



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on October 31, 2011

Obama “Bundlers” Raise Millions for Reelection Campaign

A highlight of President Obama’s 2008 campaign was his purported drive to end “special interest politics,” as he assured American voters that he would not accept contributions from Washington’s vast army of lobbyists. “You need leadership you can trust to work for you, not for the special interests who have had their thumb on the scale,” Obama declared at an October 2008 campaign stop in La Crosse, Wisconsin. “And together, we will tell Washington, and their lobbyists, that their days of setting the agenda are over. They have not funded my campaign. You have. They will not run my White House. You’ll help me run my White House.”



But [according](#) to the *New York Times*, Obamas pledge to rid the White House of self-indulgent lobbyists has fallen well short, as he has courted prominent allies in the lobbying industry who are raising millions of dollars for his 2012 reelection campaign. At least 15 of Obamas “bundlers” large donors who bundle together contributions from multiple parties hold influential roles in the lobbying industry (though they are not registered), and have raised more than five million dollars so far for the campaign.

These 15 bundlers are a dominant force among Washingtons business and political alliances. Sally Susman, an executive who manages lobbying operations for the pharmaceutical company Pfizer, raised more than \$500,000 for the Obama campaign and helped promote a \$35,800-a-ticket dinner for the President. However, under the labyrinthine tenets of federal lobbying, Susman has avoided registering with the Senate as a lobbyist.

Although none is currently a lobbyist, four of the bundlers were registered at one time, and several presently work for large lobbying and law firms, such as Blank Rome and Greenberg Traurig. Obama fundraiser Alex Heckler (pictured above) runs a Florida consulting firm, [LSN Partners](#), which touts its effective ability to “win results for our clients” at local, state, and national levels and “maintain a strong national network of lobbying firms who are available to support our clients regional and local objectives.” The *Times* reported:

Mr. Heckler, a noted Democratic fund-raiser in Florida who raised money for the presidential bids of Hillary Rodham Clinton and Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, has already brought in at least \$200,000 for the Obama campaign, records show. (The campaign uses only broad dollar ranges for the money raised by its bundlers, and it declined to provide more precise data.)

Likewise, Andy Spahn, owner of a government relations company in Los Angeles, tells visitors to his Web site about its “extensive relationships in Washington, D.C.,” and elsewhere in advocating for “high net-worth individuals,” corporations, nonprofit groups and others.

Mr. Spahn, who made his name doing lobbying work for DreamWorks film studio and was appointed by Mr. Obama to a presidential committee on the arts, has raised at least \$500,000 for



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the presidents re-election.

And Michael Kempner, who has also brought in at least \$500,000 for the campaign, runs a team of Washington lobbyists at his New Jersey firm, MWW Group, who, according to its promotional material, use their “important relationships with both the Democratic and Republican leadership” to wield influence for their private sector clients.

According to a [study](#) by the Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit watchdog on public policy, 80 percent of Obamas bundlers who raised at least \$500,000 for his 2008 campaign, ended up receiving “key administration posts.” For instance, the organizations iWatch News exposed that Telecom executive Donald Gips bundled half a million dollars for the campaign and later benefited immensely from Obamas election: He was assigned to administer hiring in the White House; he was later named ambassador to South Africa; and his company, Level 3 Communications, reaped nearly \$14 million in stimulus contracts for broadband and communications projects. *CBS News* [reported](#):

Mr. Obama’s bundlers were also granted White House access they and their families “account for more than 3,000 White House meetings and visits,” according to iWatch. (There were 800 bundler visits to the White House in just the first few months of the administration.) The report also found that “[a]t least 18 other bundlers have ties to businesses poised to profit from government spending to promote clean energy, telecommunications and other key administration priorities.”

Mr. Obama’s decision to reward his donors follows the pattern of his presidential predecessors. But it flies in the face of his campaign promise to reduce the clout of moneyed special interests. The report shows how his bundlers ended up working in the Department of Justice, Department of Energy and the Federal Communications Commission, among other federal agencies, and been [sic] appointed to policy advisory commissions.

The President has long touted his campaigning practices as free from special interest influence, where lobbyists are barred from fundraising events and denied financial bargaining with the White House. However, many argue that Obama simply disguises his financial politicking by using backdoor tactics. For example, Fox News [reported](#), “After the president clears the room or before he arrives, the Democratic National Committee can set up another fundraiser in the same spot and ushers the check-wielding lobbyists through the backdoor.” This grants the President power to run attack ads on Republicans and fund state offices, yet still allow him to deny accepting any direct contributions from lobbyists.

Further, recruiting persons who act like lobbyists or manage a team of lobbyists but are not registered, give Obama another campaign loophole. Indeed, while denying money from registered lobbyists, the team gladly welcomes those who act as “strategic advisers” to clients aspiring to wield influence on government affairs.

“Its a legitimate concern,” said Craig Holman, a lobbyist for [Public Citizen](#), a nonpartisan ethics group. “The campaign has to draw the line somewhere, but the reality is that the president is still relying on wealthy special interests and embracing those people in his campaign.”

Unsurprisingly, the Obama campaign retaliated against the *Times* article, saying the piece “misses the forest for the trees, obscuring the Presidents long history of advancing ethics and government reform and brushing right past his opponents records with nothing but a shrug.” From the beginning of Obamas 2008 campaign, he has not accepted a dime from registered lobbyists, asserted campaign secretary Ben LaBolt.



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“Reducing the influence of special interests over the policymaking process won’t happen overnight there are many institutional forces fighting tooth and nail to make sure that it does not,” LaBolt added. “But every step of the way, the president has promoted reform while candidates like Mitt Romney have thrown up their arms and attempted to thrive off the system as it is.”

Although some GOP candidates rely on special interest campaigning, particularly ones such as Mitt Romney, they have not branded a campaign slogan around this notion, nor have they promised the American people the “most open and transparent” administration in American history and then reneged on their campaign vow.



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