



THE INFLUENCE GAME: Lobbyists adapt to power shift

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WASHINGTON – Wanted: Democratic congressional aide seeking new career. Must have strong powers of persuasion, excellent connections and good marksmanship. Contact the National Rifle Association's government affairs office for details.

It's clear times have changed in Washington when the nation's biggest gun-rights lobby — long considered Republican-leaning — points out the Democrats on its team and only half-jokingly talks about hiring more.

"We're always looking for good ones," NRA executive vice president Wayne LaPierre said when asked if he's seeing Democratic staffers leaving Capitol Hill to fill a growing demand for Democratic lobbyists. "If they do, give us a call."

The Democrats' election sweep — they gained the White House and increased their majorities in the House and Senate — is shaking up the capital's \$3 billion-a-year lobbying industry. After eight years of a Republican administration and shifting power in Congress, Washington's 16,000 registered lobbyists must now work to capitalize on, or cope with, one-party control.

"We look at any new administration as a time of opportunity in the lobbying community, and certainly here," said Gregg Hartley, vice chairman and COO of the bipartisan lobbying firm Cassidy & Associates. He said he would love to see an influx of applications from Democratic aides. "We have shopped to add very high quality, strong individuals, but they are enjoying being in the new majority."

Many lobbyists along Washington's K Street lobbying corridor began positioning themselves before the election. President-elect Barack Obama's stated antipathy toward lobbyists may keep many of them from winning high-profile posts in his administration, but it hasn't kept them from promoting their policy positions to Obama's team.

The American Farm Bureau Federation, like most major trade groups, tries to keep a

bipartisan balance. It has staff members who worked and volunteered in the campaigns of Obama and his Republican rival, Sen. John McCain. The federation and its state farm bureaus already are talking to Obama's transition team about its priorities, including energy production, trade and how government carries out the new farm bill, chief lobbyist Mark Maslyn said.

"It starts long before this moment. And many of the people we have known for years and years," Maslyn said. "Because we regularly work with both sides of the aisle, we work with lawmakers who want to see those positions advance as well: members of the Democratic caucus as well as the Republican caucus. As I tell a lot of people, this is a relational business."

Likewise, the Edison Electric Institute, a lobbying group for electric utilities, talked with both campaigns and already has been in touch with Obama's transition team. Issues it is trying to get on the Obama team's radar include the need for more power lines.

Offering a glimpse of how the institute may promote that, spokesman Jim Owen said the group sees renewable energy as a way to create the kind of "green jobs" Obama championed during the campaign. To use the renewable energy that utilities generate, transmission lines are needed to connect it to the power grid, he said.

The Financial Services Roundtable is engaging in a postelection full-court press. "We're talking with lawmakers, Treasury and the transition team," said Scott E. Talbott, vice president of government affairs. Its concerns include the \$700 billion bailout administered by the Treasury Department and "overtightening" existing restrictions or creating new ones. Congress has talked about restrictions on paying dividends and bonuses, and on lobbying.

Though seldom willing to name names, lobbyists are weighing in on potential Obama appointees, in some cases describing the kinds of people they would like to see in key jobs or going so far as offering to help recruit and vet candidates.

Key posts for the Farm Bureau include the agriculture and energy secretaries, Environmental Protection Agency administrator, U.S. trade representative and second- and third-tier appointments, the "sub-Cabinet" positions such as deputy secretaries and deputy administrators, assistant administrators and undersecretaries that tend to be the

point people and experts on specific industry issues.

Top lobbying goals for the American Association for Justice, formerly the Association of Trial Lawyers of America, include asking the Obama administration to undo any rules the outgoing Bush administration adopts to try to limit lawsuits. It wants Congress and Obama to outlaw mandatory binding arbitration in consumer contracts and reverse a Supreme Court decision making it harder for consumers to sue the makers of FDA-regulated medical devices.

The American Medical Association's Washington office communicated with both presidential campaigns and now is talking to Obama's transition team about key issues such as Medicare reimbursement, preventive health care and the uninsured, said its incoming president, Dr. Jim Rohack, a physician in Temple, Texas.

Though Democrats control Congress, AMA lobbyists won't ignore Republicans, Rohack said, noting that Senate Democrats lack a filibuster-proof 60 votes. The Financial Services Roundtable plans to do the same.

Some lobbyists are now seeing people they worked with in government years ago back in positions of power. Dan Glickman, chief executive of the Motion Picture Association of America, was agriculture secretary under President Bill Clinton, whose administration is being tapped by Obama for expertise as he prepares to take office.

Others are not so well-positioned with Obama's team, and are making their views known through other channels.

The NRA, which endorsed McCain, is lobbying sympathetic congressional Democrats to try to head off any move toward new gun controls. When it comes to lobbying Obama's transition team, "we're talking to whoever we know who talks to them," LaPierre said. The current climate will make it difficult for new Republican lobbyists, but could prove lucrative for those who represent business.

Wright Andrews, a former Democratic congressional aide who lobbies on banking issues, said the power shift will require Republican lobbyists to hunker down, working at the margins of legislation to make modest changes and forming coalitions between GOP lawmakers and conservative Democrats to play a more defensive game.

"We are looking at more government regulation," Andrews said. "I would certainly expect that after many people see the new administration's agendas and proposals, they will come clamoring to K Street, saying, 'Save us.' You will see business interests socked like they haven't been in a long time."