

ROLL CALL

Watchdogs Doggedly Pursue the Truth

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Roll Call Staff
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It's a cold day in January, but Fred Wertheimer is hot under the collar.

He's been hammering away at House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) for more than a month now, and DeLay has come back swinging on a recent episode of NBC's "Meet the Press."

"He's been in his leftist business for, I don't know, 20 or 30 years. Most of his actions are after Republicans. And he's a leftist organization," DeLay says in response to host Tim Russert's questions about Wertheimer's allegation that DeLay is violating federal tax laws with a new charity being used for political purposes.

Not so, Wertheimer says, pointing out the more than half-dozen or so Democrats who've been targets of his complaints over the years.

Welcome to the world of the Washington watchdog — a feisty and independent breed who have made careers, and often names, for themselves by sparring with some of the most powerful people in the world on everything from pay raises to pork.

"I take almost nothing personally," Wertheimer says, as he jovially prepares to release a mass e-mail: "SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: DELAY MAKES FALSE AND MISLEADING CLAIMS ON MEET THE PRESS TO DEFLECT ATTENTION FROM HIS MISUSE OF 'CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION.'"

"I've never had a problem with it," explains Wertheimer. "If you choose to play ... that kind of role there are certain things that come with the territory, and one of them is that you tend to get people angry at you every now and then, and that can add up over the years."

Wertheimer said he learned a lot from his predecessor, the late John Gardner. As the founding head of Common Cause in the 1970s, Gardner and his group earned the nicknames "Common Crook" and "Common Curse" from his nemesis, then-Rep. Wayne Hays (D-Ohio), a chief opponent of campaign finance reform in the immediate post-Watergate era.

In fact, Common Cause's outspoken criticism of then-President Richard Nixon's re-election committee, better known as CREEP, resulted in a General Accounting Office audit of the independent nonprofit group. Common Cause went along with it and came out smelling like a rose.

In a city that attracts idealists and spits out cynics, the watchdogs Roll Call spoke to seemed unusually upbeat and optimistic about their jobs.

According to Pete Sepp of the National Taxpayers Union, exposing Congressional perks is “still singularly the most entertaining thing about my job.”

Like many who toil in the trenches of accountability, Sepp seemed to discover his calling almost by accident.

He had just been hired as a public information officer for the taxpayers union in 1989 when he was handed a telephone receiver and told to speak with a Detroit radio talk show host about a proposed Congressional pay raise.

When a caller suggested a Boston Tea Party-like revolt, a plan was hatched to send tea bags to Washington in opposition to the pay raise. The idea caught fire. Capitol Hill was deluged with bags of Lipton, and Congress was forced to retreat, if only temporarily, on a 51 percent pay increase.

How does Sepp account for the amount of national interest in such matters?

“Year in and year out, the politicians fail to understand why folks get ticked off at pay raises for Congress; it’s because no matter how many zeros are tacked on to the federal budget, the average person can still figure out if \$157,000 is too much to pay their Senator or Congressman,” he explained.

While Sepp and NTU have been providing unparalleled statistics on Congressional pay and pension and other perks to the press for more than a decade, newer groups such as the Campaign Legal Center are also making their marks inside the Beltway.

Formed just two years ago, CLC has added a strong voice and legal expertise to the pro-campaign finance reform community — both by providing expert analysis of campaign finance through its legal team and on its Web site and promising to use legal tactics to ensure the new laws are enforced.

In the wake of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, CLC Director Trevor Potter said he isn’t just interested in reforming the Federal Election Commission — he’s also interested in jump-starting the Congressional ethics process.

“There isn’t a constituency there that is calling for these laws to be enforced. The Members don’t want to be subject to an ethics investigation, so you not only have new rules prohibiting outside groups from filing a complaint, you have a treaty between the two parties [not to file a complaint],” Potter said. “That to me is a real problem.”

Like nearly everything else in Washington, watchdog groups fall across the political spectrum, and while some insist on their nonpartisan objectivity, others freely acknowledge their leaning.

Judicial Watch, which turns 10 this year, captured attention when founder Larry Klayman doggedly pursued litigation against the Clinton administration for even the most minor allegations of misconduct. Klayman, a former international trade lawyer who is now running for the Senate in Florida after leaving Judicial Watch, made no secret of his conservative views. The organization's budget and mission have swelled since those early days.

