

[Pelosi Set to Attack Conservatives](#)

[NewsMax](#) 2 January 2007 | Dave Eberhart

Leading Capitol Hill watchdogs are sounding alarms by plans of the soon-to-be Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and her majority of House Democrats to ram through a new law that would seriously undermine free speech – and put restrictions on conservative groups and others who encourage ordinary citizens to directly deal with Congress.

Pelosi has already stated she is planning to push through major legislation during the first 100 session hours after the Democrats take control of Congress this week.

At the top of the list is seemingly good legislation intended to curb the power of lobbyists. But the Pelosi law goes far beyond bridling Washington influence peddlers. Under her proposed legislation, Pelosi will seek to control and limit any organization in America from encouraging citizens to communicate and influence Congress.

Unlike the other Pelosi New Year's resolutions (committing to no new deficit spending, fully enacting the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, raising the minimum wage, letting the feds bargain on prices for Medicare drugs, ramping-up stem cell research, cutting interest rates on college loans, cutting subsidies to oil companies, or protecting the status quo with Social Security), this one has the hackles up and bristling early on.

Richard A. Viguerie, the famous conservative direct-mail guru and author of the recent "Conservatives Betrayed: How the Republican Party Hijacked the Conservative Cause," has sounded a clarion call about the Pelosi lobbying initiative.

"The . . . plan is perhaps the most comprehensive regulation of political speech ever proposed, and would make small grassroots causes report quarterly to Congress -- the same as K Street lobbyists representing wealthy interests before Congress," Viguerie says.

"Communications to as few as 500 citizens would trigger reporting under lobbying laws," he warns.

"The reporting requirements and more severe penalties being written in response to recent congressional corruption scandals would apply to those who have no Washington lobbyists, who make no political contributions, and who do not provide gifts, travel or anything of value to politicians," Viguerie continues.

Viguerie, who has cranked up GrassrootsFreedom.com to counter the bill, argues that in his opinion the thinly disguised intent of the enactment is to cripple the conservative movement, for which the grassroots are often the best and sometimes the only means of affecting public policy.

Just as Pelosi plans four days of celebration around her Jan. 4 swearing-in as the first female speaker of the House, concerned conservatives like Viguerie look to ramp up their own visibility on what they perceive as nothing less than a frontal assault on the First Amendment right to free speech.

When the celebrating Pelosi is attending a tea in the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium for some 400 female politicians, supporters and activists, or listening to Tony Bennett's serenade of "I left My Heart in San Francisco," opponents of the Pelosi plan hope to be flooding Congress with petitions, emails and phone calls; inspiring OpEds, and calling into talk radio shows about what they see as dangerous flaws in the bill.

Already down the blitz pike is a letter to Public Citizen opposing the legislation. It is signed by 47 conservative and other leaders – including Dave Keene, chairman of the American Conservative Union; Paul Weyrich, head of the Free Congress Foundation and coiner of "moral majority;" Morton Blackwell, president of the Leadership Institute; and Don Wildmon of American Family Association.

Public Citizen, a liberal government watchdog, has touted that it has helped Pelosi draft the legislation and wants lawmakers to adopt the Internal Revenue Service's definition of "lobbying," which includes communication that encourages the general public to contact a member of Congress on pending legislation or public policy.

Some controversial features of the bill:

It makes changes to the legal definition of "grassroots lobbying" and requires any organization that encourages 500 or more members of the general public to contact their elected representatives to file a report with detailed information about their organization to the government on a quarterly basis. Such report (above) would require, among other things, the detailing of the organization's expenditures, the issues focused on and the members of Congress and other federal officials who are targeted. A separate report must address each policy issue the group is advocating. Causing additional heartburn among the critics is a broad exemption they say is wholly unfair and unbalanced. Significantly, the reporting requirement spelled out above would not apply to messages targeted at an organization's members, employees, officers or shareholders. In effect, this would let most corporations, trade associations and unions off the reporting hook.

William J. Olson, the co-counsel for the Free Speech Coalition, summarized his impression of how the unfairness would operate:

"The Public Citizen/Pelosi bill would allow corporations, unions and even foreign interests to spend literally hundreds of millions of dollars mobilizing their shareholders, officers, employees and members, yet hide those expenditures," Olson opined.

"On the flipside, their bill would require real citizen associations to essentially obtain Congress's consent to communicate about important policy matters that impact on them. It's not just the imbalance that is wrong; it's a frontal attack on the First Amendment and political speech," Olson concluded.

Not all the Pelosi changes are as nettlesome as the new reporting requirements. In most quarters other initiatives to bridle lobbying are more welcomed -- including:

A ban on House members and their staff from using corporate jets for travel taken as part of their official duties.

A ban on House members and their aides from taking anything of value from lobbyists -- including meals, tickets and entertainment. The prohibition would extend to gifts from nongovernmental groups that hire lobbyists.

Extending the current prohibition against lobbying on former members of Congress and senior staff executive staff from one year to two.

Ending the practice of adding narrow spending provision to bills after House-Senate negotiators have completed their work.

Broadening a rule change mandating lawmakers to disclose the sponsors of "earmarked" spending and tax measures before the bills become law.

Meanwhile, at noon on Jan. 4, 2007, the House will formally elect Pelosi speaker. Afterwards, the rounds of celebrations continue. In the evening, the invited partygoers will congratulate Pelosi -- this time as she enjoys the crooning of Jimmy Buffett.

But burning the midnight oil as well will be Viguerie, who tells NewsMax that he and others fearful of what may roar in with the New Year are digging in for a fight.