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The Business of Persuasion Thrives in Nation's Capital

By JILL ABRAMSON

"I haven't thought about Monica Lewinsky all day," mused Wright Andrews, a Washington lobbyist.

He was too busy. While the rest of Washington was obsessing over the President's sex scandal, Mr. Andrews and dozens of other business lobbyists were working on bankruptcy legislation that passed the Senate on Wednesday. Kenneth W. Starr's \$40 million investigation may have dominated the headlines and caused misery for President Clinton, but \$40 million was also spent on lobbying by the banking, credit card and retailing industries on a variety of bills, including bank legislation that would make it much tougher to declare personal bankruptcy.

This year has also, separately, been a banner year for K Street, the power corridor of law and lobbying firms that rims the White House in downtown Washington.

It started with extensive lobbying earlier in the year by the cigarette industry to crush a comprehensive tobacco bill, followed by efforts to influence major banking and bankruptcy legislation. With more lobbying yet to come on appropriations, trade and tax measures, Mr. Andrews and many lobbyists interviewed in recent months predicted that more would be spent on influencing the Federal Government this year than in 1997, when a record \$1.2 billion was reportedly spent.

This rapid growth in spending has brought with it the rise of a new lobbying elite. At a time when the Democratic Administration and the Republican-led Congress are often at loggerheads and when Washington's agenda, dominated by scandal, seems inert, K Street's portfolio has never been more robust. That portfolio includes multimillion-dollar lobbying campaigns on issues like product liability law, health care and computer privacy.

They are issues that do not necessarily receive a lot of media attention though they affect millions of people.

All last week, for example, while the klieg lights were shining on the House Judiciary Committee's debate about the Starr report, swarms of tax lobbyists were crisscrossing the

hallways outside the House Ways and Means Committee, known as Gucci Gulch, in an effort to preserve an array of business tax breaks in the House's \$80 billion tax-cut package.

The influence industry was already on a growth curve in the 1980's, but that growth has exploded in recent years with the advent of a divided Government.

A new cast of Republican Congressional committee and subcommittee chairmen as well as Washington's increasing impact on highly regulated industries like financial services, telecommunications and health care has meant that corporations and lobbying firms are reaching much deeper into the bureaucracy in order to wield influence.

When Kenneth J. Kies left his Congressional staff position last winter for a million-dollar job lobbying for PricewaterhouseCoopers, Congressional committee chairmen, senior Treasury Department and White House officials turned out for a lavish farewell in the House Ways and Means Committee room, a testament to his connectedness.

The eye-popping salary package commanded by Mr. Kies, a 46-year-old Republican tax lawyer who earned \$132,000 as chief of staff of the Joint Committee on Taxation, was fresh evidence of a culture of money that in the 1990's has begun to transform Washington's image as a power city.

Another bureaucrat who was unknown outside Washington, Bruce Merlin Fried, a senior administrator for Medicare and Medicaid programs at the Department of Health and Human Services, was also courted like a superstar when he left the Government last January.

"I felt like I was representing Michael Jordan," said Susan Schneider, a legal headhunter who helped Mr. Fried choose among plum jobs at law and lobbying firms.

"The demand for knowledgeable people who can track what is going on on Capitol Hill and the Government and can figure out the pressure points that companies should be touching in Washington has greatly increased," said Richard Shapiro, executive director of the Congressional Management Foundation, a private organization that tries to educate Congress on running its business.

Almost anyone with significant political connections, including the spouses, family members and former aides of lawmakers, is highly marketable on K Street. Michelle Laxalt, for example, the daughter of Paul Laxalt, a former Republican Senator, is sought after as a lobbyist for her Senate connections.

Boutique firms that specialize in lobbying a single member or a single committee of Congress have also sprouted up and are flourishing. Ann M. Eppard, who for 22 years served as a top aide to Bud Shuster, the House Transportation Committee chairman, left her job in 1994 and hung out her shingle as a transportation lobbyist. Within months, she

had lined up more than \$1 million in retainers from an array of big transportation companies, including the FDX Corporation.

