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Week 18

Lobbying and Ethics Reform

"You work for the people who elected you. Not the people who paid for your campaign."

1. The Problem

Former government officials become lobbyists, lobbyists become government officials, and the revolving door spins continuously — with a 1-2 year cooling period that does not break the influence pattern because the relationships, institutional knowledge, and access do not expire in 1-2 years. Members of Congress trade stocks in companies whose industries they regulate. The omnibus spending bill is where accountability goes to die — provisions that cannot pass a standalone vote get buried in must-pass legislation and carried through in the dark. The result is a permanent governing class that works for the people who fund it, not the people who elected it.

2. The Governing Principle

You work for the people who elected you. Not the people who paid for your campaign. The revolving door closes. Dark money is disclosed. Individual stock trading by people whose decisions move markets ends. And the omnibus bill dies. One bill. One subject. Every time. The mechanism of corruption is attacked, not the symptom. Every reform in this week is designed so that compliance is structurally unavoidable, not just theoretically required.

3. The Specific Policy

I. The Revolving Door and Lobbying Reforms

- **5-year revolving door cooling period:** covers members of Congress and senior staff; executive branch political appointees; Senior Executive Service career civil servants; regulatory agency staff at FDA, FCC, SEC, CFPB, FMCSA, and all agencies whose decisions have direct commercial impact; White House staff; and Pentagon civilian staff in procurement, contracting, and policy roles. The line is drawn at access and authority. A senior FDA reviewer who knows which drug applications are pending is as valuable to a pharmaceutical lobbying firm as a congressional staffer. The 5-year period applies to both.
- **Close the shadow lobbying loophole:** former officials who provide compensated advice related to influencing federal government decisions — regardless of whether they make direct contact — register as lobbyists and disclose their clients. Strategic advice without direct contact is lobbying. It is registered and disclosed as lobbying.

- **Full dark money disclosure:** 501(c)(4) organizations spending above a defined threshold on federal election-related advocacy, issue advertising, or direct lobbying disclose all donors. Citizens United acknowledged that disclaimer and disclosure requirements are constitutional. Buckley v. Valeo established that disclosure requirements serve a compelling government interest. The disclosure requirement does not restrict who can spend or how much. It requires that they do so publicly.
- **Ban individual stock trading for all government employees with access and authority:** the same population covered by the revolving door reform plus their immediate family members. Diversified mutual funds and index funds permitted — individual stocks are not. You work for the American people while you are in government. You do not simultaneously bet on companies whose fate your decisions influence.
- **FARA enforcement — mandatory criminal referral for documented violations:** the Foreign Agents Registration Act has been notoriously weakly enforced. Mandatory criminal referral for documented FARA violations. Close the legal or commercial activity exemption that allows foreign-directed lobbying to avoid registration when structured as business consulting.
- **Lobbying expenditure transparency:** which specific bills or regulatory proceedings were targeted, which specific officials were contacted, and what specific outcome the client is paying for. All filings searchable and machine-readable in a public database updated in real time.

II. One Bill, One Subject — Presidential Governing Standard

This is not a law. It is a presidential governing standard communicated directly to Congress on inauguration day and enforced through the veto pen. A formal letter delivered simultaneously to the Speaker of the House and the Senate Majority Leader — and released publicly to the American people — states the standard plainly and without ambiguity. Every member of Congress will know from day one what will and will not be signed.

- **The standard:** every bill must address a single subject. The title of a bill must accurately describe the entirety of its content. Any provision not described by the title has no business being in the bill.
- **What will be vetoed:** any bill containing provisions not directly and substantially related to its stated subject; any omnibus spending bill bundling unrelated appropriations into a single vote; any must-pass legislation used as a vehicle for provisions that cannot pass on their own merits; any continuing resolution extending government funding beyond 90 days without a full budget passed through regular order.
- **Why the veto pen is sufficient:** no law is needed. The Constitution gives the president veto authority. A president who consistently vetoes omnibus legislation changes Congressional behavior — because the alternative is passing nothing. Congress will test the standard once. When the first bill comes back vetoed they will know it is real. After that the behavior changes.
- **The political effect:** legislation that has historically moved by attaching provisions to larger vehicles must move on its own merits or not move at all. Some provisions that would have passed will not pass. That is the point. If a provision cannot survive a standalone floor vote, attaching it to a defense bill does not make it good policy. It makes it hidden policy. Hidden policy ends.
- **The American people's right to know:** the omnibus spending bill is where accountability goes to die. Citizens cannot hold their representatives accountable for votes on provisions they cannot find inside a thousand-page bill assembled in private and passed at midnight. One bill, one subject makes every vote visible. Every member is accountable for exactly what they passed and nothing else.

4. Estimated Cost

Ethics reform is primarily regulatory and enforcement — net federal cost is minimal. FARA enforcement expansion: approximately \$100-200 million per year. Lobbying disclosure system upgrade: \$50-100 million one-time investment. The one bill, one subject standard costs nothing — it is a veto standard. The return in reduced regulatory capture and restored public accountability is the entire point of the platform.

5. Year 1 Implementation and Measurable Result

Year 1 measurable result: one bill, one subject letter delivered to Congress on inauguration day and published publicly; 5-year revolving door cooling period enacted within 90 days; stock trading ban for covered government employees in effect within 90 days; dark money disclosure requirement proposed to Congress within 60 days; FARA criminal referral mandate issued within 30 days; lobbying disclosure database upgraded to real-time machine-readable format within 180 days; first omnibus-style legislation vetoed and returned to Congress with a public explanation of which provisions violated the one bill, one subject standard.