While not always ultimately successful in winning cases, the group has received the highest form of flattery. Last year, a new group, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, modeled itself as the liberal version of Judicial Watch with a strategy of hitting wayward government officials with ethics complaints and litigation.

For the first time ever, Roll Call has prepared a roundup of some of the top watchdogs inside and outside of Washington that focus on bringing accountability to Capitol Hill.

In doing so, we have limited our picks to those groups that devote a significant amount of time and resources to working specifically against corruption within the institution of Congress — either by involvement in the Congressional ethics process, by advocating institutional reforms or by focusing on money and politics. We have not included groups that work exclusively on specific policy issues, unless those specific issues relate to the institution of Congress itself.

For instance, an environmental group that tracks lawmakers' records on clean air and other environmental issues would not be considered for this, but a policy group such as the NTU that focuses on tax issues is included, because the group also examines Congressional trappings of the office and lawmakers' perks.

While this in no way purports to be an exhaustive list of all the groups or individuals watchdogging Congress, it is, we feel, a good representation of some of the major watchdogs who help keep Washington honest and is a fair representation of the broad political spectrum.

ALLIANCE FOR BETTER CAMPAIGNS

Last year the Alliance for Better Campaigns launched its "Our Democracy, Our Airwaves Campaign" aimed at lowering the cost of political advertising in campaigns.

The campaign was boosted by the introduction of the Our Democracy, Our Airwaves Act in the Senate by reform leaders including Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.), Russ Feingold (D-Wis.) and Dick Durbin (D-Ill.).

While most reform groups applauded the absolute end of soft money with the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, the Alliance for Better Campaigns cheered other reforms contained in the new law, including provisions to require broadcasters to maintain public files on requests for ad time by candidates, issue groups and political parties.

In 2004 the group vows to hold broadcasters accountable for fulfilling their public interest obligations, recently reaffirmed by the Supreme Court, in covering the 2004 elections.

Meredith McGehee

President

Age: 48

Career highlights: McGehee is also the president, principal and founder of McGehee Strategies, an independent consulting service that specializes in public-interest advocacy campaigns. She is a former senior vice president and chief lobbyist for Common Cause. Prior to joining Common Cause, McGehee was legislative director for Rep. Lane Evans (D-Ill.) and a legislative aide to then-Rep. Dante Fascell (D-Fla.).

D.C. pet peeve: “In the pursuit of power, too many people forget that those with whom they disagree can actually be good human beings.”

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: “I would like more people to understand the difference between being bipartisan and nonpartisan.”

CAMPAIGN LEGAL CENTER

After serving as deputy general counsel to George H.W. Bush’s 1988 presidential campaign, Trevor Potter experienced a meteoric rise to prominence in Washington with an appointment to the Federal Election Commission — an experience he calls “eye-opening.”

Potter said he arrived at the FEC believing in reform but left feeling ineffective and confronting the realization that “Congress was becoming restive about FEC enforcement of the election laws.”

Potter now spearheads the Campaign Legal Center. Established in 2002, the CLC filled a niche for the campaign finance reform community — a centralized legal shop with significant resources for people who believe in reform ideas.

The group was an integral part of the legal team representing Congressional sponsors of campaign reform in *McConnell v. FEC*, the BCRA challenge. The group also submitted comments to and testified before the FEC in connection with the agency’s implementation of the law.

In 2004, expect the group to remain active in rulemaking or advisory opinion proceedings at the FEC as well as to continue monitoring campaign finance activities to detect violations.

Trevor Potter

Chairman and general counsel

Age: 48

Career highlights: Potter is a former commissioner and chairman of the FEC and general counsel of the McCain campaign for president in 2000. He is also general counsel to the Reform Institute, a nonprofit educational organization established to address election reform issues. Potter is the editor of the Campaign Finance Law Web site at the Brookings Institution, where he is a nonresident senior fellow. He also heads up the political activities practice for the D.C. law firm Caplin & Drysdale.

D.C. pet peeve: “Officeholders who think selling official meetings in return for campaign contributions is appropriate behavior in a democracy — and a Justice Department which thinks such sale of access is legal!”

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: “A president willing to make the FEC work — by exercising constitutional prerogatives and nominating qualified nonpartisan FEC commissioners (perhaps based on names recommended by an outside blue ribbon presidential commission).”

CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

Charles Lewis founded the organization in 1990 following a successful 11-year career in network television news, and the group has become a leader in the field of watchdog journalism, issuing high-quality, well-documented, investigative research demanding a higher level of accountability from its government and elected leaders.

