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POLITICS

Slotkin leasing Lansing home from business executive, campaign donor



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Democratic U.S. Rep. Elissa Slotkin holds a seven-month lease on a condo in Lansing's Old Town neighborhood that is owned by an executive and board member of the firm Niowave Inc., a Lansing-based manufacturer of medical radioisotopes that does business with the federal government.

Slotkin also advocated for a government program that her landlord's company benefited from. That's made Slotkin's residency in Lansing a topic of debate in her hotly contested race for a third term against Republican state Sen. Tom Barrett of Charlotte, which is among the most competitive U.S. House contests nationally.

The Lansing property is owned by Jerry and Kathy Hollister. Jerry Hollister is a part-time director of government relations at Niowave who is currently living in Connecticut but continues to be registered to vote at the Lansing home where Slotkin registered to vote on May 17, according to city and state records.

Hollister, the son of Lansing's former Mayor David Hollister, is also a donor to Slotkin's campaign, having contributed \$1,850 total since 2018, according to the campaign.

Amid Michigan's redistricting process, Slotkin last fall decided to move into the new Lansing-based 7th District from her family home in Holly to run for reelection.

Slotkin's seven-month lease of Hollister's home ends in mid-November, a week after the Nov. 8 election – an arrangement that has raised questions about her residency in her tossup race against Barrett.

Jason Cabel Roe, an adviser to Barrett's campaign, said the short-term lease is a sign that Slotkin's Lansing residency is a "stunt," suggesting she's likely spending most of her time at her family home in northern Oakland County and Washington, D.C.

"She's known these district lines long enough that finding a legitimate residence within the district shouldn't be that difficult," Roe said. "I also have not heard of a lot of seven-month leases. There was definitely favorable terms in terms of only having to sign a lease that got her through the election."

Slotkin's campaign disputed those claims and said the congresswoman intends to purchase a home in the Lansing area after the terms of the Old Town lease are up. The campaign said she began working with a real estate agent late last year and toured seven homes but, given the fast-moving market at the time, opted to rent on a short-term basis instead.

The campaign said Slotkin is paying a fair-market rate for the furnished condo: \$2,000 a month including utilities, according to a copy of the lease provided to The Detroit News. Both Hollister and the campaign said Slotkin is not sharing the property with Hollister, despite claims by Republicans. Indeed, the lease instructs Slotkin to mail rent payments to the Hollisters at an address in Mystic, Connecticut.

"Since the term of this lease began and our renters occupied the Lansing Property, neither my wife nor I have lived at the Lansing Property," Hollister wrote in a signed affidavit provided to The News by Slotkin's campaign. "I have never lived with Rep. Slotkin."

Hollister told The News that he and his wife intend to split their time between Michigan and Connecticut, where they own a second home to be closer to family, including their two children in college in New England.

Hollister said he met Slotkin at the 2018 MLK Breakfast in Lansing when she was first running for Congress. After learning that Slotkin intended to move to Lansing, Hollister said he reached out to one of her staffers to ask if she had an interest in leasing his condo. Hollister provided a screenshot of a text exchange to this effect dated Jan. 11 – two weeks after Michigan's redistricting maps became official.

“Elissa Slotkin has served our country her entire adult life, and attacking her integrity is ridiculous. The facts here are plain: the Congresswoman is paying market rate rent to a

landlord, just like thousands of mid-Michiganders. Her landlord lives in Connecticut with his wife, he is not a registered lobbyist anywhere, and he works part-time for a mid-Michigan manufacturing company," Slotkin spokeswoman Lynsey Mukomel said. "She has never done anything in Congress that inappropriately benefits his company."

Mukomel also blasted Barrett and his allies for falsely insinuating that there is an inappropriate relationship between Slotkin, who is married, and her landlord, including the suggestion that they are living together.

"To be clear, this is patently false, a salacious allegation, and is far beneath the voters of this district," Mukomel said.

But Barrett's campaign consultant argued that the optics of any elected official sharing an address with a "lobbyist" are not good.

"She made quite a to-do over getting a residency in Lansing, as opposed to her actual home outside of the district in Holly, and the carelessness of choosing to share a residence with a lobbyist I think raises legitimate questions," Roe said.

Candidates for Congress are not legally required to live in the district they seek to represent.

Niowave has 'engaged' members of Congress

Barrett's campaign has questioned a letter Slotkin signed in December 2020 in support of a program at the U.S. Department of Energy that has awarded \$28 million total in grants to Niowave in 2019 and 2021 for it to boost production of the medical isotope molybdenum-99(Mo-99) that's used in thousands of medical procedures, including medical imaging.

