

How to moderate the power of lobbyists

By Lee H. Hamilton

There is a fundamental question raised by lobbying of the Congress. It is this: Can we temper its excesses without destroying its usefulness as a valued component of the system?

There are roughly 13,000 registered lobbyists in Washington D.C. at the moment, and they spend huge sums of money on their work - \$3.5 billion last year, according to the Center on Responsive Politics. This money has a direct impact not only on how members of Congress look at issues, but also on what issues they decide to look at in the first place. I don't think it's a stretch to say that it can skew what takes place on Capitol Hill toward the interests of those who can provide the money, and away from those who cannot.

Yet lobbyists are also indispensable to lawmaking. When done well, lobbying helps the governing process work. The best of its practitioners know that what lawmakers need is information - straightforward, understandable, and accurate. Lobbyists help members of Congress understand the issues before them and gauge how legislation will affect the various constituencies affected by it.

So as a nation, we are left with a challenge. How do we counter-balance the impact of all the money that lobbyists wield, so that Congress pays attention to the voices of ordinary Americans and serves the country's best interests?

This is by no means impossible. One important measure would be complete, real-time disclosure of lobbying contacts with legislators and regulators. I'd even go further: I favor the fairly radical steps of prohibiting members of Congress from accepting contributions from firms that lobby them, and banning lobbyists from contributing to members they lobby. As reformers argue, it's fine for lobbyists to plead their case, but they shouldn't be able to pay off the jury.

It also makes sense to slow the revolving door between Capitol Hill and the offices of the lobby corps, and to create an institution, similar to the Congressional Budget Office, to give Congress unbiased and unvarnished analysis of pending issues each week.

Finally, I believe a big part of the answer lies with both individual members of Congress and with the American people. Members have the ultimate responsibility to assess and judge a lobbyist: where he comes from, for whom he speaks, what his interests are. They also need to ask themselves how much they're influenced by the campaign contributions they receive and whether they are giving equal consideration to all sides on any given policy question, including how the policy might affect ordinary Americans.

Similarly, we all have to step up as Americans and engage actively with our legislators. The more vigorous the conversation between our elected representatives and their constituents, the less of a hold lobbyists will enjoy.

Lee Hamilton is Director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.



Thumbs up to the Andbe Home employees for making Thanksgiving such a joyful and great day with their attitude and great meal. Brought in.

Many thanks to the Andbe Home dietary department manager and employees for the delicious five-star dinner on Thanksgiving day. The residents, family and friends really enjoyed it. Called in.

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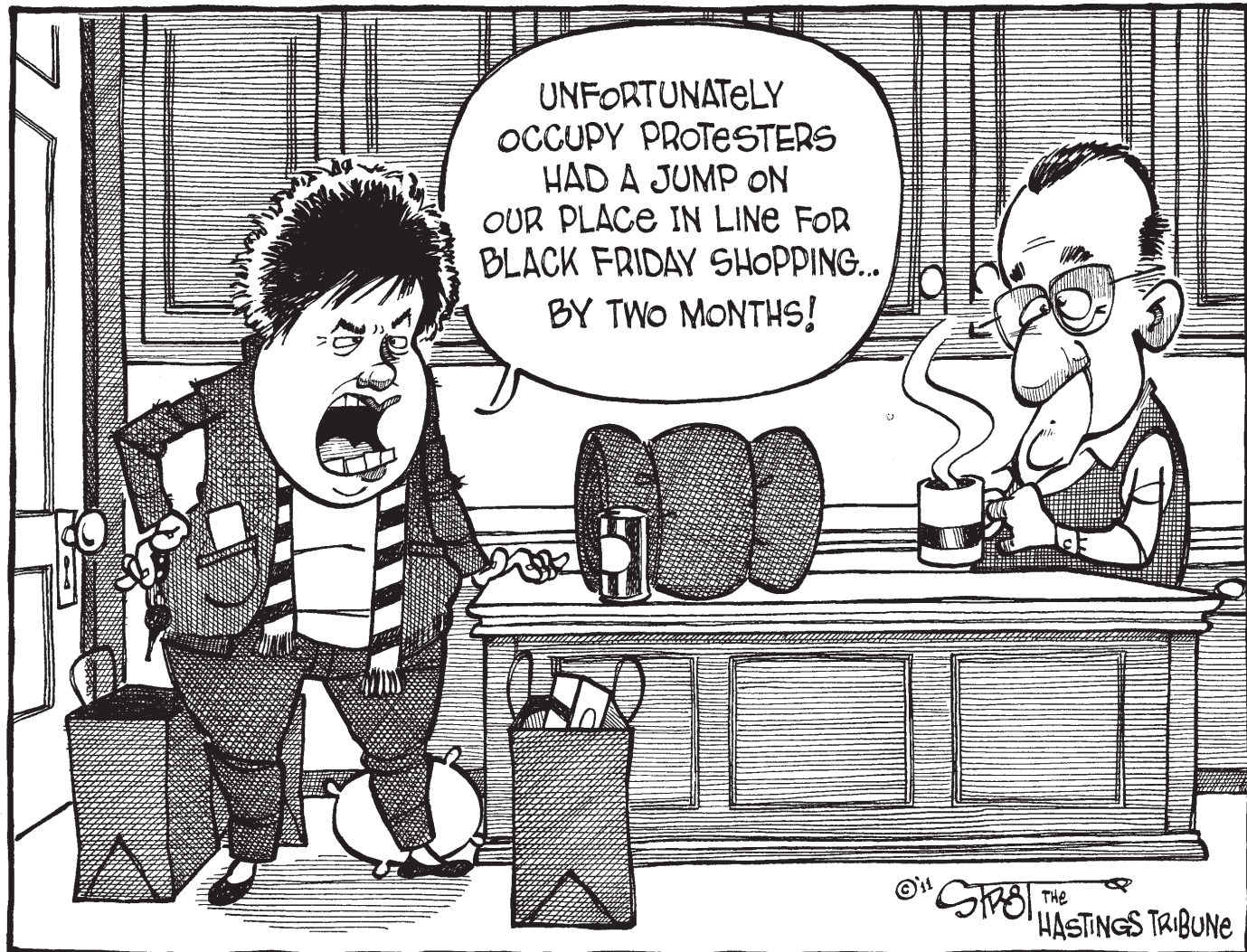
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The hustle and bustle of the holidays is here