Since opening its doors in downtown Washington in 1990, the center has released more than 100 investigative studies including 10 books, four of which were finalists in the best investigative book category for the prestigious Investigative Reporters and Editors award.

With an annual budget of \$4 million, the organization churns out numerous books each year. Some of CPI’s recent projects include: “The Buying of the President 2004,” which examines presidential fundraising and the role of money in politics; “The Windfalls of War,” an investigation of contractors in post-war Afghanistan and Iraq; and “Silent Partners,” a study of the role of 527 organizations in the political arena.

Charles Lewis, executive director

Age: 50

Career highlights: Lewis was an ABC News and CBS News “60 Minutes” producer. He co-authored five books. He received a MacArthur Fellowship in 1998.

D.C. pet peeve: “Faux sincerity and support by politicians for openness, transparency and disclosure. It is not coincidental that the Freedom of Information Act doesn’t apply to Congress or the White House.”

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: “Just one? It is utterly unrealistic, of course, kind of like the question, but how about no more lies? Could Washington even function?”

CENTER FOR RESPONSIVE POLITICS

Larry Noble describes the group’s main role as providing the public with the connection between campaign contributions and public policy and ensuring transparency in the campaign finance system.

Noble, the executive director, is especially proud that last year his group was perhaps more effective than ever in showing the connections between political money and government

action. For example, CRP highlighted the campaign contributions of the corporations that won the first round of contracts in Iraq and those behind the Medicare and energy bills.

This year the group is pumped up about another task — tracking the money being raised under BCRA in every Congressional race and the presidential campaigns, as well as money being raised and spent by the new 527 political organizations.

Larry Noble
Executive director
Age: 51

Career highlights: Noble served as general counsel of the FEC from October 1987 to December 2000. He served as president of the Council on Governmental Ethics Laws from 1997 to 1998 and received the 2000 COGEL Award for his “efforts to promote the highest level of ethical conduct amongst governmental officials and candidates.” He has testified before Congress on problems with the existing campaign finance laws and has served as an official observer and consultant for elections held in several foreign countries. He teaches campaign finance law at George Washington University Law School.

D.C. pet peeve: “My biggest pet peeve — after how hard it was to get good tickets to the Springsteen and Stones concerts and how expensive those tickets were — is how political parties and candidates can explicitly offer big fundraisers and contributors ‘exclusive’ meetings with officeholders and then act ‘shocked ... shocked’ when they are accused of selling access. It’s one thing to have to buy your way into a rock concert. It’s another to have to buy your way in to see your government.”

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: “It would be the all-too-widespread belief that personal attacks are an acceptable response to policy arguments. That, and how bad my rush-hour commute is.”

COMMON CAUSE

Founded in 1970 by former Health, Education and Welfare Secretary John Gardner, Common Cause has waged numerous successful reform battles in its 30-year existence.

Common Cause spoke out against the war in Vietnam and played an instrumental role at both the state and federal levels in the passage of open-meeting laws and the Freedom of Information Act.

Through its sustained and focused lobbying campaigns, grassroots activities and other efforts, Common Cause also contributed to reforming the presidential campaign finance system in the 1970s and '80s and the more recent passage of BCRA. The group has helped make significant institutional reforms on Capitol Hill, which include creating tough Congressional ethics standards and financial disclosure laws and establishing a ban that restricts Members from taking gifts, free vacation trips and expensive meals from special interests.

Today Common Cause has more than 200,000 members and supporters nationwide.

Key agenda items in 2004 include media consolidation and the future of public broadcasting; reconstruction in Iraq; and privacy issues and challenges in an election year.

Chellie Pingree,
President and CEO

Age: 48

Career highlights: This former Maine Senate Majority Leader has a decade of experience in politics and another decade as a small-business owner. In 2002 she ran a hard-fought U.S. Senate race against popular incumbent Republican Sen. Susan Collins, receiving 42 percent of the vote. During her 1992-2000 tenure in the Maine Senate, she became known for her efforts to reduce the costs of prescription drugs.

D.C. pet peeve: “People are too timid about the weather.”

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: “I’d have people get out of the Beltway more often to balance their perspective.”

CONGRESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

With Ralph Nader’s blessing and backing, the Congressional Accountability Project has been opposing corruption and pushing for reforms on Capitol Hill for more than a decade.