Some denizens of the capital say that K Street's explosion has fundamentally changed the city's atmosphere, with a new obsession with money eclipsing Washington's traditional obsession with power.

"New York was money, Los Angeles was glamour and Washington was always power," said Victor Kamber, a lobbyist and a political consultant for 32 years whose firm billed \$11 million last year. "Now this town is as much about money as power."

Dollars on Parade A World Awash With Big Money

Washington has long been one of the nation's wealthiest metropolitan areas, with a large population of Government workers and white-collar professionals. But its elite, led by a stratum of highly paid lawyers and lobbyists, has never been as brazen in advertising its money or political connections.

At the Capital Grille, an expensive restaurant that opened near the Capitol in 1994, lobbyists flaunt their clients and their expensive tastes with brass name plaques on private wine lockers.

So many wealthy Washingtonians are buying second homes along Maryland's once-quaint Eastern Shore that some areas are taking on the congested feel of New York's Hamptons on summer weekends. And a new glossy magazine, Capital Style, regularly profiles the lives of Washington's rich and famous.

Nothing seems to restrain this new culture. Not tighter revolving-door rules signed by President Clinton that lengthened the time that some lobbyists must refrain from lobbying their old agencies. Not a gift ban passed by the Congress to loosen the knot of friendship between lobbyists and lawmakers. Not even a major fund-raising scandal in which some of the city's premier lobbyists, including Haley Barbour, a former Republican Party chairman, and Peter S. Knight, a Democratic fund-raiser, were brought before Congressional oversight committees.

Some of the most expensive lobbying campaigns have sought to insure that nothing happens, like the \$100 million effort to kill anti-tobacco legislation.

"A lot of the best lobbyists are like paid assassins," said Jennifer Shecter of the Center for Responsive Politics, a research group in Washington.

Lobbyists have always been part of the capital's political fabric, but have never before been so intimately interwoven into the government. Twenty years ago, for example, most Washington law firms did little or no lobbying. Now virtually all of them have bustling

lobbying practices, and some have even hired non-lawyers to increase their political clout.

In his fight against impeachment, President Clinton has reached out to a network of Democratic lobbyists, lawyers and political consultants, including Thomas Hale Boggs Jr., Jody Powell, Joseph P. O'Neill and Anthony T. Podesta, who participate in a daily conference call with White House officials to plot strategy. This daily bull session is organized by Steve Ricchetti, who recently returned to the White House after leaving to become a lobbyist.

Both Vice President Al Gore and Speaker Newt Gingrich have tight coteries of lobbyists who regularly advise them on political matters.

Political analyst Kevin P. Phillips, author of "Arrogant Capital," worries that Washington has become what the Founding Fathers feared, a "capital so privileged and incestuous in its dealings, that average citizens believe it is no longer accessible to the general public."

Mr. Phillips added that there was nothing like Washington's "massive, permanent lobbying elite" in other foreign capitals.

Foreign countries, in fact, feel it is necessary to hire Washington lobbyists to have their voices heard. Tiny Azerbaijan is currently interviewing firms, even though the small republic has an embassy in Washington and limited resources. The reason? Its neighbors have Washington lobbyists.

At least 128 former members of Congress are now working as lobbyists. Although some found solace on K Street after they were defeated for re-election, others left office because they were offered giant salary increases to become lobbyists.

In 1993 and 1994, Ohio Republican Willis D. Gradison Jr. and Oklahoma Democrat Glenn English stepped down from their House seats in the middle of their terms for lucrative lobbying jobs.

Only 3 percent of the lawmakers who retired in the 1970's are currently on K Street; in the 1990's, at least 22 percent of those leaving have become lobbyists.

