

Pelosi's In – It's a New Day for Lobbyists

The speaker of the House has promised lobby reforms, and the players are hoping for a leg up in the game

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Even while Nancy Pelosi was becoming one of the most vocal opponents of the current culture of lobbying, she was also receiving support from lobby groups of all stripes.

Now that she is speaker of the House, many lobbying groups are tugging even harder at her seams, some with smiles on their faces, others wanting a compromise.

Looking at what could lie ahead, they want her on their side even more now — some for the very first time.

From banning lawmakers' receipt of gifts, meals, entertainment, and travel from lobbyists to toughening requirements for public disclosure of lobbying activity, Pelosi is making it clear that lobbyists will be treated differently with Democrats in power. Almost before her swearing-in as speaker could be completed, Congress had already started tackling the issue of lobby reform through the [Honest Leadership and Open Government Act](#).

Last week, ethics-rules changes were approved by a 430-1 vote. The new rules ban members from accepting travel or gifts from lobbyists, require approval by the Ethics Committee for privately funded travel, and impose mandatory ethics training for staff. The reform also puts stricter lobbying-disclosure rules in place and requires lawmakers to identify which "earmark" spending projects they request.

While lobbyists are hoping to get a chance to sit down at the table with Pelosi and other lawmakers to discuss closing the loopholes in current lobbying legislation, Big Oil has also been trying to sway Pelosi on her promise to roll back tax breaks and other incentives for major oil companies. The oil industry poured money into her re-election campaign, a race she was certain to win well before Election Day.

Occidental Petroleum's political action committee was Pelosi's top contributor then, dropping \$17,000 into her coffers during the 2006 election cycle. The oil and gas industry as a whole was one of the top 20 industries to contribute to the California Democrat.

Other top contributors to Pelosi's campaign included Silicon Valley venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, which gave \$16,700; AT&T, which donated \$12,500;



THE QUEEN OF CRACKDOWN: Nancy Pelosi is holding tough on her talk of lobby reform; some just hope the bark is worse than the bite.

(Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

and the AFL-CIO, which added \$10,000 to Pelosi's coffers.

SMILING FACES

Unlike the oil industry, some lobby groups aren't as nervous about the new power shift. In fact, they're thrilled.

Lobbyists representing issues such as energy renewal and domestic energy independence, issues long supported by Pelosi, have either already started lobbying or are gearing up for progress.

With Pelosi's plans to promote biofuel use in the United States and increase the number of vehicles that run on ethanol as well as the number of gas stations that offer ethanol at the pumps, renewable-energy and ethanol-related lobby groups hope to make gains with House leadership.

The Clean Fuels Development Coalition, an organization that promotes the increased use and production of clean fuels to reduce air pollution and oil imports, is ramping up its talks with House Democrats, particularly Pelosi's office, about ethanol production and clean air.

"Pelosi has always been a leader for clean air in California," says Doug Durante, executive director of the coalition. "In this Congress, there are a lot of newcomers and new friends for ethanol, and that's great. We will continue to lobby Pelosi's office because we want to make sure everyone is doing things the right way."

Pelosi's longtime support of gay rights also has advocates for those causes feeling overwhelmingly positive that no discriminatory federal mandates will pass. About 18 percent of Pelosi's San Francisco district is identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

"She was one of the few legislators that would advocate for gay rights when no one else would," says Allison Herwitz, legislative director for the Human Rights Campaign, a major lobbying arm for the gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities.

Under Pelosi's leadership, the Human Rights Campaign is confident that issues such as workplace discrimination, the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, and hate-crimes legislation will be addressed.

With Pelosi at the helm, says Luis Vizcaino, the campaign's communications director, legislation that could potentially divide the nation, such as the controversial Federal Marriage Amendment, will be less likely to see the light of day.

"With the Democrats, we will have a more productive leadership. We won't have attacks similar to what we saw in '06, when lawmakers decided to write discriminatory federal legislation," Vizcaino says.

Of course, Republican-leaning groups that have normally supported legislation such as the Federal Marriage Amendment might find it tougher sledding with Pelosi in office.

“[The] Family Research Council has made attempts to reach Nancy Pelosi’s office. Our president, Tony Perkins, recently invited her on our radio show, ‘Washington Watch Weekly,’ with no response on her end,” says Amani Council, director of government affairs at the conservative group. “As a nonpartisan organization, we make it our mission to work both sides of the aisle, by scoring Republicans and Democrats on issues that uphold biblical principles.”

Groups such as the Family Research Council have long opposed same-sex marriage and have aggressively pushed to amend the Constitution to state that marriage in the United States should be defined only as the union between a man and a woman. The legislation, which was defeated, would have prevented the legalization of same-sex civil marriages.

THE TRUTH IS IN THE EYES

Along with their specific lobbying issues, lobbyists have also turned their attention to the business of lobbying itself.

A year ago, just as Jack Abramoff was pleading guilty to a host of felonies, House Republicans were the ones talking tough about significant lobbying reform. But over the course of the session, those promises melted away.

The reforms that Democrats brought to the table last week include Pelosi’s promise to pass the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, amend the current [Lobbying Disclosure Act](#), close the “revolving door” between Congress and lobbying firms by doubling from one year to two the period during which lawmakers are prohibited from lobbying their former offices, and eliminate floor privileges for former members of Congress and officers of the Senate and House who return to lobby.

Concerned with the fierce attack on lobbyists, the American League of Lobbyists has called on Congress to proceed “reasonably” as it considers new lobbying legislation, urging lawmakers to invite lobbyists to the table to help craft new rules to the Lobbying Disclosure Act.

“The big question we have is, ‘What is the new legislation going to look like?’ ” says Paul Miller, president of the league. “We have to come up with a mechanism to enforce the current rules if it’s going to have an impact. Lobbyists have the day-to-day knowledge of how lobbying works. What better legislation for us to influence than this one?”

Closing loopholes in current lobbying-disclosure policy would serve a better purpose than creating new legislation, Miller says, and warns that Congress shouldn’t overreact to the Abramoff scandal.

“We can’t have a knee-jerk reaction to one lobbyist,” he says.