

Support the “Strengthen House Floor Integrity” Resolution

Proposal Would Close Loophole in Current House Ethics Rules Banning Lobbyists Access to the Floor

Our organizations and civic leaders urge the House of Representatives to amend congressional ethics rules to close a loophole that allows access to the House floor for some former members-turned-lobbyists during ceremonial events, such as the State of the Union address.

The “Strengthen House Floor Integrity” Resolution, sponsored by Rep. Ann McLane Kuster (D-N.H.), provides a very straightforward yet simple mend to current ethics rules that otherwise bar former members of Congress who are registered lobbyists from access to the House floor.

Our organizations supporting this Resolution include: Campaign Legal Center, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), Common Cause, Communications Workers of America (CWA), Democracy 21, Every Voice, James A. Thurber, Judicial Watch, National Legal and Policy Center, Norman Ornstein, Project on Government Oversight (POGO), Public Campaign, Public Citizen, and U.S. PIRG.

House Rule IV(4) was adopted in 2008 in response to the ethics scandals embodied by disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Previously, lobbyists were banned from the House floor – unless the lobbyist was a former member of Congress. The House recognized that this exception provided one small class of lobbyists (former members) with a distinct advantage over all other lobbyists. Some members-turned-lobbyists abused this special access for personal gain, actively lobbying colleagues on the floor on behalf of paying clients and touting this special access to attract even more paying clients.

Congress saw fit to end this preferential treatment and banned floor access for former members who are registered lobbyists in both the House and the Senate as part of the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007 (HLOGA). However, an exception was provided for ceremonial events, the most sensational being the State of the Union address. At the last State of the Union address, at least one former member-turned-lobbyist was prominently featured on national television visiting with colleagues and networking throughout the floor of the House.

It is not known whether the lobbyist discussed business with his colleagues on the floor. But the sheer access to lawmakers, and being seen by millions of people (including current clients and potential clients) on the floor with Congress and the President, is a privilege not available to other

lobbyists. The proposed Resolution would eliminate this exception. The Resolution still preserves some discretion for the Speaker to issue a waiver to the ban under limited circumstances, for example when Congress is not in session and there is no business to be gained. But the most obvious preferential treatment, such as access to the House floor during the State of the Union address, would be appropriately ended.

The floor of Congress is a sacrosanct institution of the “People’s House,” where lobbyists should not be permitted to conduct business or promote the firm’s business brand on national television. We strongly encourage Congress to close the current loophole in the ethics rules and adopt the “Strengthen House Floor Integrity” Resolution.

Sincerely,

Campaign Legal Center
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Common Cause
Communications Workers of America (CWA)
Democracy 21
Every Voice
James A. Thurber
Judicial Watch
National Legal and Policy Center
Norman Ornstein
Project on Government Oversight (POGO)
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