Even Robert Strauss, at 80 years old perhaps the most seasoned member of a generation of Democratic superlawyers, is amazed at how fast the revolving door spins. A former Democratic Party chairman and United States trade representative, Mr. Strauss said in a recent interview that lawyers now often went to work for the Government for a few years, not because they wanted a career in public service, but because "they know that enables them to move on out in a few years and become associated with a lobbying or law firm and their services are in tremendous demand."

To be sure, the long hours and lean salaries of Congressional aides have always led to turnover, but not this much, according to the Congressional Management Foundation. In

1987, for example, most administrative assistants in the House, the highest-ranking aides, had spent 5.5 years working in the Congress. In 1996, the average tenure had dropped to 4 years, a study first reported by National Journal said.

The length of tenure of senior Senate staffers has also dropped.

In a recent foundation survey, 58 percent of departing Congressional staffers cited a desire to earn more money as their reason for leaving; it was the second most frequent response given after a desire to pursue a different type of work.

The Million-Dollar Man A Tax Analyst Joins the Fold

PricewaterhouseCoopers, the accounting firm that hired Mr. Kies to lobby on tax issues for its clients, may have already recouped its investment.

Last spring and summer, Mr. Kies led a lobbying blitz for some of the biggest names in corporate America, including the General Electric Company, to maintain a lucrative tax break. The provision, which Mr. Kies's old committee estimated would cost \$1.8 billion in Federal revenue over 10 years, allowed United States corporations to reduce taxes on their overseas operations. Mr. Kies headed a team of 10 other PricewaterhouseCoopers analysts and lobbyists in a successful effort to maintain the status quo.

When the Treasury Department announced its intention to kill the provision, Mr. Kies swung into action, meeting many times with with top Treasury officials, including Lawrence H. Summers, the Deputy Treasury Secretary. "We spent hours and hours with Donald C. Lubick, the Assistant Secretary for Tax Policy," Mr. Kies said in a recent interview. Mr. Kies dealt with both men at the Joint Tax Committee, which evaluates the tax implications of legislation.

Mr. Kies pushed hard with a central argument: that the provision was not really a loophole and would not result in a revenue loss from multinational companies shifting more of their operations overseas. Using Rube Goldberg-like diagrams that Mr. Kies likes to draw to illustrate complex tax issues, he carried the day. In June, the Treasury Department decided not to make the change, at least for the time being.

It also helped Mr. Kies that his old boss, the House Ways and Means Chairman Bill Archer, and other influential Republican tax writers, weighed in on his side. Federal lobbying laws prohibit Mr. Kies from lobbying Mr. Archer or his old committee for one year after his departure, but they are not much of an impediment. Former officials circumvent the law simply by designing the lobbying strategy and then letting their clients or colleagues do the direct lobbying until their one-year cooling-off period is over.

Coming from the Joint Tax Committee, Mr. Kies had free rein to lobby at Treasury, but on his team, which included lobbyists from other firms, was a former Treasury Department official.

In an interview, Mr. Kies said that the old-fashioned stereotype of a back-slapping lobbyist trading on friendships was outmoded. Much of his time is spent crunching numbers and persuading Treasury officials and lawmakers that his analysis is on target. Of course, his political connections count, too, but Mr. Kies said of his old bosses, Mr. Archer and William V. Roth Jr., the Senate Finance Chairman, "Archer and Roth generally do what they believe is right."

"They don't do things because someone who's a buddy of theirs comes to see them," he said.

Ari Fleischer, an aide to Mr. Archer, had high praise for Mr. Kies.

"There are scores of top-notch lobbyists who have relationships but who don't have the great knowledge to go beyond a handshake," Mr. Fleischer said. "Ken Kies is an exception. He's a well-respected expert on tax law and he came to be one of the Hill's most admired strategists."

As the top aide at the Joint Tax Committee, Mr. Kies supervised a staff of more than 60. Almost every line of the sweeping tax bill passed last year was written by Mr. Kies. A year earlier, he helped break a three-year stalemate on how to make health coverage portable. Fortune Magazine named him "Mr. Tax" in a story on Washington's most powerful bureaucrats.

