

MCCAIN WOULD BE THE SECOND LOBBYIST PRESIDENT

Christy has been doing great work exposing the lobbyists running the McCain campaign. She showed how common (in both sense of the word) it is for McCain to get in bed with lobbyists. She did a profile of what a nice guy Rick Davis is. And a post showing that the one thing that will interrupt McCain's campaign schedule (since we know it's not votes in the Senate) is a schmooze session in Deer Valley.

It sure raises the specter of a presidency run by lobbyists, doesn't it?

The thing is, the notion of a presidency run by and for the lobbyists isn't really a new thing. Consider the following highlights from the Bush Administration:

Ed Gillespie

Remember when the Administration was flailing last summer, as more and more dirt piled up on Karl Rove and Alberto Gonzales? The Bush Administration brought in a person to replace both Dan Bartlett and Karl Rove to retool the Administration and try to salvage Bush's legacy. Gillespie brought along the considerable baggage of his lobbying client list, without taking reasonable precautions to ensure he was working for the American people—and not his former clients.

Ever since Ed Gillespie became Bush's replacement for Dan Bartlett (and after that, for Rove), I've been trying to track the clients of Quinn Gillespie—the firm that Gillespie co-founded. After all, Gillespie is a guy who, up until days before he took on one of the most powerful advisory roles at the White House, was a big-time lobbyist, with a broad clientele. And Gillespie has

declined to recuse himself automatically from matters concerning his former clients.

Despite the potential for conflicts of interest, Gillespie won't be forced in his new role to recuse himself from all matters related to the companies he has lobbied for, said Ken Gross, a Washington-based attorney and former associate general counsel with the Federal Election Commission.

Instead, Gillespie will have to decide on a case-by-case basis if his activities could violate federal ethics standards.

So, when Bush pushes back S-CHIP eligibility to prevent S-CHIP from becoming a cornerstone to a universal, government-provided health care program, I think it relevant to consider that, until recently, Bush's counselor was representing the interests of the Coalition to Advance Healthcare Reform—a corporate group pushing privately-funded healthcare. And as Bush prepares to veto a bill reforming the corrupt student loan process, I think it relevant to consider that Gillespie was also, until very recently, representing Nelnet, one of the student loan companies most deeply mired in the scandal. And as Bush commands Congress to enact a bill giving telecommunications companies immunity for their past illegal actions associated with the warrantless wiretapping program, you might want to remember that until recently, Gillespie was representing the interests of AT&T, Verizon, and the US Telecom Association.

In fact, as soon as rumors started flying that

Gillespie was going to move to the oval office, the US Chamber of Commerce took the opportunity to put some last minute lobbyist cash in his pocket before he made the move.

You see, the rumor that Gillespie would replace Bartlett was reported at least as early as June 3. Bush made it official on June 13. And on June 15, Quinn Gillespie started working for a new client. A pretty significant one, as it turns out.

Just in time to work with Gillespie's now incredibly wired former colleagues—but late enough to avoid any requirement that he recuse himself, the US Chamber of Commerce jumped in bed with Gillespie's close associates. In the first two weeks Gillespie was working at the White House, the US Chamber of Commerce paid his former colleagues \$40,000 to lobby Congress on banking issues, immigration, trade policy, and energy policy.

Ed Gillespie has not, himself, faced jail time for his conflicts of interest while with the Bush Administration, thus bucking a trend we'll see below. In fact, he was instrumental in shielding the White House from any repercussions from the New Hampshire phone-jamming scandal. To follow that success, Gillespie has promised that Bush and the Republicans won't be mired in scandal like they were in 2006—though he has yet to convince Ted Stevens not to run again. His primary strategy seems to be about dodging responsibility for crimes committed, though, and not avoiding crimes altogether. Not long after AT&T's former lobbyist took a central role in the Administration, their primary focus became getting the telecoms out of any legal liability for having illegally wiretapped Americans.

But that wasn't the only favor the newly Gillespie-led Bush Administration did the telecoms—Gillespie's timing almost perfectly

coincides with the Administration's tardy push against Net Neutrality.

