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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.

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?



On the Hill

Mortgage Crisis

In response to the national mortgage crisis that is hitting homeowners and taxpayers from coast to coast, the Senate Banking Committee passed a bill that would tighten oversight on Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, allow the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) to insure \$300 billion in troublesome mortgages, and could help as many as a half of a million borrowers. The Senate Committee overwhelmingly voted for the measure, passing it out of committee by a vote of 19-2 (Sens. Enzi and Bunning dissented).

Oil Supplies and Energy

President George W. Bush has been facing criticism recently over his insistence on filling the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to levels it has not seen in years. This is during a time when oil per barrel is at record prices and Americans are suffering from paying more and more for gasoline. Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle have called on the President to halt increases to the Reserve in an effort to increase the supply to consumers. President Bush has also called on Saudi Arabia to increase its output of crude oil in an effort to reduce the price of oil. For what it is worth, the Saudi Kingdom has decided to continue its current output pace. Congress passed legislation capping the Petroleum Reserve. The Reserve currently can hold 701 million barrels of oil and is at 97% capacity. Congress, with its legislation, has halted the daily shipments to the facility.

FEC Nominations

Congress and the White House have been at odds over Federal Election Commission nominees for nearly a year; however, the two institutions seem to be moving towards talks again. Controversial nominee Hans Von Spakovsky withdrew his name for consideration after it was apparent that talks between political leaders had collapsed. In an attempt to reignite the conversation, the White House has nominated former Senate Rules and Administration Committee aide Matthew Petersen. Democrats are expected to find this nominee much more acceptable than previous ones put forth by the Bush Administration.



Iraq Supplemental

The Senate has overwhelmingly passed an Iraq supplemental spending bill and sent it back to the House of Representatives for its consideration. The language, which passed 75-22, added \$10 billion more for domestic programs in addition to the money requested for Iraq and Afghanistan. Both President Bush and presumptive GOP presidential nominee Arizona Sen. John McCain oppose the added domestic spending agenda. It is uncertain whether the President will find enough distaste in the bill to veto it. Congressional Democrats seem to have enough support to think about a veto override.

Farm Bill

The Farm bill passed with flying colors, even with the threat of a veto stemming from the Oval Office. Upon being vetoed, Congress overrode the President's actions; however, it became apparent that it was for naught. Congress ended up sending the wrong bill to the President's desk for his signature and, therefore, President Bush vetoed a different bill than that which was passed by Congress. This sent a confused Congress back to work to vote on the correct language and send that Act back up Pennsylvania Avenue. Assuming that the provisions remain the same, the Farm bill will include added programs for nutrition and conservation in addition to the more traditional subsidies for America's farmers.

Bush v. McClellan and the War in Iraq

This month, Scott McClellan, former White House Press Secretary, released a book where he details what he believes to be misstatements and mistruths told by the Bush Administration regarding the War in Iraq. McClellan maintains that officials in the Executive Branch stretched the evidence in the lead up to the invasion in order to garner more support and acceptance. He names Vice President Dick Cheney, former Bush aide Karl Rove, and President Bush himself as being involved in McClellan's giving false statements to the news media. It remains to be seen how much of a factor this memoir, which Republicans have vehemently denounced and Democrats have intriguingly used, will be in November during the general election.

Democratic National Committee

Obama v. Clinton; Michigan and Florida v. the DNC

On May 31st, the Rules Committee of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) met to discuss what to do with the Democratic primary delegates from Michigan and Florida. When the primary season began earlier this year, the DNC established a calendar by which the states were to set their primary elections. Florida and Michigan decided to try to move their primary dates up the calendar in order to, in their minds, make their contests more relevant to the process (similar to New Hampshire and Iowa). In an effort to resolve the Democratic primary's divisiveness, the Rules Committee decided to sit all the delegates from both states, but each delegate will only receive half a vote. During the meeting, the division between supporters of Sens. Obama and Clinton was extraordinarily apparent. Booming and hissing occurred, with some of Clinton's supporters chanting that they would be voting for presumptive GOP nominee Sen. John McCain. Since then, Sen. Obama, through both committed and super delegates, has received enough delegates to claim the Democratic nomination. Although Sen. Hillary Clinton has not yet conceded defeat to the Illinois Senator, she is expected to do so by the week's end. In recent days, allies of the New York Senator have been posturing Clinton as a potential and viable vice presidential candidate to round out the Obama for President ticket.