Without confirming or denying his salary, Mr. Kies stressed that he would have been making the same amount if he had stayed in the private sector instead of spending several years on a government salary. At Baker & Hostetler, the Cleveland-based law firm where he practiced tax law before 1994, he earned \$500,000.

"The whole world was bidding for him and he's worth far more than the great salary he is making," said former Congressman and Ways and Means Committee member Guy Vander Jagt, a Republican who worked with Mr. Kies when he was a Congressional staffer earlier in his career and who later practiced law with him at Baker & Hostetler. Mr. Vander Jagt tried to woo Mr. Kies back to the firm, but failed because it could not compete with PricewaterhouseCoopers's seven-figure offer.

Show Us the Money Fat Paychecks For Everyone

It has been nearly 15 years since Michael K. Deaver, a former Reagan White House aide turned lobbyist, sparked controversy when a Time Magazine cover story showed him flaunting his multimillion-dollar accounts and pictured him riding in a limousine. But earlier this year, Washingtonian Magazine, a glossy magazine that caters to the city's professional elite, had no trouble rounding up many of the city's 50 top lobbyists to pose for a group photo accompanying an article titled, "Show Me the Money!" Though he was not in the picture, Mr. Deaver is still a successful lobbyist at one of the city's premier public relations firms.

The nexus of lobbying and campaign fund-raising, which lawmakers and lobbyists used to make efforts to conceal, has also never been more graphically displayed. It is no coincidence that some of Washington's most successful lobbyists, such as Mr. Barbour and Daniel A. Dutko, a close adviser to Vice President Al Gore, are also leading fund-raisers for their respective parties.

Half of all political action committee contributions to Federal candidates and parties flow from Washington, with many donors listing K Street corridor zip codes. Two dozen lobbyists interviewed said they received hundreds of fund-raising solicitations from Congressmen and their parties last year, some shortly after a lobbying meeting with a particular lawmaker.

"You can almost count on getting some kind of fund-raising solicitation after you've been to the Hill," said one lobbyist who insisted he not be named. "The time in between has gotten shorter and shorter and it's gotten more and more brazen."

When Mr. Andrews, the business lobbyist, recently signed up a trade association of home equity lenders as a client, one of the first pieces of advice he gave the association was to establish a political action committee. "Under the current system, campaign giving and fund-raising are essential," he said. "When it isn't done, it's noticed."

Corporate interests that finance the largest portion of Washington's lobbying are fortifying their influence with record campaign contributions to Federal lawmakers. Even as the House moved to ban the large contributions to political parties that are known as soft money, the national parties scooped up \$115 million in these big donations from business and other interests over the last 18 months. That is more than double the amount raised during a comparable period in the last non-Presidential election cycle. Microsoft Corporation, which opened a Washington government affairs office only three years ago but now has one of the largest fleets of lobbyists -- more than a dozen people and firms -- recently signed on through one of its executives as a member of the Republican Party's Team 100, its elite corps of \$100,000 donors.

Labor unions, which are among the Democratic Party's biggest donors, also field large teams of lobbyists. Labor money and lobbyists played an important role late last year when the House defeated President Clinton's efforts to expand his trade authority.

In the past two years, serious scandals have erupted involving lobbyists and fund-raising, but few lobbyists have suffered serious consequences. James H. Lake, a prominent Republican lobbyist, was convicted of making illegal corporate campaign contributions as part of the Federal criminal investigation of Mike Espy, the former Agriculture Secretary. After Mr. Lake left the firm where he worked when the illicit contributions were made, he was offered a position as managing director of the Washington office of Burson-Marsteller, a public relations firm. Last January, Mr. Lake was fined \$150,000, placed on probation and ordered to write a paper on Federal election laws. Mr. Lake's monograph was distributed to the 2,000 members of the American League of Lobbyists.

