

Pro/Con

Should Congress strengthen its oversight of lobbying?

yes

Rep. Rahm Emanuel, D-Ill.
Chairman, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee
Written for The CQ Researcher, July 2005

It has been 10 years since the laws governing lobbyists were updated — a time of explosive growth in the number of lobbyists and the amount of money they spend. According to the Center for Public Integrity, lobbying expenditures jumped 50 percent in just the past six years — from \$1.4 billion in 1998 to more than \$2 billion last year.

And while we have extensively debated campaign-finance reform, there's been no discussion about how to reform the relationship between Congress and lobbyists. K Street has become Congress' "back office," facilitating lavish trips, writing legislation and serving as an employment agency for former lawmakers. Just as we have put distance between donors and candidates, we need to do the same for lobbyists and Congress.

To address these issues, Rep. Martin Meehan, D-Mass., and I introduced The Special Interest Lobbying and Ethics Accountability Act of 2005. The bill would jumpstart reform by requiring lobbyists and Congress to be more transparent and accountable for travel, meals and other favors exchanged. It makes lobbyists and Congress responsible for disclosing more information about a trip's sponsors; slows the "revolving door" between Congress and K Street by doubling the waiting period for former members and staff to lobby

no

Paul Miller
President, American League of Lobbyists
Written for the CQ Researcher, July 2005

So often in this town when something goes wrong there is a knee-jerk reaction by some that legislating the problem is the cure-all. This is what we are seeing with the allegations made against lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

I, for one, am not convinced that the current system needs fixing. For one thing, we don't have any idea if the current rules are working or not because no one has taken the time to review the current Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA).

Before we go legislating based on the actions of one individual, we should do our due diligence to see what actually works and what doesn't. Only then can we make an informed decision on what — if any — changes in the regulations need to be made.

The LDA is not some obscure set of rules and regulations that lobbyists acknowledge, but don't adhere to. The current LDA requires lobbyists to report who they represent; the issues they are working on; the committees, agencies or administration personnel they meet with; how much they are being paid, and — believe it or not — this information is available to the public.

These rules also come with stiff penalties for non-compliance, including possible jail time. With an already strict set of rules in place, I would question the wisdom of legislating this issue before we have a real understanding of how

Congress from one to two years; and requires the Government Accountability Office to report twice a year on how congressional committees are performing their oversight duties.

For K Street lobbyists, our bill requires every organization that pays for congressional travel to publicly list their funding sources. It also requires lobbyists to report on meetings with members of Congress and to disclose previous Capitol Hill employers. Enforcement is strengthened by doubling the civil penalties for false statements.

Finally, our legislation requires the disclosure of "grass-roots" lobbying activities by lobbyists and outlaws the "K Street Project," a Republican effort to intimidate businesses, lobbying firms and trade associations into hiring only Republican lobbyists.

While the recent lobbying scandals have damaged the integrity of Congress, some good could still result. This legislation will add greater accountability, transparency and integrity to the system while turning Congress from an auction house back into the people's House.

the current system is working.

The case involving Abramoff is an isolated incident that will not be solved by a whole new set of unnecessary rules and regulations. If you want to fix the problem with this particular case, simply enforce the current rules and regulations. It's really that easy.

Let's not blame the LDA for the alleged abuses by one individual. It doesn't matter how many rules we put in place there will always be someone who stretches the ethical lines and breaks them. Let's not punish the 99 percent of us who are adhering to the LDA in an ethical manner. And let's not look to score points by blowing this current situation up into a national problem. It's not!

The fact that the overwhelming majority of lobbyists adhere to the LDA is proof of that. Blame those directly responsible for these activities, not an entire profession or an LDA that works.