Senator Ted Kennedy

This month, Senator Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) suffered a seizure and was subsequently diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. The seventy-six year old lawmaker underwent brain surgery on Monday June 2nd at Duke Medical Center in North Carolina. Reports after the procedure seem to point to a successful operation; however, Kennedy has radiation and chemotherapy treatment ahead of him. The Massachusetts senator is the last remaining Kennedy of the famed Joe Kennedy. His elder brother, Joe, died in World War II; the second oldest brother, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963; and presidential candidate and former Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1968. This youngest brother has experienced more crises in his family than most will ever witness.

Budget

Congress's first week back to Capitol Hill after the Memorial Day recess has been a hectic one, and it is not going to let up for the federal budget. The House is expected to pass a budget conference bill this week for Fiscal Year 2009; however, it is roughly \$21 billion more than President Bush's request. It is important to note that this budget conference bill is non-binding; although, it would be an important step towards working on the appropriations bills at the end of the year. Much of the additional funds within the \$21 billion is for non-defense related programs and agencies which has been a sticking point between Congress and the White House. This year, the budget process will undoubtedly face election year politics as both sides of the aisle maneuver to lay claim to being fiscally responsible and as having the best interests of Americans at heart.

On the Ground: United States House of Representatives

CO-04

Democrats are targeting Republican Rep. Marilyn Musgrave in her quest for reelection in the fall. The national Democratic Party's horse in the race is Betsy Markey, a former aide to Sen. Ken Salazar. In a recent poll released by the Markey campaign, the Democrat was leading Musgrave by 7 percentage points. Musgrave's campaign released a poll of its own stating that the Congresswoman was ahead. In 2006, Musgrave only won 46% of the vote in her win, and 51% in her victory in 2004.



VA-11

Democrats in this Northern Virginia congressional district are still vying to be the nominee to run against presumptive Republican nominee business Keith Fimian. Former Rep. Leslie Byrne and Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Gerry Connelly are neck and neck to take on Fimian. This race became a national target for both parties when current Rep. Tom Davis decided not to seek reelection. The district has been trending blue recently due to its proximity in the national capital region.

United States Senate

New Hampshire: Sununu v. Shaheen (Round 2)

The November election between Democratic former Governor Jeanne Shaheen and GOP Senator John Sununu is a rematch from 2002, when Sununu defeated Shaheen 51-46%. Currently, Shaheen is leading the incumbent by 12 points in a recent University of New Hampshire Survey Center poll. The Director of the Survey Center, Dr. Andrew Smith, believes that the race will surely tighten up before Election Day. Presumptive GOP nominee for the presidency Arizona Sen. John McCain is very popular in the Granite State, where he won the Republican primary in both 2000 and 2008. New Hampshire voters' enthusiasm for McCain should help Sununu in his own campaign. However, the wild card may be the popularity of the state's Democratic Governor John Lynch. Lynch's approval ratings have consistently been in the 70s in a state where independents reign supreme. Shaheen and Sununu will both have to work diligently to convince voters in this civically minded state that they are the best representatives in Washington, DC.

Oregon: Smith v. Merkley

Sen. Gordon Smith finally now has a confirmed challenger for the November election. Speaker of the Oregon House Jeff Merkley has won the right to be the Democratic nominee by defeating activist Steve Novick. Smith has made a name for himself in Washington as being a moderate voice for Oregonians. However, if national Democrats and Merkley can successfully tie the Senator to President Bush and if Democratic frontrunner Illinois Senator Barack Obama can effectively campaign in the Beaver State, then the Democrats stand a good chance of picking up a Senate seat in the Pacific Northwest.

On the Ground: United States Senate

New Mexico: Wilson v. Pearce v. Udall

The biggest question right now is who will win the chance to take on Rep. Tom Udall (NM-03) for the Senate election to replace retiring Republican Sen. Pete Domenici. Udall, the presumptive nominee will either be facing Rep. Steve Pearce (NM-02) or Rep. Heather Wilson (NM-01). Wilson, who is running as the moderate choice, touts that she is the most electable against Udall. Pearce, who is running as the conservative alternative, is thought to have less of a chance of defeating Udall in the fall. Wilson, a graduate of the Air Force Academy, has a powerful and popular mentor in Domenici; although, the retiring Senator has not publicly endorsed a candidate in the GOP primary race.