In April, Ms. Eppard, the transportation lobbyist, was indicted by a Federal grand jury in Boston on charges of accepting improper payments from a lobbyist and a businessman while she was on the House Transportation Committee chairman's staff. She has denied wrongdoing and is still lobbying, having won provisions for her clients in the sweeping highway bill passed this summer.

A Bipartisan Bazaar Peddling on Both Sides of the Fence

"When I came to Washington, there was a small coterie of committee chairmen with iron-clad seniority and tremendous power," recalled Charls E. Walker, a former Treasury Department official during the Eisenhower administration who opened the capital's first non-lawyer lobbying shop in 1973, called Charls Walker Associates. "On a tax issue, if you had the agreement of the chairman of Ways and Means, you could go out and play golf" for the rest of the day.

These days, Mr. Walker said, "you can't rest easy unless you've worked all the members."

With new committee and subcommittee chairmen, and such a slender Republican majority, there are many more bases for lobbyists to cover. The demand for Democrats with ties to the Clinton-Gore administration and Republicans with connections to G.O.P. lawmakers has produced a veritable bazaar of political influence, with single companies and trade associations assembling all-star bipartisan lobbying teams. On the bankruptcy bill, for example, the American Financial Services Association showcased in its newsletter its "team of highly experienced lobbyists and consultants," including two Republican firms, Barbour Griffith & Rogers and Timmons & Co., as well as Democratic bench strength from Verner, Liipfert, Bernard, McPherson and Hand, the law firm of former Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen, and President Clinton's polling firm, Penn & Schoen Associates.

There have been many mergers of Democrats and Republicans in lobbying firms. In recent weeks there has been speculation that two respected House members, California Democrat Vic Fazio and New York Republican Bill Paxon, who are both retiring from the House this year, will join forces and open a new lobbying firm.

Parry, Romani & DeConcini, a firm that specializes in health and pharmaceutical lobbying, was long known for its connections to Orrin G. Hatch, the Republican Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman, and Dennis DeConcini, a former Democratic Senator from Arizona who joined the firm when he left the Senate in 1995.

Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America and a political veteran who was a top aide to President Lyndon Johnson, has been Hollywood's man in Washington for the last 32 years. He said he was nostalgic for the days when he employed a single lobbying firm, Akin, Gump, which is now one of seven firms that the film association keeps on retainer.

Mr. Valenti is himself a celebrated Washington insider who earns more than \$1 million. Although he enjoys easy access to most lawmakers, he said he needed so many other lobbyists because the film association had an ever-broadening agenda of foreign and domestic issues before a host of committees and agencies, from the House Judiciary Committee to the Office of the United States Trade Representative.

"I don't need any lobbyists for access or entree," Mr. Valenti said. "I need troops in the field."

Akin, Gump is still on Mr. Valenti's payroll, according to Congressional lobbying files. Another mainly Democratic firm, Verner, Liipfert, lobbies on Hollywood's trade and telecommunications issues. Still another Democrat in Mr. Valenti's lobbying arsenal is Mr. Podesta, whose brother, John, was once his lobbying partner and is now the President's top damage-control adviser on the Lewinsky imbroglio. Anthony Podesta lobbies on ratings issues for the television subsidiaries of the movie studios, according to the records. The film association has also hired Mr. DeConcini's firm and the firm of former Democratic Representative Marty Russo.

Mr. Valenti has also beefed up his Republican lobbying retinue, hiring Republicans like Mr. Vander Jagt, who said his services were in much greater demand after the Republicans won control of the House in 1994.

Field Draws Many The Experienced And the New Too

In an interview, Mr. Vander Jagt joked that his first years as a lobbyist after he retired in 1992 were so slow that, "I would have represented Al Capone or Fidel Castro." That all changed after the election in November 1994.

