

Changing Tone In Washington Includes Media

By: Paul A. Miller

I read with great interest your February 1, 2009 article by Robert Kaiser, *Obama Had a Special Interest in Curbing K Street. Can He Do It?*

I understand that in order to sell books a writer needs content that grabs readers and there is no issue which grabs the public's attention than scandal and lobbyists. It seems that the stories don't have to be true or even factual; they just have to be one's own interpretation of being true. I recall a few years back that this type of innuendo got at least one reporter at the *New York Times* in hot water for making up stories just to sell papers and further his career.

Mr. Kaiser makes the point in his article that Washington is run by "special interests" and lobbyists. He further points out that the problems in this country stem from the self serving behavior of these groups. I appreciate Mr. Kaizer building our profession up, but it's simply just not true. If his claims are true, then I was either not paying attention or absent the first day of lobbying training, because I don't recall getting my voting cards from Congress allowing me to vote on legislation. Nor did I get my special pen from the White House allowing me to sign legislation into law.

I know a lot has changed since I was a kid, but I don't believe the Constitution of the United States has. I am re-reading the Constitution to find where it gives lobbyists and "special interests" the authority to pass and sign legislation into law.

Like most Americans, I have problems with how our government is running these days, but if we are going to be honest we have to place the blame where it belongs. It is Congress who introduces and votes on legislation and it's the President who either signs it into law or veto's it. Lobbyists and "special interests" play a valuable role in this process, but ultimately it's your elected officials who are the ones making the final decisions on whether legislation becomes law, not lobbyists.

Mr. Kaiser makes the point in his article that only the rich can afford lobbyists and only corporations have lobbyists. Are we to believe that labor union's don't spend tens of millions of dollars each year trying to influence legislation? Are we to believe that states don't lobby for more federal funding? What do you think is happening right now? States are sending their Governors to Washington to ensure they get their piece of the proposed stimulus package. Somehow these are for the right reasons and registered lobbyists do it for the wrong reasons.

Tell small businesses around this country that lobbying is for the rich and I think they will tell you a different story. Tell retirees losing their healthcare that lobbying is just for the rich and I think you will get a different story. Tell the parents all across the country who are working as a group in their community fighting for better education for their kids

that lobbying is just for the rich. I bet here to you will get a different answer. By the way, all of these are “special interests.”

What Mr. Kaiser failed to point out in his article is that just about every American is represented by a lobbyist on the local, state and/or federal level; they just may not know it. If you ever belong to the Girl Scouts, own a gun, have or know someone battling cancer, play little league, play professional sports, volunteer, or belong to an association or civic group representing your profession or community, you have a lobbyist or more than one lobbyist representing you; and why shouldn't you.

A key element of our Constitution affords every citizen the right to petition their government. The Constitution doesn't require that you do it yourself. Mr. Kaiser seems to want to prohibit the First Amendment Right of every citizen to be heard. This is what is so great about a democracy – everyone has the right to be heard. We don't have to agree, but people have the right to be heard. When it comes to lobbyists it sounds like Mr. Kaiser wants to create carveouts for who can be heard and who cannot. Wouldn't that be a “special interest,” which Mr. Kaiser opposes?

Mr. Kaiser also points out in his article that the new Administration is combating Washington by doing away with lobbyists. First, this should concern every citizen in this country. Do we really want a government that takes away our Constitutional right to petition our government? Do we really want to leave Washington unchecked to do what they want? I think not.

Mr. Kaiser if were going to change the tone in Washington it's going to require everyone doing their part, including journalists. If we all work together we can begin to change the corrosive tone in politics, which will then translate into elected officials working together in a bi-partisan way for the betterment of the country's greater good.

We all have to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. I don't want to take away your freedom of speech, nor should you want to take away every citizen's right to petition their government.

Let's begin a new day by reporting honestly about issues and professions. Lobbyists aren't perfect, but we don't have the unfettered access and power you point to in your article. If we do, then I would like someone in Congress to forward me my voting cards and the Administration to tell me when they need me in the Oval office next to sign or veto legislation. I'm ready to influence if this is the case.

Lobbyists can't be responsible for the morals and ethics of elected officials, nor can Congress be responsible for the morals and ethics of lobbyists or constituents. This is the responsibility of any person entrusted with the public's trust. It is also the responsibility of voters. If you don't like what your elected officials are doing, then vote them out of office.

Let's stop the politics of destruction and all work together to fix the problems in our political system and in our country. That's what the American people want.