Whatever "bug" it was that bit me the week before Thanksgiving, hitched a ride with us to Dallas and bit me again after we got there. I was sick last Wednesday, only waking long enough to drink some tea and eat a cracker. But, then, when it was over, it was over and I've felt fine ever since.

Unfortunately, even though I didn't think I was contagious, my 12-year old granddaughter, Taylor, got sick, too. And she was way more sick than I had been. For that I am truly sorry. The morning we left Taylor was up and had a little color in her face. So, I guess we're all back to normal.

-ob-

Remember how I was bragging about being so organized with my pie crusts, the cranberries and the bread dough? It's a good deal I was. My daughters, Halley and Kara, were able to step right in and make the pies and cranberry salad. Although after peeling a bag of apples for the pie, Halley said, "Mom, I'm sorry for asking for apple pie. This is entirely too much trouble for just a pie."

"Just" a pie! "Just" a pie! That is not "just" a pie. That is my Reserve Grand Champion Apple Pie, thank you very much. And do you know what? The girls' apple pie tasted just as good as mine. So did the pumpkin. So did the deviled eggs. So did everything. It was all good.

I confessed later that when I make apple pies at home I use my apple peeler and slicer to speed things up.

The unspoken values of today's farmers and ranchers

Think of farmers and ranchers and this old, often forgotten tribute comes to mind. It fits farmers like seed in the soil or ranchers like a new-born calf takes to its mother's udder.

I've often heard friends, neighbors and family - my dad for one - quote bits and pieces of it. I've heard others refer to it at meetings, in church, at a sale barn, funerals and many other places where rural people live, work and congregate. It exemplifies the farm and ranch vocation. It goes something like this.

A man's greatest possession is his dignity and no calling bestows this more abundantly than farming. Hard work and honest sweat are the building blocks of a person's character.

Farming and ranching, despite its hardships and disappointments, is the most honest and honorable way a man/woman can spend days on this earth.

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



Halley said, "Then I take back my apology if you have a machine that does it for you."

-ob-

Our daughter, Jennifer, and her two girls, Alexandria and Aniston, from San Antonio arrived late in the night Wednesday. Ani is five and Thanksgiving morning, while her mother and sister ran to the store for some forgotten item, Ani stayed with us to "help". She was all dressed up so we put an apron on her and she set the table and put celery sticks on a plate. Everything was going fine until Halley noticed Ani taking her apron off. She said, "Ani, what are you doing?"

Ani answered, "I'm done helping. I just want to be Ani again."

When she was done, she was done.

-ob-

With commercialization, Thanksgiving has become the kick-off of the Christmas shopping season. Jim has gone out with the kids for the Black Friday shopping experience in years past, but I never had.

We had poured over the sale flyers and planned our strategy. One carload would go to this mall and one carload

of us would go to a certain major discount store. Then we would meet in the middle, combine forces and storm a different mall. Everyone had their shopping assignments and cell phones: we were ready. Charge!

My car went to the discount store. We grabbed our shopping cart and entered the fray. That's where the fun ended. It was gridlock. You could not move unless someone in front of you moved. And then, you had to move in the direction they moved. It was ridiculous. People impatient with stressed out employees; parents yelling at their children; shoppers pushing and shoving for some perceived "bargain".

After we determined this was not working we made our escape and regrouped in the car. Halley said, "That was an exhibit of pure greed. I'm ashamed to admit I was even a part of it. I'll never do that again."

We all agreed. Whatever small amount of money you might save, I think you lose twice as much in dignity.

-ob-

We learned of the death of a dear friend upon our return. Lora had been a close friend of my folks. And subsequently, a friend of mine. When my dad died, Lora and Lee were the first ones at the house. "What can we do to help?" When Mom died, it was Lee and Lora, again, who were right there to help. I'm sorry I wasn't here to do the same for John and Susan. I know they will miss their mom and so will we.

Insight

John Schlageck



The vocation of agriculture nurtures the close family ties that make life rich in ways money can't buy.

Children who are raised on a farm or ranch earn values that last a lifetime that can be learned no other way. Farming and ranching provides education for life and no other occupation teaches so much about birth, growth and maturity in such a variety of ways.

Without question, many of the best things in life are free - the splendor of a sunrise, the rapture of wide open spaces, the exhilarating sight of the landscape greening each spring - true

happiness comes from watching crops ripen in the field, watching children grow tall in the sun, seeing your whole family feel the pride that springs from their shared experience living, working and harvesting from the land.

Farmers and ranchers believe that through their shared vocation they are giving more to the world than they are taking from it - an honor and privilege that does not come to all men or women. Agricultural producers believe their lives will be measured ultimately by what they have done for their fellow men/women and by this standard, fear no judgment.

They believe when they grow old and sum up their days, they will stand tall and feel pride in the life they've lived. Farmers and ranchers believe in their vocation because it makes all of this possible.

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