

LOBBYING REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Emanuel) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EMANUEL. Mr. Speaker, in the past few months and days, a constant stream of headlines has opened the public's eye to the relationship between lawmakers and lobbyists and what goes on in this town and how we make our laws. Professional lobbyists have become a virtual "back office" for Congress and Congressmen, serve as travel agents, employment agencies and authors of legislation. In the past 6 years, lobbying expenditures have more than doubled to \$3 billion annually, nearly twice as much as we spend on campaigns. That is what they spend trying to influence the type of legislation we have. Whether it is on pharmaceutical legislation, prescription drugs, whether it is on the tax legislation, whether it is on energy legislation, the amount spent by lobbyists has doubled trying to influence the Members of Congress.

Yet while the number of professional lobbyists and their fees have increased, only one in five lobbyists required to register actually does. Of the 250 top lobbying firms, 210 have failed to file one or more of the necessary documents. The bottom line is that the special interests benefit from weak reporting, nonexistent oversight and toothless penalties while the credibility of the United States Congress, this entire institution and the Members who serve in it, suffers.

We have had in the past debates about campaign finance reform and proper debates about the relationship between donors and congressional candidates. It is time now to have a debate and pass legislation about the relationship between professional lobbyists and Members of Congress. The last major lobbying reforms were over 10 years ago. It is time to update our laws to reflect the explosive growth and increasing influence of professional lobbyists on this institution, the people's House.

For all those reasons, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Meehan), the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Van Hollen) and I have introduced the Lobbying and Ethics Reform Act. Our bill creates a code of official conduct for Congress. This code of conduct would close the revolving door by requiring former Members and staff to wait 2 years before coming back to lobby the institution they had worked at prior. The bill also ends the practice of lobbyists serving as congressional travel agents by arranging lavish junkets for Members. Our bill would require congressional travel to conform to expense guidelines similar to those of other government employees, so it is actually the work that trip is intended to do and work on that trip rather than it becoming a lavish vacation and a working trip in name only. We also require lobbyists to disclose their past connections, previous Hill employers and financial activities on a public database.

The Meehan-Emanuel bill increases the penalties for failing to comply with the Lobbying Disclosure Act. It also

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creates a bipartisan House task force to recommend ways to reinvigorate ethics oversight and enforcement. It would require the Government Accountability Office to report twice a year on the state of oversight and enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, the gavel of this institution when it comes down should mark the opening of the people's House, not the auction house. Unless we reform the relationship between lobbyists and Members of Congress, we cannot restore the public's faith in the people's House. We are suffering from a systematic problem requiring an institutional solution.

Legislation here that we produced in the last Congress, the pharmaceutical industry spent \$154 million lobbying Members of Congress. When we were working on the reimportation legislation of pharmaceutical products, there were two lobbyists for every Member of Congress. The prescription drug bill was passed in a year in which lobbyists for the pharmaceutical industry was one of the biggest spenders on lobbying Members of Congress ended up resulting in an additional \$150 billion of profits for the pharmaceutical industry over a 10-year period of time.

Just the other day, we voted, this Congress, on an energy bill, a badly needed bill that did not deal with gas prices at the pump and yet gave tax credits, the public's tax money, to the wealthiest corporations who are making the biggest profits. Even the President acknowledged that it was wrong. Why? Because this institution is being lobbied by members that have the right to have their voices heard but not the right to have their voices literally drowning out the public's voice and individuals who vote for us.

It is time for this institution and the Members of Congress of both parties to come together, change the way professional lobbyists relate to Members of Congress, how they relate to the institution, whether there is a revolving door that goes from here, you go to a place of employment and whether you have in fact the transparency and the disclosure that is required, because in truth this is the whole cloud that exists, exists over all the institution. It requires all of us to work on dealing with this.

Mr. Speaker, we have a duty to ensure that the voices of the American people are not drowned out by the voices of the professional lobbyists working the halls of Congress. Only through lobbying reform can we restore the integrity of the Congress and retain the people's trust. We work on important issues here but not so important that it must literally push out the other voices. There is time and again, whether

it is dealing with the pharmaceutical industry, the corporate tax bill, the energy bill, other pieces of legislation, you can mark literally the amount of money spent by the lobbying community and the type of legislation this institution passes.

When that gavel goes down, it is intended to open the people's House, not the auction house.