Nebraska: Kleeb v. Johanns

On May 13th, the nominees for both parties were decided in the race to replace retiring Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel. On the GOP side, former Governor and Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns will carry the message of experience and conservatism through Election Day. Democrats chose activist and rancher Scott Kleeb who will be touting change as the main theme of his campaign. Kleeb beat out wealthy businessman Tony Raimondo for the right to continue the race. Kleeb, who came to attention of the state Democratic Party in 2006 by losing to GOP Rep. Adrian Smith by only 10 percentage points, has his work cut out for him for the next five months.

Presidential Politics

Kentucky

Winner: Clinton

New York Senator Hillary Clinton claimed victory in Kentucky on May 20th, 65%-30%, over Illinois Senator Barack Obama. The backbone of her support was working class, white voters who turned out in droves to vote for her. Mrs. Clinton was heavily favored to win this race over her rival. Kentucky has not voted for a Democrat in a Presidential election since President Bill Clinton took the state in both 1992 and 1996. Time will tell whether or not this will be the year that Democrats reclaim the Bluegrass State.

Oregon

Winner: Obama

Barack Obama defeated Hillary Clinton handily in the Beaver State 59-41% on May 20th. Similar to Clinton's Kentucky victory, the pre-election polls suggested that Obama would cruise to a win here. If Obama is the nominee for the November race, he very well could prove to have coattails for House Speaker Jeff Merkley who is running to replace Sen. Gordon Smith.

Presidential Politics

West Virginia

Winner: Clinton

On May 13th, Democratic voters went to the polls to cast their votes for their presidential nominee – choosing between Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama. The people of West Virginia overwhelmingly chose Clinton to take on McCain in November. Clinton defeated Obama 67-26%. Even though there are not a tremendous amount of delegates in the Mountain State, West Virginia is critical for Democratic presidential candidates in the general election. If Obama is the nominee, November will tell whether or not West Virginia voters will accept his as being moderate enough; otherwise, they will shift to John McCain.



Indiana

Winner: Clinton

On May 6th, Hillary Clinton defeated Barack Obama by 2 percentage points (51-49%) in a state that was a must-win for her campaign. Many political observers believed that Clinton needed to win by a larger margin in order to stem the political tide that is moving towards the Illinois Senator. Also, Clinton should have shored up more support by having the enthusiastic endorsement of popular Senator and former Governor Evan Bayh.

North Carolina

Winner: Obama

Slightly to the south on the same evening, voters in North Carolina were heading to the polls, except the outcome was slightly different. North Carolinians voted for Obama 56-42%, splitting the night's state victories between the two candidates. According to the exit polling, Clinton was able to take the more rural areas; whereas, Obama's stronghold seemed to be in and around the more urban regions (Greensboro, Raleigh, Charlotte, and Durham).

Pledged Delegate Count:

Hillary Rodham Clinton: Committed Delegates – 1,499

Barack Obama: Committed Delegates – 1,661

Presidential Politics: Vice Presidential Sweepstakes Begin

Senator Obama:

Wes Clark – retired Army General
Sam Nunn – former Senator from Georgia
Hillary Clinton – Senator from New York
Evan Bayh – Senator and former Governor from Indiana
Bill Richardson – Governor of New Mexico, former Energy Secretary and UN Amb
Bill Nelson – Senator from Florida
John Edwards – former Presidential candidate and former Senator from NC
Jim Webb – Senator from Virginia, former Navy Secretary
Tim Kaine – Governor of Virginia
Michael Bloomberg – Mayor of New York City
Kathleen Sebelius – Governor of Kansas
Brian Schweitzer – Governor of Montana
Jon Tester – Senator from Montana
Ted Strickland – Governor of Ohio
Joe Biden – Senator from Delaware



Senator McCain:

Mike Huckabee – former Presidential candidate and former Arkansas Governor
Sam Brownback – former Presidential candidate and Senator from Kansas
Mitt Romney – former Presidential candidate and former Massachusetts Governor
Lindsey Graham – Senator from South Carolina
Haley Barbour – Governor of Mississippi
Bobby Jindal – Governor of Louisiana
Charlie Crist – Governor of Florida
Joe Lieberman – Senator from Connecticut
Rob Portman – former Ohio Congressman and Director of the OMB
John Thune – Senator from South Dakota
Tim Pawlenty – Governor of Minnesota
Condoleezza Rice – Secretary of State
Carly Fiorina – former CEO of HP
Mark Sanford – Governor of South Carolina