

Vested Interests

ROLL CALL

The lobbying
and legislation that
drives Capitol Hill

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Approps Lobbyists Wait, Worry

By **Kate Ackley**
ROLL CALL STAFF

Reform proposals that would limit lobbyists' ability to schmooze with Members and staffers are making K Street jittery. But when Congress starts talking about earmark reform, appropriations lobbyists realize that their business' bottom line could be in jeopardy.

Some of the city's biggest firms — including Cassidy & Associates, Van Scoyoc Associates and the PMA Group — got their start in and are best known for their appropriations work. And it's difficult to find a registered lobbyist in town, from any firm, who doesn't have at least one client looking to Congress to secure some money. Most of those clients pay

\$10,000 to \$20,000 a month, though some are even more lucrative.

Colin Wellenkamp, vice president of government relations at the Washington Linkage Group, which represents cities and municipalities, said he and his colleagues are keeping tabs on all the discussions related to earmark reform, which has emerged as a rallying cry since the Congressional bribery scandals involving former GOP lobbyist Jack Abramoff and former Rep. Duke Cunningham (R-Calif.).

"We are certainly taking them seriously and watching the process very closely," he said. "Every year, it seems, our dialogue about appropriations and strategy sessions with our

municipalities is becoming more and more a cautionary tale. We are having to put more caveats in there, put more caution into it to reduce expectations."

One appropriations lobbyist said the mounting pressure against earmarks will not be good for business.

"Obviously, it's going to hurt appropriations lobbying," he said. "All this talk about limiting requests means it's going to be tougher to get them and be harder to succeed for clients. If you can't succeed for clients, clients go away."

This lobbyist, who would speak only on condition of anonymity, said that limiting the

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number of earmarks that each Member could request — one idea that's currently on the table — would be "disastrous" for appropriations lobbying.

Rodney Emery, a lobbyist with the Capitol Hill Consulting Group, said his firm maintains a diverse roster of issues in addition to appropriations, including tax and energy policy. Emery said his practice focuses on working for nonprofit groups.

"Because they rely on federal dollars and state dollars as well as private contributions, when they make the investment to hire a lobbyist, they are doing so to get a return that's going to be absolutely essential to their survival," he said. "If I'm pitching a client that's a nonprofit, they're investing in me ... and if they get nothing in return, that's a huge loss for them. They may make the decision to keep that money for their operating budget rather than paying me."

Veteran appropriations lobbyist Vincent Versage of the National Group said people who work in his sector are concerned about the rhetoric and the anti-earmark proposals.

"But many of us have worked ethically and followed the rules over all these years, and many of the proposals are basically things that we as appropriations lobbyists who are of quality have followed," he said.

Several lobbyists who work in the appro-

priations sector pointed out that earmarks can help Congress send money to projects that need it. Members can make an increase in funding for such things as more body armor for soldiers in Iraq, for example.

David Gogol, vice chairman of B&D Consulting, said appropriations work amounts to less than 30 percent of his firm's bottom line.

"While we have a significant approps practice, we also work on behalf of a number of trade association and nonprofit associations, and that's a source of revenue that's not affected by earmark issues," he said.

He added that the causes of his clients are often politically easy for Members to support.

One client, Ways to Work, he said, helps low-income moms get car loans. Rep. Ralph Regula (R-Ohio), among others, helped secure an earmark for it.

"Mr. Regula would not be embarrassed to be associated with that," he said.

Campbell Kaufman, a partner in Cornerstone Government Affairs — a firm that

has many clients seeking government dollars — said that until he sees what reforms might happen, it's unclear what impact it might have on his firm's business.

"We've talked to our clients about it, but nobody is alarmed because we have no idea what the rules will be," he said. "Whatever they are, we will follow them."

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Partner, Cornerstone Government Affairs



File Photos

Vincent Versage (left) and Colin Wellenkamp, who specialize in appropriations lobbying, are taking a wait-and-see approach to potential reforms of the earmarking process.

gress have all of the pertinent information regarding the project and are fully informed about the merits of the request," Aimee Steel, Cassidy & Associates communications director, said in a statement. "We are following the process closely. We do not expect a dramatic change to the way we conduct business with regard to appropriations due to the strong community support for our clients."

All appropriations lobbyists said that while they have worries in the back of their mind, they are operating for now in a busi-

ness-as-usual fashion, outlining clients' earmark requests to meet February and March deadlines.

"Right now, you're telling your municipalities to finalize their priority lists, and let's see if we can schedule a time to visit your Member of Congress and make a formal request," said lobbyist Jeff Taylor, whose firm Barnes & Thornburg represents a range of clients on appropriations matters. "The theory that there will never be any earmarks is extreme."