

# **RESCUE, REBUILD, RESTORE – A NEW FOUNDATION FOR PROSPERITY**

## **CRACKING DOWN ON SPECIAL INTERESTS**

For too long, hardworking folks doing everything they can to stay afloat have not been heard over the powerful voices of the special interests and their lobbyists in Washington. The result was a national agenda too often skewed in favor of those with the power to tilt the tables. In the President's first year in office, he implemented historic reforms to reduce the influence of those special interests. But more needs to be done. That's why the President continues to believe a reformed Presidential public finance system is essential, along with the following additional key reforms:

- **Fix the Damage Done by *Citizens United*:** Last week, the Supreme Court handed a huge victory to corporate interests and their lobbyists. Its 5-4 decision wrongly overturns a century of law that had barred corporations from using their financial clout to directly interfere with elections and opens the floodgates for an unlimited amount of special interest money into our democracy. The President has instructed his Administration to work with Congress to develop a forceful, bipartisan response to this decision. Those efforts are underway, including responding to the danger that foreign-controlled corporations will seek to influence our elections.
- **Limit Contributions and Bundling by Lobbyists:** During the campaign, the President voluntarily declined to accept contributions from federally-registered lobbyists. It's time this practice became law. That's why the President is calling upon Congress to establish low-dollar limits on the contributions lobbyists may bundle or make to candidates for federal office. Those carefully-tailored limits would ensure that lobbyists can't unduly influence the system to favor the special interests over the public interest.
- **Toughen Lobbyist Disclosure Rules:** Under instructions from the President, the White House now discloses detailed records of its visitors. It's past time that the Lobbying Disclosure Act was updated to conform all lobbying to this practice. Lobbyists should disclose everyone they lobby and when, where, and what the substance of the contact was. The current law also contains a loophole that allows many lobbyists to avoid registering so long as they keep their actual lobbying activities to less than 20% of their time working for any particular client, and another loophole that allows foreign agent lobbyists to avoid full disclosure of their activities. Those loopholes should be closed.
- **Fully Disclose All Earmark Requests:** Many Members and others disclose earmarks on various individual websites. That has helped contribute to a significant drop in earmarks since 2008, but the practice is far from uniform across Congress, and often too difficult to access prior to votes. It's time for a comprehensive, bipartisan, state-of-the-art disclosure database that allows Americans to examine the details of every proposed earmark before a vote is taken—one that is fully searchable and otherwise user-friendly.

These steps build on the actions that the President has already taken to crack down on special interests and their lobbyists and to make government more open and accountable to the American people:

- **Closing the Revolving Door:** On January 21, 2009, the President signed an Executive Order imposing tougher ethics standards on this Administration than any in history. The Order not only places strict limits on lobbyists joining the Administration but also prohibits all appointees

from lobbying the Obama Administration after leaving government service. These steps earned the Administration an “A” rating on fulfilling its promise to close the revolving door by a consortium of independent good government watchdogs.

- **Banning Gifts from Lobbyists:** In that same Executive Order, the President also imposed strict limits on appointees in his Administration accepting gifts from lobbyists.
- **Restricting Recovery Act Lobbyist Contacts:** On March 20, 2009, the President issued a memorandum imposing restrictions and disclosure requirements on registered lobbyists' communications with federal officials regarding Recovery Act funding. Those restrictions were expanded on July 24, 2009 to limit communications by lobbyists and non-lobbyists alike once a competitive grant application is on file to insure decisions are merits-based.
- **Disclosing Visitors to the White House:** On September 10, 2009, the Administration announced it would post White House visitor records online, including for registered lobbyists and others who come to the White House, so the public can know who comes and goes from the people's house.
- **Removing Lobbyists from Advisory Boards and Commissions:** On September 23, 2009, the White House announced a goal of no longer appointing or reappointing federally registered lobbyists to agency advisory boards and commissions and federal agencies across the government have implemented policies to achieve that goal.