former House Majority Leader, to open its D.C. office in September 2014, the bank [sought to](#) woo the "Dulles Corridor" of defense contractors and technology companies in Northern Virginia. Over the past 30 years, Derrough's [bio](#) reads, he has helped restructure hundreds of entities across the U.S., from companies to nonprofits to government entities, representing over \$600 billion.

Jason Rae — DNC Secretary

Rae, who in 2012 became the youngest person ever elected to the DNC, was [elected](#) secretary in February 2017 with 224 of the 420 votes cast. In November 2017, Rae became a partner at [Nation Consulting](#), a Milwaukee-based firm where he has worked since 2012 and whose clients include WEC Energy Group, one of the nation's largest electric utility and natural gas delivery holding companies, as well as local Democratic politicians. [Rae](#) was the chair of the DNC Youth Council from 2007 to 2017 and currently serves as president and CEO for the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce. A resident of Milwaukee, host city of the July 13-16 convention, [Rae](#) is also a member of the standing Rules and Bylaws Committee.



More Day Jobs of DNC Leaders

Also on the Executive Committee are the following members: [Casey Steinau](#), chair of the Alaska Democratic Party, “a twenty-plus-year veteran of the real estate industry and small business owner”; Jesse Durfee, a DNC member from California, chair of the Western Region Caucus, and, since February 2016, a [member](#) of the board of directors of the California State Fair; and Carol Fowler, the former South Carolina state Democratic party chairperson who [serves](#) as a member of the Columbia Metropolitan Airport commission, and who with her husband, Donald, is a well-known candidate-visit [host](#).

An Executive Committee member not included in the above count is Gus Bickford, DNC member from Massachusetts. Bickford, [chair](#) of the Massachusetts Democratic Party since November 2016, is also a member of the standing Resolutions Committee and is one of Perez’s nominees to the Convention Credentials Committee. Bickford is a strategist as president of his [Factotum Productions](#), which specializes in data services for nonprofits and Democratic campaigns.

Another is [Gayle Jones Carson](#), DNC member from Tennessee, who according to her LinkedIn profile since 2007 has directed corporate communications for Memphis Light, Gas & Water, becoming its Vice President of Community & External Affairs a little over a year ago. Previously, after working in media for the city of Memphis, Carson worked in corporate communications for FedEx for over two decades.

Executive Control Over Convention Rules

After the DNC was revealed to have funneled over \$82 million to the Clinton campaign during the 2016 presidential primary, the DNC’s Unity Reform Commission of 2017 sought to increase democratic governance within party leadership. The Unity Reform Commission was made up of [21 members](#), with ten selected by then-nominee Hillary Clinton, eight by Bernie Sanders, and three by Perez. While some members’ transparency and ethics proposals were outvoted, the primary reform it brought back to the standing Rules and Bylaws Committee was to reduce the influence of unelected superdelegates — including dozens more corporate lobbyists and party

vendors — on the nominating process. It did this by restricting superdelegates’ votes to the second ballot, which would only come into play if no candidate receives a majority on the first ballot.

While this reform was endorsed by a deadline-driven process of [acclimation](#) in a full DNC member meeting in August 2018, these superdelegate rules are currently in the Convention Rules, not articulated themselves in the DNC Charter. If the DNC Convention Rules Committee were to recommend a change that allowed superdelegates to vote on the first ballot again, as some DNC members have been [discussing](#), the proposal would go back to the DNC Executive Committee, which in turn would refer it to the standing Rules and Bylaws Committee. If that committee endorsed the change, “the Executive Committee may adopt the recommendations of the Rules and Bylaws Committee as such temporary Convention rules,” according to the [DNC Charter](#) (Article 2, section 10, (d)(iv), located at the top of page 18 in that linked document).

While the Convention Rules Committee is still to be fully formed in proportion to candidates’ pledged delegates, the recent pattern of [breakdowns in communication](#) between the DNC chair and members, combined with [Perez’s recent nomination of a Bloomberg campaign senior adviser to the Convention Rules Committee](#), opens up the possibility of another unilateral decision by the chair that would overturn the highly contested superdelegate voting rules.

Many of the figures above were among DNC Chair Tom Perez’s nominees to the three convention committees that will refine the rules and write the platform at July’s national gathering in Milwaukee. The next reports in this series, based on interviews with current and former DNC members, will examine more corporate lobbyists and consultants on Perez’s standing committees and how the Rules and Bylaws Committee has repeatedly rejected conflict-of-interest and governance policies on-par with those of other privately-held companies.