Mr. Vander Jagt can offer the motion picture industry and other clients a feel for what the Republican leadership is thinking because he continues to reap the perks of being a former Congressman, attending weekly meetings of several groups that are open only to current and former Republican lawmakers. "It's a lobbyist's dream to be sitting there with the committee chairmen and to find out what's going on," said Mr. Vander Jagt, who lobbies on tax and other issues. "You have all the benefits of your former life and none of the hardships," he adds.

Children, wives and even siblings of lawmakers have hung out lobbying shingles. There is Linda Hall Daschle, the wife of the Democratic Senate leader, and a former top official at Federal Aviation Administration, who lobbies on aviation issues. Randy DeLay, the brother of House Whip Tom Delay, also has transportation clients. (An ethics complaint against Representative DeLay that was sparked by his brother's lobbying activities was dismissed last year by the House Ethics Committee).

The son of former Louisiana Senator J. Bennett Johnston is one of the city's most successful lobbyists. Mr. Johnston, former chairman of the Senate energy committee,

joined his son in the business after he retired in 1996, and so did one of the former Senator's top aides. Their client roster brims with energy interests and they also lobby for clients on trade issues involving China.

Former Senator Bob Packwood, a former chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, left office after the Ethics Committee decided he should be expelled because sexual misconduct and allegations that he had given legislative favors to a lobbyist. During the first half of this year, Mr. Packwood's firm, Sunrise Research Corporation, took in \$440,000 lobbying on tax and trade issues for blue-chip clients such as Northwest Airlines and Marriott International.

But even the young and inexperienced are entering the field of lobbying. Lobbying has become an academic field, with American University offering a popular course on it.

Andrew Lacy, 23, for example, is an alumnus of a two-week intensive lobbying program at American. From his perch on K Street at Marlowe & Company, he enthusiastically sets up client meetings on Capitol Hill and attends fund-raisers for lawmakers.

"It's fun to meet a Senator or a Congressman and make your pitch," said Mr. Lacy, who is earning \$25,000 as a beginner.

Mr. Lacy, who grew up on Maryland's Eastern Shore in a rural farm area where his father is in the agriculture business and his mother is a public school teacher, said he hopes to keep his lobbying job while he takes evening law classes.

James Thurber, a professor who runs a lobbying institute at American, gets well-known lobbyists like Mr. Boggs to teach the trade to fledgling lobbyists like Mr. Lacy. Professor Thurber's students are required to develop a lobbying plan and to make their pitch to a panel of mock lawmakers. "We want them to feel the pressure of what it's like to be on a lobbying campaign," Professor Thurber said.

Mr. Lacy was persuasive in his lobbying assignment to discourage the mock lawmakers from restricting a computer practice known as "spamming," where businesses send unsolicited E-mail to consumers. He got an A and a job offer from one of the graders, lobbyist Howard Marlowe.

Mr. Marlowe's clients include property owners and localities trying to win financing for beach conservation, a cause that Mr. Lacy said he is comfortable embracing. He said some of his friends were working for tobacco companies, something he said he understood but would not do. "They are making ends meet," Mr. Lacy said. "They are learning the system. They are getting a foot in the door of the business."

The Right Connections
Gore or Gingrich: Gucci Gulch Ties

Thomas K. Downey, a New York Democrat, came to Washington in 1974 as the youngest of the Watergate Babies, the Young Turks who were elected to clean up Washington the year of President Nixon's resignation.

No longer a young reformer, Mr. Downey, who lost his seat in 1992, heads a lobbying firm, Downey & Chandler, that earned more than \$2 million last year from clients like the Boeing Company, Microsoft and Time Warner Inc.

The former New York Congressman is also the most important member of Vice President Al Gore's kitchen cabinet of advisers. All of the members of this informal advisory group are expected to play pivotal roles in his Presidential campaign in 2000 and many are charter members of the K Street elite. The group includes top Democratic fund-raisers like Mr. Knight and Mr. Dutko and two former domestic policy advisers to Mr. Gore, Roy Neel and Greg Simon, who both lobby for telecommunications interests. Another member is Jack Quinn, the former White House counsel who was also Mr. Gore's chief of staff. Mr. Quinn was a lead lobbyist for a coalition of computer companies that pressed for a new administration policy, announced earlier this month by Mr. Gore, that loosened regulations on the export of sensitive software and hardware that shields information from public scrutiny.

