

Stop Criticizing Lobbyists for Being Involved

By Paul A. Miller
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We're damned if we do, and we're damned if we don't.

Regardless of what your personal feelings are about lobbyists, the issue of lobbyists working on candidates' campaigns is and should be a nonissue.

As a lobbyist myself, let me say I am proud of the profession and the value we provide the legislative and political processes.

I guess the adage is if you can't win an election talking about issues, why not win it by bashing lobbyists. This week you can't open a newspaper or turn on a news program without reading or hearing about how Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) has had five top staffers resign from his campaign because of their lobbying ties.

The question I have for people is why take him to task for this? Sen. McCain made a personal decision last month requiring all staff to be "nonregistered lobbyists."

Both parties bash our profession; why bash Sen. McCain for making a decision that tracks both parties' support for lobbying reform over the past two years?

The answer is simple: because it seems scandalous and gets votes.

What we should be asking is why aren't the press and public demanding the other candidates do so as well?

If you believe neither of the other candidates has lobbyists being paid or volunteering on their campaigns, you are living in a bubble.

If moms, dads, teachers, doctors, lawyers or anti-war activists can work for candidates, why not lobbyists?

Are we really supposed to believe that those who work on campaigns do it just to participate in the process without the hope that their candidate will support issues important to their cause?

If you believe those who work on campaigns do it because they support the candidates' positions and hope they will implement them once elected, then you just described lobbyists and what we do.

Is there really a difference between Cindy Sheehan and her anti-war activists and registered lobbyists? No, both groups are working to get Congress and/or the administration to support their issues.

The only difference between the two is that registered lobbyists have their clients and issues listed with the federal government, whereas Sheehan and others are able to lobby without having to register.

Sen. McCain has done nothing wrong by allowing lobbyists to work on his campaign, the same way Sens. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) and Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) have done nothing wrong by having lobbyists work on theirs.

The difference is that Sen. McCain has asked that they not be active lobbyists while working on his campaign. He hasn't hidden the fact that top advisers to his campaign were lobbyists — like the others are doing. The difference is that the other candidates still have lobbyists working for them at the very least as unpaid staff.

And just because they are unpaid should not make a difference. The fact is, they are lobbyists and actively lobbying while working for a campaign.

I don't have a problem with lobbyists working on any of these campaigns. I agree with Sen. McCain that any staff should probably be on leave from their firms during the campaign to avoid any potential conflicts, but they shouldn't be penalized or chastised in the press for being lobbyists.

Would you do the same for clergy who support any of the candidates and help them get elected? I doubt it.

We hear so much about change, but this election isn't bringing change. We are seeing the same old fear tactics being used to woo voters.

This article isn't in support of Sen. McCain, it's about the continued bashing of lobbyists by all candidates. I have to ask my colleagues: When will we all stand together and say enough is enough?

I would ask my colleagues to halt giving or raising money for the candidates this cycle. If we really are as evil as we are portrayed to be, then I think both sides would welcome our willingness to stop contributing to either party for the general election.

Instead of making issues of nonissues that aren't at the top of the public's agenda, let's get back to talking about real issues like providing health care to all Americans, providing jobs to all Americans, providing tax relief to all Americans, providing quality education to all Americans, and implementing an energy policy that will not cost all of us at the pump. These are the issues that the American people want to hear about, not whether lobbyists are working on campaigns.

It's pure politics and gutter politics at that, to bash a profession that protects the First Amendment rights of so many in this country who would not have a voice if it were not for honorable men and women who defend these constitutionally guaranteed rights.

It's appalling for me to hear a well-respected talk-show host refer to lobbyists on his show recently as pigs. Those in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. I seem to recall the press having its own ethical issues a few years back, yet you don't hear us calling them pigs.

Don't we all deserve more from this supposed change?

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