

FIGHT GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION

In theory, Members of Congress and other public officials should make decisions to advance the common good, not reward campaign donors or enrich themselves. In practice, politicians often fall short of these ideals. Government ethics and transparency rules are meant to prevent politicians from serving themselves. Unfortunately, Congress has exempted itself from many of these rules while leaving large loopholes in others.

Half of Congressmen and Congresswomen join lobbying firms after they leave office, collecting lavish salaries for influencing their former colleagues. Members of both parties pass through the “revolving door” between Capitol Hill and K Street. Former Senate Majority Leaders and former House Majority Leaders have become lobbyists, and for many, election to Congress becomes the path to a multi-million dollar lobbying career. The same is often true of Cabinet secretaries.

Voters are in the dark about how lobbyists influence their elected representatives because Congress has exempted itself from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). As a result, Members of Congress do not have to report when they meet with lobbyists or what they discuss. Lobbyists can and do secretly draft bills and amendments for Members of Congress, but the communications about this process are hidden from public view.

Ethics rules generally prevent senior executive branch officials from owning stock in companies affected by their decisions, but Congress has not seen fit to apply these standards to itself. Members of Congress frequently vote on bills that directly affect the value of individual stocks they own.

The government can do better for the American

people. Open records policies should apply to Congress. Members of Congress should have to disclose e-mails with lobbyists and other outside parties, and they should have to disclose any and all meetings with lobbyists and advocacy organizations. Voters should know how lobbyists are trying to influence their elected representatives.

Members of Congress should also be prohibited from owning or trading individual stocks. Congressmen and Congresswomen should not derive financial benefits from votes they cast.

THE FACTS

- ★ 14 current and former members of Congress were convicted of criminal offenses between 2012 and 2022.
- ★ Over the past three years, at least 64 members of Congress violated the STOCK Act, a law intended to combat insider trading by Members of Congress.
- ★ Federal ethics rules generally prohibit senior executive branch officials from owning more than \$15,000 worth of individual stocks.
 - These ethics rules do not apply to Members of Congress or their staff members.
- ★ Executive branch agencies fulfilled more than 838,000 FOIA requests in FY 2021.
 - Congress did not fulfill any FOIA requests, because FOIA does not cover Congress.

THE AMERICA FIRST AGENDA

At the federal level, support policies that:

- ★ Apply open records requirements to members of Congress and their staff members, allowing the American people to see their communications with

lobbyists and special interest groups.

- ★ Require Members of Congress to report meetings with lobbyists and other advocacy organizations.
- ★ Prohibit Members of Congress from owning or trading individual stocks.
 - This would not prevent the ownership of broadly diversified mutual or index funds, which grow with the overall economy.

REFERENCES

64 members of Congress have violated a law designed to prevent insider trading and stop conflicts-of-interest by

David Levinthal, Business Insider (June 2022).

Fiscal Year 2021 FOIA Data Available on FOIA.gov, U.S. Department of Justice (March 2022).

Part 2640 - Interpretation, Exemptions and Waiver Guidance Concerning 18 U.S.C. 208 (Acts Affecting a Personal Financial Interest), Code of Federal Regulations (Dec. 1996).

Revolving Door: Former Members of the 115th Congress, [opensecrets.org](https://www.opensecrets.org).