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Google is a Washington powerhouse that shapes federal law, rewards congressional allies and boasts a new 54,000-square-foot office, just down the road from the U.S. Capitol. But the Internet giant quietly has planted its political roots in places far beyond the Beltway — in state legislatures and city councils that have become hotbeds for tech policy fights. The company has hired an army of lobbyists from coast to coast as it seeks to protect its self-driving cars, computer-mounted glasses and other emerging technologies from new rules and restrictions, according to an analysis of state records.

It's an aggressive offensive meant to counter local regulators, who increasingly cast a skeptical eye on Silicon Valley and its ambitious visions for the future. Google this year has retained a quartet of lobbyists in Maryland to remove any roadblocks facing its fleet of driver-free Priuses. It's tapped consultants in California, Utah, Georgia and other states where the company has tried to deploy its ultrafast Fiber Internet. In Illinois and beyond, Google has worked to battle back legislation that might affect Glass, its high-tech spectacles. And the tech giant has cozied up to leaders in New York state and New York City, while camping out in Massachusetts to seek changes in state tax laws. "Google is an example of a company that has, in very short order, come to value political engagement in a very expensive way," said Lee Drutman, a senior fellow at the Sunlight Foundation. "One of the things you see when a company becomes engaged in politics: They realize it's not just federal politics, but state and local politics" that matter.

In a sense, Google agrees. "Technology issues are a big part of current policy discussions, not just at the federal level but in the states as well," a spokeswoman acknowledged. "It's important to be part of those discussions and to help policymakers understand new technologies, Google's business, and the work we do to encourage economic opportunity."

In Washington, Google is already a political behemoth. The tech giant spent more than \$3.8 million to lobby federal lawmakers on privacy, patent and immigration reforms just in the first quarter of 2014, according to federal records. So far in the 2014 election cycle, the company also has donated \$1.1 million to federal candidates. And it just took residence this month in a new Massachusetts Avenue office that's within walking distance of Capitol Hill, symbolizing the company's meteoric political growth since federal antitrust regulators investigated it in 2012. But Google's political tentacles reach far beyond the nation's capital. It's especially evident with Google Fiber, its attempt to wire population centers with ultrafast, gigabit-speed Internet. The company aims to take Fiber to a total of 34 cities — possibly including San Jose, Charlotte and Atlanta — but only if it's able to secure enough local interest along with changes to city and state laws. Already, Google has deployed its lobbyists and lawyers on the ground — long before it has summoned any shovels or dump trucks.

Google wants cities to map out nearby poles and cable lines. In some cases, it has asked regulators to change laws to permit the company and others easier access to that infrastructure, too. Google further seeks a point person in each Fiber location to handle and streamline the building applications process. And the tech giant has started negotiating contracts on where it can store the physical units that house fiber cables and deliver service to homes. Armed with a regulatory wish list, Google has tapped its long-standing lobbyists in places like California, while registering this year a team of lawyers as its chief influencers in cities like San Jose and Santa Barbara, according to local records. And it has relied on a stable of government-relations minds in Oregon, Utah, Arizona, Texas, Kansas, Georgia and North Carolina to see Fiber to fruition, those states' data show.

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For Google, the aim is to get “cities to do things — not subsidize us, but do things ... that lower the cost” to build and offer fiber service, explained Blair Levin, the architect of the Federal Communications Commission’s National Broadband Plan. He’s now the executive director of Gig.U, which works to help bring next-generation Internet to cities and states. At times, though, Google has been forced to play aggressive defense. Its Fiber project repeatedly has triggered opposition from entrenched telecom companies in places like Kansas — and Google has lobbied legislatures, written letters and sounded off to keep Fiber on track. “If you want to be serious, and you want to be innovative, and you want to have states courting you as a potential source of jobs, you have to establish relations on the ground,” said Harold Feld, senior vice president of Public Knowledge. “Google is a lot more out there than other tech companies have been in terms of understanding that.”

Google’s self-driving car has posed that particular challenge: Twelve states this year alone have explored some new regulation of those vehicles on local roadways, according to data compiled for POLITICO by the National Conference of State Legislatures. And in almost each of those capitals, Google has lobbied intensely to stave off any new, onerous restrictions. In order to test its fast-evolving fleet of autonomous cars, Google first had to secure some states’ permission to put them on major roadways. It deployed an army of consultants beginning in 2011, and it notched much-needed wins in Nevada and California — often by wooing local interest groups and regulators with rides. More recently, Google worked in early 2014 to oppose two bills in New Jersey that might create a special class of driver’s licenses for self-driving cars, according to state records. Both measures are pending further action.

The automated-vehicle debate prompted Google to hire its four Maryland lobbyists in February, according to state documents, though the company quickly filed amended reports that removed any trace of the issue from its list of activities. Still, from February to April, Google had spent about \$16,000 on its Maryland consultants. Google similarly has trained its sights on new rules that would ban drivers from wearing Glass, its computer, while behind the wheel. Illinois and Delaware are two states that recently have considered such laws — and places where Google has mounted a lobbying defense.

Proposed restrictions on Glass also number among the many items on Google’s regulatory radar in New York. There, the company further lobbied against potential self-driving car rules on top of a torrent of consumer privacy proposals from May 2013 to March 2014, the records reflect. To that end, Google paid two lobbying firms more than \$110,000 in compensation over the course of 2013. And it doled out an additional \$96,000 to connect specifically with council members in New York City, where Google has a major office.

In Massachusetts, Google spent \$91,000 in 2013 on lobbyists who opposed a bill that prohibited “service providers who offer cloud computing services to K-12 educational institutions from processing student data for commercial purposes,” according to state data. Google also lobbied on a host of general business issues, like “economic development.” The company declined to detail its specific agenda — or make available anyone for an interview — but Massachusetts last year did debate and abolish a controversial tax on computer and software services.

The company has maintained a team of five lobbyists in Texas, years after the state’s attorney general started an antitrust probe in tandem with the federal government. In North Carolina, Google shelled out a rough total of \$54,000 to lobby regulators on taxes, telecommunications, education and more, local ethics filings reveal. Both states also are targets for Google Fiber projects. And Google racked up \$30,000 in lobbying spending in Michigan in 2013 — but wouldn’t fully disclose its policy targets. There, and in many states, it’s impossible to tally Google’s total level of influence or its political agenda because local laws don’t require that level of transparency. While the company does maintain a website detailing some of its federal work, it lacks detail about Google’s state

operations.

For now, all signs point toward Google expanding its nationwide political footprint. The company even appears to be in the market to hire additional state government relations aides in the nation's capital, according to its employment listings. "Google faces a challenge in some respects in that they're new to the game," said Lee Drutman of the Sunlight Foundation, comparing Google's sizable but new state footprint to the likes of telecom giants and taxicab companies that have major local footholds. Still, he added, "There's something that happens, as a company grows up ... that it cares about politics at all levels." *Politico*

Former Pennsylvania Gov. Dick Thornburgh has been hospitalized in Pittsburgh after suffering a mild stroke. His wife Ginny Thornburgh tells the [*Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*](#) the stroke happened Saturday at their weekend home in Ligonier. She says a doctor told her that 81-year-old Dick Thornburgh "will do well from a recovery point of view." She says he's resting comfortably at UPMC Presbyterian hospital. As governor in 1979, Thornburgh led the state during the Three Mile Island nuclear crisis. The Republican later served as U.S. attorney general under both presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Bush appointed him undersecretary general of the United Nations after Thornburgh lost a Senate race in 1991. *Associated Press*



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