Amiable with reporters but dogged in his pursuit of ethical accountability, Gary Ruskin is the meat and bones of the small operation, which was once based in D.C. but is now headquartered in Oregon. Ruskin relocated to the West Coast to concentrate on a new nonprofit venture aimed at combatting negative effects of commercialism in this country, but he still remains tapped into the Washington scene — pushing everything from better Web access to Congressional documents to a clamping down on pay raises for lawmakers.

A critic of the Congressional ethics process, Ruskin was one of the leading filers of ethics complaints against Members of Congress until the House changed its rules to prohibit outside complaints in 1997.

“There’s one theme that runs through all of it,” Ruskin says of his work. “Which is what should be for sale — how policy shouldn’t be for sale. Votes shouldn’t be for sale and influence shouldn’t be for sale.”

Gary Ruskin

Director

Age: 38

Career highlights: Ruskin has run the Congressional Accountability Project since 1993. He is also executive director of Commercial Alert, a sister nonprofit he founded in 1998 with Ralph Nader that opposes commercialism.

D.C. pet peeve: “The dominance of K Street over Congress and the executive branch.”

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: “We’d elect our president and Members of Congress based on the content of their character, not the size of their war chests.”

CITIZENS AGAINST GOVERNMENT WASTE

Founded in 1984 by the late industrialist J. Peter Grace and syndicated columnist Jack Anderson to eliminate waste, mismanagement and inefficiency in the federal government, Citizens Against Government Waste has developed a reputation for taking a tough stance against ethically challenged lawmakers.

Just ask Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), who in July was named “Porker of the Month” by CAGW.

Last month, the group turned up the heat on the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee after a Los Angeles Times investigation revealed how Stevens made millions of dollars from investments with a businessman who received government contracts or other aid through his legislative efforts.

Freshmen beware: While federal lawmakers pride themselves in bringing home the bacon for their constituents, CAGW is dedicated to singling out the most egregious pork-barrel politicians and their pet projects. CAGW’s annual “Congressional Pig Book Summary” exposes what it considers to be the most glaring and irresponsible pork-barrel projects in the 13 annual appropriations bills and their sponsors.

Thomas Schatz

President

Age: 51

Career highlights: Prior to joining CAGW in 1986, Schatz spent six years as legislative director for then-Rep. Hamilton Fish (R-N.Y.) and two years practicing law and lobbying. Schatz is a nationally recognized spokesman on government waste and has appeared often on TV and radio talk shows.

D.C. pet peeve: “Members of Congress who wrote appropriations bills with pork-barrel projects in spite of the war on terrorism and a record \$500 billion deficit.”

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: “To create an effective and efficient government that lives within the taxpayers’ means and stops mortgaging the future of our children and grandchildren.”

CITIZENS FOR RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICS IN WASHINGTON

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, the latest watchdog on the block, came out swinging last year with complaints against Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas), and asked the Justice Department to investigate an alleged bribery attempt by House GOP leaders during the Medicare vote.

Melanie Sloan, the group's 38-year-old executive director, bills CREW as a liberal version of the conservative Judicial Watch, but she insists the group is nonpartisan and will go after wrongdoers from both parties. Sloan believes the pioneering watchdog efforts by conservative groups against liberal politicians left those on the right relatively free from scrutiny over the past decade.

CREW differs from other watchdogs because it will directly sue and file complaints against offending officials, hoping to use the legal system to police ethical transgressions.

Sloan said the group plans to focus attention this year on Vice President Cheney and his former role as head of Halliburton as well as continue to press complaints against DeLay.

Melanie Sloan
Executive director

Age: 38

Career highlights: Sloan served for four and a half years as an assistant U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia and was counsel to the House Judiciary Committee. **D.C. pet peeve:** "The agreement by both parties in the House of Representatives not to report Members to the ethics committee and the committee's refusal to accept complaints from anyone other than a Member. Not only does this prevent investigations into many ethical violations, it allows Members to freely disregard ethics rules without fear of reprisal."

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: "I'd allow citizens to sue high-ranking government officials who commit serious violations of the ethics laws if the Department of Justice refused to investigate."

DEMOCRACY 21

A fixture in the campaign finance reform community for the past 32 years, Fred Wertheimer founded Democracy 21 in 1997 to work on eliminating the undue influence of big money in American politics. The group promotes campaign finance reform and other political reforms.