Jack Abramoff

The Administration saved itself the embarrassment of actually hiring Jack Abramoff—and they're still twisting law and precedent to hide the degree to which Abramoff had ready access to the White House. But it's clear that Abramoff had a key role in the early days of the Administration. While serving on the transition team Abramoff was able to influence hires—particularly in areas affecting the Department of Interior and Marianas Islands.

At least two people who worked on Abramoff's team at Preston Gates wound up with Bush administration jobs: Patrick Pizzella, named an assistant secretary of labor by Bush; and David Safavian, chosen by Bush to oversee federal procurement policy in the Office of Management and Budget.

Abramoff's close ties to the Administration and the party have tainted much of what the Administration does—and put Abramoff and several of his cronies in jail.

Stephen Griles

Stephen Griles, a James Watt-era Interior employee turned energy lobbyist before Bush picked him to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior, was precisely the kind of guy Abramoff and Cheney wanted at Interior. In his years at Interior, he contributed to lower standards for clean air and water, opened up new areas for oil and gas drilling, and contributed to an Enron-style accounting gimmick that allowed his former clients to drill on public lands at cut rates. And in spite of promising to recuse himself from matters affecting his former clients, he continued to lobby EPA for them while serving as the number two guy in Interior. Later, when Griles was trying to avoid jail time for this attentiveness to lobbyists, he tried to spin it

as a good thing!

Mr. Griles responded to inquiries from citizens, lobbyists, Members of Congress and others was particularly accessible as a public official as demonstrated by his calendar. ... Lobbyist Terry O'Connor [who lobbies for Shell] stated that Mr. Griles was very approachable while at the Department of Interior, and his "constants were always his candor and honesty, coupled [with] his approachability with an *open door policy to meet with and listen to any stakeholder*, irrespective of his or her point of view on the policy subject at hand. ... In fact, Mr. Griles met with dozens if not hundreds of lobbyists while he was Deputy Secretary, and he had a meeting scheduled with lobbyists on every page of his weekly calendar.

(He also had several of those lobbyists he had been so attentive to write leniency letters in support of sentencing.)

Griles also had a penchant for affairs with ethically-challenged women. As a result of his affair with Italia Federici, Griles did favors for Jack Abramoff's tribal clients. And the Enron-accounting for oil and gas companies was one outcome of an affair with his now wife Sue Ellen Wooldridge.

Griles is doing times for his lies to cover up how he catered to Abramoff's needs. Still pending (AFAIK) is the trial for allowing an oil-industry beneficiary of Griles' Enron-accounting gimmick to buy a house for he and Wooldridge.

These three are just three of the most obvious. Less well-known are:

- Ann-Marie Lynch, a former PhRMA lobbyist turned Deputy Assistant Secretary of HHS

for policy. In HHS, Lynch fought price caps on drugs and pushed brand-name drugs over generics. She's one of the people we can thank for Medicare Part D's problems.

- Thomas Scully, a former for-profit hospital lobbyist turned head of Medicare. Scully oversaw a favorable settlement for one of his former clients, HCA, and hid the costs of the Medicare Part D program from Congress.
- Charles Lambert, a former lobbyist for National Cattlemen's Beef Association turned USDA Deputy Undersecretary. Lambert has claimed Mad Cow disease was a hoax and opposed country-of-origin labeling.
- Phillip Cooney, the former lobbyist for the American Petroleum Institute turned Chief of Staff for the White House Council on Environmental Quality. Cooney repeatedly edited climate change reports to minimize the effects of human activities.

The list goes on and on—former mine executives in charge of mine safety, manufacturers' lobbyist in charge of consumer safety, and so on. And that doesn't include the revolving door

working the other way—taking top Bush officials into lobbying positions in the private sector, a practice that has benefited defense, homeland security, and health care corporations mightily. When you give free rein to the lobbyists, it results in the wholesale gutting of the public interest. And not incidentally, it results in poor decisions—as science and open bidding are replaced by cronyism—and a failing economy.

We already know what happens when lobbyists take over the Oval Office. If John McCain is elected, along with his buddies Charlie Black, Rick Davis, and Vicki Iseman, you can expect more of the same.