"Whether they're sharing a bathroom when they brush their teeth in the morning or not, it is the impropriety of that relationship: This is a person who had business before the Congress, and she's in a position to help him," Roe said of the Niowave executive leasing his home to Slotkin.

Slotkin's campaign said she did not advocate for the Niowave grants. The letter she signed did not mention Niowave or any other company by name but expressed support for the

National Nuclear Security Administration's program for developing and accelerating a domestic supply of Mo-99 without using highly enriched uranium. The letter also notes that Congress has provided funding for competitive, cooperative agreements with Mo-99 manufacturing partners around the country, "including in Michigan." Niowave is in this category.

Slotkin's campaign noted that her Republican predecessor, Rep. Mike Bishop of Rochester, signed onto a similar letter of support for the government's Mo-99 program in 2018. The campaign said Slotkin was asked to sign the 2020 letter by the office of U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Lansing, which confirmed that it initiated both the 2018 and 2020 letters.

The other signatories of the 2020 letter were Sen. Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Township, and Republican Rep. John Moolenaar of Midland, whose district hosts a Niowave facility. Niowave asked Moolenaar to sign the letter, spokesman David Russell said Thursday.

"For all their denying it, it seems Niowave was the one who approached these members to sign" the letter, Barrett said, calling the entire situation an "outrageous" conflict of interest.

"There are 1,513 apartments available to rent in Lansing if you go on Apartments.com. I looked it up today," Barrett said. "That Elissa Slotkin wants us to believe that in the entire coincidence of the entire universe, somehow she landed in the residence of a lobbyist, and there's no untoward or ethical questions about that is ridiculous. Her husband doesn't even live there."

Slotkin's campaign said her husband, Dave Moore, has never been registered to vote in Michigan because his work as a Pentagon contractor largely keeps him in Washington.

Hollister said the idea that Slotkin did a favor for Niowave or that some impropriety exists is "frankly, ridiculous."

"Niowave has engaged all Members of Congress on both the House and Senate sides for over a decade to be aware of our operations and the importance of a domestic supply of medical radioisotopes. Elissa has never done anything in Congress – either through a vote or any other advocacy – that specifically helped Niowave," Hollister said in an email to The News.

He said Niowave has been headquartered in Lansing since before Slotkin was elected, and that several development programs over the past decade plus, including the one to ramp up the domestic manufacturing industry for medical radioisotopes, received similar support from her predecessors including Bishop and GOP Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Howell.

"In fact, the overall funding that we have received from the federal government has declined since Rep. Slotkin took office," Hollister said.

From 2007-17, Niowave received roughly \$25 million through the federal Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs, and an additional \$13 million from the U.S. Navy and Department of Homeland Security, Hollister said. Niowave was later selected for a \$15 million award from the NNSA in late 2018 before Slotkin took office, and then received a follow-on award of \$13 million announced in December 2021, Hollister said.

'I am not a lobbyist'

Hollister also pushed back against being called a lobbyist, even though his LinkedIn profile says his part-time government relations role at Niowave "is to continue developing Congressional (sic) relationships, local community relationships, and media relationships important to continued growth." Hollister previously was the company's chief operating officer with responsibility for customer development, proposal development and contract execution, according to LinkedIn.

He is not registered to lobby at the state or federal level, and he said that is because, "I am not a lobbyist."

"Government interface accounts for approximately 5% of my work," Hollister said.

"Niowave isn't a lobbying entity, and doesn't have any lobbyists registered to lobby on its behalf at either the federal level or in Michigan."

Under the federal Lobbying Disclosure Act, individuals are not required to register as a lobbyist if they didn't spend 20% or more of their time on lobbying activities for a particular client over a three-month period.

Hollister maintained that because he intends to split his time between Michigan and Connecticut, it is legal for him to keep his Michigan voter registration under state law.

Lansing City Clerk Chris Swope told The News that Hollister contacted him in the spring to clarify this point.

Swope, a Democrat, said he told Hollister that, yes, those who move out of state and have an intent to return may continue voting in Michigan as long as they don't register and vote in the new state.

Swope said this can happen in cases when someone moves for college, military duty, medical caretaking or out-of-state job assignments.

"His ballot for (the August primary) was mailed to his address in Connecticut, as his November ballot will be," Swope said, adding that Hollister returned a voted ballot in the Aug. 2 primary election.

The Hollisters have also maintained their "homestead" or principal residence exemption on the Lansing property and have not filed a request to rescind that exemption, according to the Lansing Assessing Department.

That exemption, which exempts an owner's principal residence from the tax levied by a local school district up to 18 mills, is supposed to be for Michiganians who own and occupy a home as a fixed, permanent residence or to which, whenever absent, they intend to return.

Lansing Deputy Assessor Darren Carter said folks such as "snow birds," who spend winters in Florida, are generally allowed to keep the exemption.

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