While 2003 was a banner year for Wertheimer and other reformers — with the Supreme Court giving its constitutional approval to the new Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act — he's moving full speed ahead with efforts to replace the FEC and fix the presidential public financing system. Democracy 21 also plans to undertake efforts to ensure that the new campaign finance law works in the 2004 elections.

Wertheimer said this relates to "watchdogging 527s, keeping the pressure on the FEC to do its job and exploring various ways for holding officeholders, political parties and outside groups accountable for any efforts to cheat and break the new law."

Fred Wertheimer
President and CEO
Age: 65

Career highlights: Wertheimer advocated establishing the presidential public financing law in 1974 and the soft-money ban in 2002. President of Common Cause from 1981 to 1995, Wertheimer also has served as a fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University; as the J. Skelly Wright Fellow and Visiting Lecturer at Yale Law School; and as a political analyst and consultant for CBS and ABC News.

D.C. pet peeve: “The collapse of the Washington Redskins and the absence of a Major League Baseball team; however, hope springs eternal, see Joe Gibbs.”

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: “The Washington influence-money culture.”

JUDICIAL WATCH

Judicial Watch, an unabashedly conservative watchdog that earned its spurs during the scandals of the Clinton administration, surprised many in Washington when it turned its attacks on Republicans shortly after President Bush moved into the White House.

With an estimated \$16 million budget, Judicial Watch proudly proclaims that no one is above the law and seeks to prove that promise.

In perhaps its most significant legal case, the group joined the Sierra Club in suing Vice President Cheney for refusing to disclose the names of those he consulted with when he was drawing up the administration’s energy policy.

The group recently lost founder and guiding strategist Larry Klayman, who left last year to seek the GOP nomination for Florida Senate. But Thomas Fitton says the organization will continue on the same track. “We are still doing everything that we had been doing and we have continued to receive tremendous support after Larry’s departure.”

The Cheney litigation will likely be the focus in 2004, but the group has already made news with its effort to force presidential candidate Howard Dean (D) to unseal his official papers from when he was governor of Vermont.

Thomas Fitton

President

Age: 35

Career highlights: Ongoing anti-corruption lawsuits against Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), Howard Dean, Dick Cheney and the entire Senate (over the filibuster).

D.C. pet peeve: “Too many politicians — in both parties — who think the rules don’t apply to them.”

If I could change one things inside the Beltway: “Once, just once, I’d like principle to beat out politics.”

NATIONAL TAXPAYERS UNION

Founded in 1969, NTU's chief focus is fiscal and economic policy — advocating lower taxes, less wasteful spending, and the principles of rational and limited government — but the group has been a consistent critic of Congressional pay and perks for more than two decades.

In 1989, NTU helped to organize the “Tea Bag Revolution” that defeated a proposed 50 percent pay raise for lawmakers.

Today NTU remains the best outside source of information about Congressional retirement benefits and other trappings of office and makes no bones about challenging the institution to tighten its belt.

Last October the group blasted Senators for boosting their own salaries, noting that it was the third pay hike since Sept. 11, 2001. In April, NTU put out a study drawing attention to the fact that House Members' office spending had jumped by 8.9 percent in just one year.

Pete Sepp

Vice president of communications

Age: 39

Career highlights: Sepp has written and edited numerous policy papers, informational publications and activist manuals, including the two-volume Taxpayers Resource Guide and two recent studies on Congressional perquisites and citizen-initiated tax revolts. Before coming to NTU, Sepp served with the St. Louis County Board of Elections and the Kit Bond for Senate Committee.

D.C. pet peeve: “Members of the political establishment dismissing concerned taxpayers as unwashed bumpkins who ‘don’t know how tough it is to live here.’”

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: “Short of term limits or tax reform, which are really ‘outside the Beltway’ changes, our political system would be a lot healthier and more competitive if we limited the franking privilege to constituent response mail only, and limited Congressional pensions to real-world levels that rise and fall with the economy like most other people’s benefits. Public financing of campaigns seems especially silly when lawmakers can use tax dollars to further their incumbency, and then reap tax dollars for hanging around.”

NATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY CENTER

Ken Boehm and Peter Flaherty operate the center interchangeably. Both men are well-known conservative activists who have steered NLPC to focus attention on the ethical transgressions of groups and officials associated with liberal interests.

