
Jeffrey Sachs: A Lobbyist's Failed Defense

If the [preposterous piece by Mr. Joel Jankowsky in Tuesday's Wall Street Journal](#) had been published in any other newspaper, we'd guess it was a spoof. Mr. Jankowsky, a lobbyist and partner at Akin Gump, bemoans the limits being placed on lobbying activities, even though those limits remain weak and porous. «Talented women and men who registered themselves as lobbyists under the Lobbying Disclosure Act are being excluded from contributing their expertise at a critical time in our nation's history,» writes Mr. Jankowsky.

Mr. Jankowsky rightly argues that big campaign contributors have far too much influence and access in the Administration, but does so through a contorted logic that completely whitewashes the role of lobbyists in the money-choked politics of Washington. Lobbyists may indeed be talented people of expertise, but they are part of a dysfunctional system that has turned policy over to the highest corporate bidder and that puts our economy and society in jeopardy. Lobbying needs far stronger constraints than the tiny but salutary steps being put into place.

Lobbyists for powerful corporations are crawling over every piece of pending legislation- from health care, to banking regulation, to climate change -- keeping a chokehold on deep reforms. Jankowsky says that lobbying is transparent. That's true in the trivial sense that lobbyists register and declare their earnings. Of course it's the activities behind closed doors and off the record that are killing our economy and confidence in the political system.

Special interests have already spent \$2.5 billion dollars this year on 13,000 lobbyists like Mr. Jankowsky and his colleagues at the firm Akin Gump, with many contributing their expertise to gutting

financial oversight of Wall Street, delaying control of greenhouse gas emissions, and preventing real controls on health insurance costs. (All data are drawn from <http://www.opensecrets.org>.) Akin Gump has lobbied in the past for AIG, the scandalous insurance company that has cost taxpayers more than \$100 billion in direct bailouts. Akin Gump is a favorite lobbying firm for big oil, major health-sector companies, and financial firms that helped to lead us to catastrophe. Already in 2009, Akin Gump has collected more than \$23 million in lobbying fees.

Mr. Jankowsky assures us that lobbying has little to do with «the influence of money on the policy-making process,» since lobbyists are «professional advocates» who have not given any money to the President's campaign. He should know that lobbyists and campaign contributors have quite an overlap. Akin Gump employees have already contributed \$469,000 in campaign funds in the 2009-10 election cycle, including \$62,000 from Mr. Jankowsky himself. A lobbying firm like Akin Gump curries favor and standing through the campaign contributions of the firm's partners. It wins lobbying contracts in view of its political standing. Whether the campaign contributions are a direct pass-thru of the lobbying fees, or are independent of those fees, the result is similar: corporate money finds its way into the campaign coffers via the lobbying firms, and everybody - from the candidate to the lobbyist to the corporate interest - is pleased with the closed circle of money, camaraderie, and favored policy positions.

Lobbyists for major corporations win their influence in many other ways as well. Perhaps the most direct is that they are part of the well-heeled revolving door of Washington employment. Mr. Jankowsky him-

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self went from being Legislative Assistant to House Speaker Carl Albert to his current employment at Akin Gump. There are dozens more examples in Akin Gump, which is just one among many major revolving doors in Washington. Indeed, influential lobbying firms have an endless stream of good jobs to offer the members and staff of Congress and the Executive branch after serving in the US Government.

American politics is suffocating on corporate money. Corporate lobbyists constitute a major conduit for the purchase of public policies. The wild excesses of lobbying and corporate power have contributed to our deepening crises in finance, health care, transport, the environment, and more. At the least Mr. Jankowsky could spare us the pontificating and stop rubbing our noses in the mess.

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