In an interview, Mr. Downey said he kept his lobbying separate from his friendship with Mr. Gore, with whom he frequently socialized. (Mr. Gore tore a muscle while playing basketball with Mr. Downey in the House gym).

And far from feeling like he has sold out his old principles, Mr. Downey said, "I do more interesting things now than I did as a member of Congress." One thing that is different is how he lives. When he served in Congress, his family had a cramped Capitol Hill town house. They now live in a large home near the National Cathedral, a house with a hand-painted dining room mural, that, he joked, "looks like one of my fund-raisers should be living in it."

Mr. Gore's coziness with lobbyists is hardly unusual. The Federal Election Commission has been investigating whether the House majority whip John A. Boehner's weekly tete-a-tetes with business lobbyists involved unlawful coordination of their political activities, allegations that Mr. Boehner has denied.

Former Representative Vin Weber is among the most successful of a new crop of Republican lobbyists. Working as a tag team of political influence, Mr. Weber often pairs up with Mr. Downey for clients, including Microsoft. He works out of the gleaming offices of Clark & Wienstock, a Wall Street consulting firm that did not have a Washington outpost until Mr. Weber opened one in 1994, after he retired from Congress.

As one of Mr. Gingrich's best friends in the House, the Minnesota Republican was in immediate demand. "People were looking for G.O.P. consultants and lobbyists all over the place," Mr. Weber said in an interview. Mr. Weber now heads an eight-man office that reported lobbying revenues of \$2.2 million in 1997.

Like Mr. Downey, Mr. Weber is still an inside player, jetting off earlier this year to join Mr. Gingrich at a Republican event in Palm Springs, Calif. And he, too, finds his new profession more rewarding in many ways. "With no disrespect to Congress," Mr. Weber said, "not everything you do as a Congressman is very exciting."

Mr. Weber and Mr. Downey also have the luxury of turning down clients. Both men refused to work for the tobacco industry and Mr. Weber said he would not be comfortable registering as an agent for a foreign client.

Another former Republican lawmaker in demand is Bob Dole, the Republican Presidential candidate in 1996. He is now "of counsel" at the Washington-based law firm of Verner, Liipfert, where he said he does not lobby but provides strategic advice to clients.

But his former political prominence still lands him national platforms, such as an appearance on David Letterman's talk show earlier this summer. There, between jokes, he took a moment to criticize President Clinton for his stance toward Taiwan. He did not disclose that his firm represents Taiwan, a relationship that required him to register as a foreign agent. Asked if he should have, Mr. Dole said that he had been a supporter of Taiwan for years before he joined Verner, Liipfert.

Mr. Dole's firm, loaded with political superstars such as George J. Mitchell, the former Senate majority leader, and Ann W. Richards, the former Texas Governor, earned \$19 million in lobbying fees last year, the most reported by any firm. Its partners also have contributed generously to Federal candidates and the political parties.

Senator John McCain, whose anti-tobacco and campaign finance overhaul bills were defeated amid a hailstorm of lobbying, said Washington would be dominated by moneyed interests as long as lobbyists remained at the hub of campaign fund-raising.

"The lobbyists give out the soft money," said the Arizona Republican, whose campaign finance bill would ban soft money contributions. "If you take away the soft money, you do really reduce the influence of these people."

Consumer activist Ralph Nader, who has watched the growth of corporate influence in the capital for the last 30 years, agreed, but said Senator McCain did not go far enough. Mr. Nader advocates public funding of Federal elections as well as new mechanisms for building genuine citizens' lobbies.

"Trying to reform lobbying is like trying to stop a leak," he said. "You block the water here, and it just goes around the corner."