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CONTACT: Naomi Seligman (CREW):
202.408.5565 // nseligman@citizensforethics.org
Michael Fulton (ALL):
703.741.7521 // mfulton@golinharris.com
Mandy Simon (ACLU):
202.715.0834 // asimon@dcaclu.org

DIVERSE COALITION OF ORGANIZATIONS CALL FOR WHITE HOUSE TO RESCIND RULE RESTRICTING LOBBYIST COMMUNICATIONS ON BAILOUT FUNDS

ACLU, CREW and ALL Argue Rule Will Not Improve Transparency and Accountability

Washington, D.C. -- Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the American League of Lobbyists (ALL) urged the White House today to rewrite a restrictive new rule on registered lobbyists seeking Recovery Act bailout funds, saying it would not achieve the transparency and accountability the administration seeks.

In a letter to White House Counsel Gregory Craig, the groups asked President Barack Obama to rescind and reissue a section of a memorandum, released on March 20, which bans all phone calls and face-to-face conversations between registered lobbyists and executive branch officials involved in funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

In their letter, the groups said the directive was both too narrow – because it did not apply to non-registered lobbyists such as bank vice presidents or corporate directors – and also too broad, because it incorrectly assumed that all registered lobbyists may exert improper pressure for clients seeking funding for Recovery Act projects.

Additionally, the right to petition the government is one of the main tenets of our country's founding principles. To state that one class of individuals may not participate in the same manner as all others is clearly a violation of this principle.

“We believe that all Americans have the right to equally petition their government and that includes registered lobbyists,” Dave Wenhold, President of the American League of Lobbyists, stated. “No citizen should be forced to give up that civil right, regardless of their

profession. These diverse organizations joining together demonstrate that this ill-advised Executive Memo crosses all boundaries. This is not a change we can believe in.”

This action will not end lobbying, it will merely replace registered lobbyists -- who must abide by strict registration and disclosure requirements -- with corporate officials -- not subject to these strictures -- who will take on the task of lobbying.

Melanie Sloan, executive director of CREW, said today, “We applaud President Obama for his efforts to improve government transparency and accountability, but this restriction won’t do that. Banning lobbyists from speaking with government officials, but not bank officers, corporate directors and other executives – many of whom may have made substantial campaign contributions, will do little to limit the influence of special interests.”

The groups have offered to meet with Craig to present alternatives. One better option would be to require disclosure of all communications -- by non-lobbyists as well as lobbyists. This would more effectively provide the transparency and accountability target the backroom deals that Americans are legitimately concerned about.

“If the aim of this provision is government transparency, the focus should not be on those who already disclose their activities publicly,” said Caroline Fredrickson, Director of the ACLU Washington Legislative Office. “This directive wholly excludes the Goliaths of Wall Street from its applicability and instead restricts the speech rights of those who are dutifully filing quarterly reports of their contacts with the administration and Congress. All the while, powerful corporate titans can go on about their business with no new disclosure requirements.”

Read the letter to WH Counsel Gregory Craig here.

Read Obama’s memorandum here.

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) is a non-profit legal watchdog group dedicated to holding public officials accountable for their actions. For more information, please visit www.citizensforethics.org or contact Naomi Seligman at 202.408.5565/nseligman@citizensforethics.org.

The American League of Lobbyists, founded in 1979, is a national association dedicated to serving government relations and public affairs professionals. Its 900-plus members include leading Washington representatives from corporations, trade associations, labor unions, government agencies, interest groups, and law and lobbying firms. Questions may be directed to Executive Director Patti Jo Baber at alldc.org@erols.com or 703-960-3011.