

July 31, 2014

Reform Groups Urge Senators to Support New Legislation Introduced Today by Senator Michael Bennet to Curb Bundling by Lobbyists for Members of Congress

Our organizations support the Lobbying and Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2014, legislation introduced today by Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO) that would limit the ability of lobbyists to use bundled contributions to obtain undue influence with members of Congress.

We strongly urge Senators to co-sponsor the Bennet bill.

Our organizations include the Campaign Legal Center, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, Common Cause, Democracy 21, Demos, League of Women Voters, Public Citizen and Sunlight Foundation.

Unlike most citizens, registered lobbyists are in the business of influencing members of Congress. They are paid to influence government decisions and the contributions they give and raise for members of Congress play a key role in pursuing their lobbying interests.

One of the principal ways in which Washington lobbyists gain improper influence is by soliciting and providing, or bundling, large amounts of campaign funds for members of Congress.

A lobbyist who bundles \$50,000 or \$100,000 for a member is in the same position as an individual who contributes \$50,000 or \$100,000 to the member – in terms of the potential opportunity to exercise corrupting influence with the member at the expense of the American people. Such large contributions are illegal if made directly but lobbyists bypass the contribution limit by bundling contributions.

The Bennet bill would curb the ability of lobbyists to obtain influence by bundling contributions for members of Congress and federal candidates. Bundling is defined in the bill as raising contributions for a member or candidate and providing these contributions in a manner in which the bundler gets credit from the member or candidate for providing the contributions.

Under the legislation, the total combined amount that a registered lobbyist would be allowed to directly contribute and bundle is \$2,600 per election, the current individual contribution limit for federal candidates. Thus, under this reform, a lobbyist could not bundle a total amount of contributions greater than the individual contribution limit.

The Bennet bill also closes loopholes in the lobbying laws to ensure that all individuals who are paid to lobby Congress register as lobbyists. The Bennet bill also prohibits members and candidates from soliciting contributions from registered lobbyists while Congress is in session.

Fourteen states currently have session prohibitions on contributions by lobbyists. In the *McConnell* case, the Supreme Court upheld a ban on solicitation by members of potentially corrupting contributions.

The solicitation restriction in the Bennet bill complements and strengthens the bill's curb on bundling by lobbyists. By prohibiting members from soliciting lobbyists while Congress is in session, the bill further limits the ability of lobbyists to use political money to obtain corrupting influence over government decisions.