The guiding principle of the NLPC, however, is a 10-point code of ethics for government service put forward by former Sen. Paul Douglas, an Illinois Democrat who served from 1948 to 1966. NLPC took shape in 1991 following release of the Senate Ethics Committee’s report on the Keating Five.

In 1993, NLPC successfully sued to open the meetings and records of then-first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's secret health care task force. More recently, the group has focused on union corruption and corporate integrity.

Ken Boehm, chairman

Age: 54

Career highlights: He helped expose an Pentagon/Boeing revolving door, leading to \$4 billion scale-back of mid-air refueling tanker deal and departure of the Boeing CEO and CFO. Using FOIA, he extracted documents showing then-FDA Commissioner David Kessler abused his government expense account. **D.C. pet peeve:** "Ethical double standards."

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: "Abolish the Legal Services Corporation, an engine of taxpayer-financed ideological legal activism."

Peter Flaherty, president

Age: 47

Career highlights: Flaherty successfully sued to open meetings and records of Clinton's health care task force. He also convinced Toyota and NASCAR to end public support for Jesse Jackson's groups.

D.C. pet peeve: "Lack of media interest in labor union corruption."

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: "Get rid of appropriations earmarks."

PUBLIC CITIZEN'S CONGRESS WATCH

For 30 years, Public Citizen's Congress Watch has been at the forefront of government reform efforts — fighting against Congressional pay grabs, exposing Congressional junkets and monitoring the revolving door between government and private industry.

The group also pressed successfully for changes in the Congressional gift rules and played a key role in passing the Lobbying Disclosure Act in the 104th Congress.

Public Citizen's Congress Watch also tracks campaign contributions and examines Congressional ethics.

The group has played a leading role in successfully pushing for incremental reform bills such as McCain-Feingold to limit the influence of wealthy special interests and the section 527 "stealth PAC" disclosure law, and supported successful election reform efforts in the 108th Congress.

Last year Public Citizen launched WhiteHouseForSale.org, a Web site focused on President Bush's fundraising activities, to spotlight the dangers of allowing people with vested interests in government decisions to play large roles in financing presidential campaigns.

Frank Clemente**Director****Age: 48**

Career highlights: In 1995 and 1996, Clemente managed two national campaigns to oppose “Contract with America” proposals, which garnered vetoes from then-President Bill Clinton. For six years he was senior policy adviser to the House Government Operations Committee, chaired by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), overseeing legislative initiatives ranging from national health care to the environment to budget policy.

D.C. pet peeve: “Members of Congress who meet with lobbyists from industry because they make campaign contributions but refuse to meet with consumer advocates promoting the interests of average Americans.”

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: “Overhaul the lobby disclosure system managed by the Senate and House so that we can get real-time information on who’s lobbying on what issues and how much they are spending — like the FEC’s database for campaign contributions.”

PROJECT ON GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT

Founded in 1981, the Project on Government Oversight remains one of the most respected and unflappable watchdogs in Washington with its laser-like focus on complex issues of waste and abuse affecting the military, contractors and government spending.

Led by 40-year-old Danielle Brian for the past 11 years, POGO regularly makes news with its investigative spotlight on wasteful spending and problems pointed out by government whistleblowers. Earlier this month, the Pentagon announced it was initiating an investigation of the fast-spinning revolving door that has led top Defense Department officials into highly paid jobs with several major contractors, a subject that has been a staple of POGO’s work over the years.

POGO and Brian personally have incurred the wrath of angry government officials who have tried to muzzle the group. Most notably, a major fight ensued when then-House Resources Chairman Don Young (R-Alaska) launched an unprecedented investigation of POGO after the group shared a portion of a settlement it had won against Mobil Oil with two industry whistleblowers.

In 2004, Brian says POGO will focus on a report on the politics of contracting and the impact of increasing government secrecy.

Danielle Brian**Executive Director****Age: 40**

Career highlights: Brian helped save taxpayers nearly \$30 billion by helping to kill the Supercollider, the Crusader and the Boeing tanker lease deal; recovering a half-billion dollars of

underpaid oil royalties; defending the False Claims Act; requiring Area 51 abide by Environmental Protection Agency standards; and increasing security at nuclear facilities.

D.C. pet peeve: “It’s a tossup. Either political agendas driven by cowardice and greed rather than good government, or toupees.”

If I could change one thing inside the Beltway: “Make agencies embrace whistleblowers and consider their reforms, rather than retaliate against the messenger.”

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