



## K STREET INSIDERS

### The hypocrisy of reform

By Howard Marlowe

Posted: 08/01/07 08:41 PM [ET]

The lobbying profession, which has never enjoyed a great public reputation, has taken a pounding from all quarters since the Abramoff scandal. Concerned the fallout would threaten their control of Capitol Hill, last Congress's Republican leaders vowed to enact lobbying reforms. But Election Day arrived before they could act, and the Democratic leadership of the 110th Congress made enacting reforms a top priority. For nearly a year, lawmakers have slung verbal arrows our way.

For example, Rep. Zack Space (D-Ohio) stated on the House floor, "The influence of lobbyists has compromised the reputation and even the health of this body." He called for action that would "breach the circle of deceit between lobbyists, their wealthy clients and this body."

White House hopefuls also have advocated for putting distance between elected officials and lobbyists. One senator in the 2008 race for president, Barack Obama (D-Ill.), declared during a campaign event: "We need a president who sees government not as a tool to enrich well-connected friends and high-priced lobbyists, but as the defender of fairness and opportunity for every American." Candidates such as Obama and former Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.) have returned campaign donations from lobbyists.

Legislation was passed earlier this year (S.1 and H.R. 2316) to limit the power of lobbyists on Capitol Hill. Both measures include a provision that requires lobbyists to report cash they round up, or "bundle," for lawmakers' campaigns and political action committees (PACs). Despite approval of this stipulation, it became a sticking point that slowed final passage. The fear, of course, was that the provision might curb contributions to the campaigns and leadership PACs of members of Congress. Ironically, another contentious provision would have doubled the amount of time during which members are prohibited from lobbying after they leave Congress. As much as Congress bashes lobbyists, our profession is probably the single largest employer of former lawmakers and congressional aides.

The lobbyist-bashing from members of Congress is hypocritical. The day after they attack, they send lobbyists invitations to donate to their campaigns. I haven't given a political dollar this year and wish that other lobbyists would withhold or scale back their contributions as well. You might term it a "job action" designed to make it clear that we dislike being treated as convenient punching bags.

Having been in the lobbying profession for nearly three decades, it's painfully clear that the most important reform that's needed is to sharply curtail the influence that political money has in the legislative process. Yet every step that Congress has taken in recent years has had the opposite effect. In the past, I could have taken a member or congressional staffer out for a meal for \$50. Now I need to shell out \$1,000 to see them for a few moments at a political fundraiser. All members of Congress understandably need money to get reelected, and lobbyists are a ready source of campaign funds. Ironically, many members of Congress use the funds they raise to give to other members of Congress. The more Congress makes it difficult for lobbyists to have contacts within the legislative process, the more it shifts those contacts to the political arena where big money clearly does count.

A good start on lobbying reform would be enforcing the laws already in place. Congress has not provided the funds to make sure that those who are supposed to register as lobbyists are actually doing so. Years ago, I testified at a Senate hearing on lobbying reform and proposed that Congress prohibit members and would-be members of Congress from soliciting registered lobbyists for political contributions. My intention was to offer some benefit to those who abide by the law. The senator chairing the hearing turned from a discussion with a staff aide to ask that I repeat my suggestion. "Oh, no," he said. "I don't think that would be a good idea." I hope that senator would agree with me that attacking the lobbying profession as a whole while seeking political contributions from those same individuals isn't a good idea either.

*Howard Marlowe is president of Marlowe & Company, a lobbying firm that represents municipalities and counties.*

---

[Close Window](#)