

# 'For such a time as this': New rules hamper lobbyists

By Deanna R. Gelak

**M**any of the increased Hill security restrictions are undoubtedly a sign of the times in which we live and do our work in and around a targeted Capitol. However, it is with heavy hearts that we contrast today's tense Hill situation with the pleasant and relatively carefree atmosphere where many of us have enjoyed participating for decades.

We appreciate the incredible demands and pressures placed on the individuals accountable for the safety and security of all of those who work on and around Capitol Hill in today's apprehensive environment. Those of us who frequently conduct our work on Capitol Hill also have a personal stake in effective security. We fully support the objectives of safety and security.

We understand that to be actively engaged in today's participatory system in our nation's Capitol means to understand inconvenience, delays and, as illustrated recently, even personal risks.

During these uncertain times, even as we hold up America's system and defend her, an imperative for heightened security is testing aspects of our participatory process. Indeed, practical and long-term concerns have emerged. Inadvertently, the heightened security has limited citizen access to key legislative events (particularly those in the Capitol) and is beginning



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*Gelak: Limited access is testing our political system.*

to test aspects of the very political system that we are proud to hold up and defend.

Prior to Sept. 11, an enormous amount of information was regularly provided to members of Congress and their staffs on a timely basis from government affairs professionals and other information providers. While not as apparent in the short-term, a long-term corrosive effect threatens the system when citizen representatives can only enter the Capitol building "by appointment," even when buzzing with time-sensitive legislative activities such as mark-ups, floor amendments and hearings. Delays of access and information delivery to members and staff have

resulted from the system of restrictions. The closing of the underground walk from the House to the Senate, coupled with the complete closing of the block on the east side of the Capitol due to construction, have disrupted efforts by information providers attempting to travel between the House and the Senate office buildings.

Decisions are only as good as the input received. Today as always, the quality of our democracy depends on the participation of the governed. Information and oversight from representatives from opposing perspectives and groups without political action committees contribute to a healthy process.

Despite these difficult times, we can't

lose sight of the imperative to be the government of, by and for the people. We are hopeful that in a place as great as this America, an innovative and secure system could be devised to restore the recent restrictions on our citizens' First Amendment rights to "petition the government for the redress of grievances." Surely, the commitment to innovation and ideals which has made our nation great will enable her to rise above the challenges of our era to effectively meet the twin goals of heightened security and the restoration of appropriate citizen access.

We invite governmental affairs professionals to join with the American League of Lobbyists (see [www.alldc.org](http://www.alldc.org)) as we address the range of critical issues confronting our profession. By pulling together as part of your professional association, we can collectively address the rapidly changing issues, which will continue to confront us for such a time as this.

*Deanna Gelak is the 16th president of the American League of Lobbyists (ALL). Established in 1979, ALL is the national professional association dedicated exclusively to lobbying. A nonprofit organization, ALL's mission is to enhance the development of professionalism, competence and high ethical standards for advocates in the public policy arena, and to collectively address challenges affecting the First Amendment right to "petition the government for redress of grievances."*

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