



Revolving Door Scandals Plague Congress: Senate Should Enact Enhanced Protections

Under two acts, the Ethics in Government Act of 1978 and the Ethics Reform Act of 1989, “covered” executive branch officials, members of Congress and senior staff are generally prohibited from lobbying their former colleagues for one year after leaving public service.

But in recent years, this revolving door policy has been undermined in two ways. First, the one-year cooling-off period is too brief, as it does not cover a full congressional session. Second, it is being interpreted to prohibit direct “lobbying contacts” with former colleagues, but permit all other lobbying activity. Former officials can, for example, develop lobbying strategy, organize lobbying teams and supervise the lobbying drive, and even become registered lobbyists immediately after leaving public service. They simply cannot pick up the telephone and call their former colleagues.

This is not enough. The Senate should address these loopholes in the law and slow the revolving door by: 1) extending the cooling-off period when a retired public official may lobby former colleagues from one year to two; 2) defining “lobbying activity” as including activity for pay that is intended to facilitate a lobbying contact and prohibit it within the cooling-off period for members of Congress and senior executive branch officials; and 3) requiring public disclosure of conflict of interest job negotiations by public officials.

Most legislative proposals under consideration are incomplete because they leave intact the loophole for lobbying activity. **We urge support for an amendment to S. 1 by Sens. Feingold and Obama that closes this important loophole.**

Public Citizen Research Shows Detriment to Congressional Integrity from Revolving Door

- An analysis shows the road from Congress to K Street is the most common career path for members of Congress. Forty-three percent of members of Congress who left office between 1998 and mid-2005 and were eligible to lobby became lobbyists – 42 percent of House members and 50 percent of Senate members.¹

¹ The Journey from Capitol Hill to K Street, available at <http://www.cleanupwashington.org/documents/RevolveDoor.pdf>

- Almost 52 percent of the Republican members of Congress who left Capitol Hill between 1998 and mid-2005 registered to lobby (58 of 112), compared to 33 percent of the departing Democrats (28 of 86).²
- The revolving door appears to be spinning dramatically faster than in earlier decades.³
- Conflict-of-interest rules governing future job negotiations for public officials are weak and generally un-enforced. Members of Congress and staff are not prohibited from negotiating future employment with industries that have business pending before the Member or committee, nor is disclosure of such employment negotiations required. In the executive branch, waivers from the conflict of interest rules that restrict such employment negotiations are routinely granted and kept confidential.⁴

The Bottom Line

Revolving door restrictions are designed to 1) discourage public officials from “cashing in” on public service while in office; and 2) to prevent the potential for corruption by wealthy special interest groups exchanging lucrative future employment for legislative favors.

The current one-year cooling off period on retired public officials lobbying their former colleagues has proven ineffective. The one-year ban does not cover a full congressional session, so the same networks in Congress will continue to benefit the former public official. The ban also does not cover any of the lobbying activity that is at the core of conducting a lobbying campaign, leaving former public officials very attractive for immediate hire by lobbying firms.

We urge Senators to SUPPORT the amendment from Sen.’s Feingold and Obama to better define “lobbying activity” and close the revolving door loophole.

For more information, contact Craig Holman at: 202-454-5182 or cholman@citizen.org.

² [The Journey from Capitol Hill to K Street, available at <http://www.cleanupwashington.org/documents/RevolveDoor.pdf>.

³ A Matter of Trust, available at <http://www.cleanupwashington.org/documents/RevovDoor.pdf>.

⁴ A Matter of Trust, available at <http://www.cleanupwashington.org/documents/RevovDoor.pdf>.