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ROLL CALL

K Street Files: Springtime in the City

April 20, 2009

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If Congress is back from recess, it must be time for the annual Hill blitz, the one sign of spring in Washington surer than cherry blossoms around the Tidal Basin.



This year is no exception, with every coalition, association and organization in town pressing hard to get a place on Congress' full plate.

First up is health care, with both the American Heart Association and the American Hospital Association bringing advocates to Washington this month. More than 450 heart disease and stroke survivors, dressed in red, will pound the halls of Congress on Tuesday to ask for quick action on health care reform, while 1,800 doctors, hospital administrators and employees representing the American Hospital Association will come to town the last week of April to tell lawmakers how the economic crisis is impacting their industry.

Lobbying days, when an organization brings its members to Washington to "blitz" the Hill and meet with Members of Congress and staff, have long been a favorite tool of lobbyists, a way to use "real people," aka voters back home, to bring policy arguments to life.

"There's no better advocate for our industry than actual practitioners," said Steve O'Connor, senior vice president of government affairs for the Mortgage Bankers Association. "They can speak to how policy is affecting their customers, their business and their employees."

O'Connor's group will host its National Policy Conference the week of April 27, bringing in over 200 mortgage lenders and bankers representing the association's 2,500 member companies. At the top of their talking points will be opposition to "cram-down" legislation — the Helping Families Save Their Homes Act — moving through the Senate.

Not to be outdone by health care reform and the economy, groups pushing for climate legislation are also making a move this month. The Natural Resources Defense Council will bring 18 leaders from its Environmental Entrepreneurs program to the Hill on Wednesday — Earth Day, naturally — to brief Members of Congress on the need to create green jobs through passage of comprehensive climate legislation.

And, rest assured, these rites of spring are not complete without the requisite awards and receptions to honor their favorite Members. Time to pull out your ethics manual.

Strange Bedfellows. The Sierra Club and a free-market group are teaming up again to fight legislation this Congress that they claim will encourage development on beaches and other areas prone to natural disasters.

"If stupid rich people want to build in risky locations, that's their right, but the proposed legislation would subsidize many of the worst possible building decisions," says Eli Lehrer, a senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute. "The proposed legislation is an awful, awful idea."

Along with the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, and other environmental groups, CEI is part of the Americans for Smart Natural Catastrophe Policy, a loose coalition that is regrouping to fight Sen. Bill Nelson's (D-Fla.) Homeowners'

Defense Act, which would “provide a Federal backstop for state-sponsored insurance programs to help homeowners prepare for and recover from the damages caused by natural catastrophes.”

Although the two groups are in line against Nelson’s bill — and similar proposals in the past — they appear miles apart on another hot political issue: climate change. On its Web site, a CEI energy expert bashed current White House priorities, including green jobs and a cap-and-trade system — a contrast to the Sierra Club, which is pushing to put “a price on carbon.”

“President Obama’s green jobs fantasy is only the beginning of the bad news he has in store for American consumers, workers, and taxpayers,” CEI energy expert Myron Ebell said in a statement earlier this year. “Cap-and-trade is another name for energy rationing.”

Still, despite their obvious differences on global warming, Lehrer wrote in an e-mail that it won’t get in the way of fighting Nelson’s bill.

“Good public policy is good public policy. Many environmental groups believe that human-caused global climate change will have catastrophic consequences. CEI does not,” he wrote. “But there’s no disadvantage to promoting risk-based insurance rates and mitigation. At worst, we’ll have made society safer.”

Tobacco Debate Still Smokin’. Miles from K Street, Lorillard Tobacco Co. has hired the Richmond, Va.-based National Black Farmers Association to help stop legislation that would give the Food and Drug Administration control over cigarettes.

Lorillard, based in Greensboro, N.C., strongly opposes the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act that overwhelmingly passed the House earlier this month.

The vote marked a significant turn in the nearly decade-long battle to grant the FDA regulatory power over the tobacco industry. Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) plans to reintroduce a companion measure in the Senate in the coming weeks, according to a spokeswoman.

Lorillard hired the association, which represents over 100,000 black farmers in 42 states, on April 7, five days after the FDA legislation passed the House.

“Any kind of reduction in tobacco production would mean a reduction in our membership,” said John W. Boyd Jr., the association’s president and chief lobbyist. “We have the same position as Lorillard does on tobacco legislation.”

North Carolina Sens. Richard Burr (R) and Kay Hagan (D) last month introduced a competing bill, the Federal Tobacco Act, that would place control of tobacco under a newly created agency at the Department of Health and Human Services, instead of the FDA. That bill, which Lorillard also opposes, has yet to be considered by the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

The debate over regulation has split the tobacco industry, which spent close to \$30 million on lobbying in 2008, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Industry giant Altria Group, the Virginia-based parent of Philip Morris USA, strongly supports the FDA bill, while R.J. Reynolds and Lorillard, the industry’s second- and third-largest companies, respectively, oppose the added regulation, arguing it will squeeze out competitors.

“Lorillard supports reasonable regulation of tobacco,” said a company spokesman. “That is, regulation which does not provide a patently unfair advantage to one, dominant player in the industry.”

Lorillard terminated its lobbying contract with Barbour Griffith & Rogers at the end of 2008, but is still represented in Washington by Dickstein Shapiro and the Federal Strategy Group. Lorillard spent \$1.8 million on lobbying in 2008, according to Senate disclosure records.

K Street Moves. Jason Rosenstock has joined ML Strategies, the government affairs arm of Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo, as director of government relations. He spent the past two years in the Washington office of Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker, and previously worked for then-Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.). Rosenstock will focus on building the firm’s financial services and real estate development capabilities.

- **Winning Strategies** Washington has brought on 11-year Hill veteran Charla Penn McManus as health policy principal. McManus most recently worked for Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-N.J.) as his principal adviser on health care issues and liaison to the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health.
- The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the union representing city, county and state employees, has recruited Chris Policano as its public affairs director. Policano joins the union from Source Communications, a firm in New York City, where he served as director of communications.

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