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February 23, 2007

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Slow the “Revolving Door”

Dear Representative:

The lobbying provisions of lobbying and ethics reform legislation – approved by the Senate by a vote of 96-to-2 on January 18 – are now under consideration by the House of Representatives.

Our organizations strongly urge you to address “revolving door” abuses by incorporating in House legislation restrictions similar to those contained in the Senate bill on former senior public officials taking jobs as lobbyists. These provisions:

- **Extend the “cooling off period”** from one year to two during which former senior officials must refrain from lobbying after leaving public service; and, *even more importantly,*
- **Include “lobbying activities”** – defined narrowly under the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) as paid activity intended to facilitate a lobbying contact – as part of lobbying prohibited during the cooling off period.

In the Ethics Reform Act of 1989, Congress recognized that public officials might be influenced by implicit or explicit promises of future employment, as well as the problems that arise when former public officials exploit their connections developed during public service to influence government action for their new private employers. That legislation barred former Members, senior congressional staff and senior executive branch officials from lobbying their former colleagues for one year after leaving office.

But the spirit of the law has not been met.

Today, the revolving door is spinning out of control. Between 1998 and 2004, almost half of Members of Congress who left office moved into lobbying careers on K Street. After the last administration, about a quarter of senior cabinet officials also moved into private employment as lobbyists.

The greatest loophole in the law is that former officials can be hired by lobbying firms immediately after leaving office to plan, strategize and oversee lobbying campaigns. They are only prevented from making “lobbying contacts” – direct contacts such as picking up the telephone and calling their former colleagues.

It is essential to include “lobbying activities” as defined by LDA – *work for compensation specifically intended at the time it is being done to facilitate a lobbying contact* – in the scope of “lobbying” that is prohibited during the cooling off period.

Former public officials can certainly join law firms or public relations firms, write books, give speeches, and pursue all other legitimate career opportunities. But it is important to the public interest that they refrain from working as paid lobbyists and engaging in lobbying activities during the cooling off period. Otherwise the revolving door, which raises so much public suspicion about conflicts of interest, will not slow.

We urge the House to join the Senate in doing what the 1989 ethics law intended: prevent very senior public officials from exploiting their public service by becoming lobbyists for an appropriate period of time after leaving office.

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