

No need to fear lobbyists

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FULL TEXT

Re: Time Frame On The Cards To Rein In Lobbyists' Clout, March 16.

Lobbying is about asserting raw political power. It's about compelling decision-makers, elected or otherwise, to do what you want, when you want it, and how you want it. Lobbying is not about making good public policy to think otherwise is naive. So too is the idea that lobbyists routinely bribe public officials. A lobbyist's true power comes from their client's constituency size, cohesiveness and willingness to take action.

The best lobbyists have mastered the art of generating simultaneous fear and lust in the minds of elected officials and senior bureaucrats. Fear of the consequences that come with crossing a powerful interest group, and lust for the benefits that come with toeing their line.

The proposal from Lida Gehrke, Toronto's lobbyist registrar, that public office holders not communicate with lobbyists outside of regular office hours is a feeble attempt to regulate the world's second-oldest profession.

Even if adopted, it will not succeed - but the public and democracy has nothing to fear.

The true check on lobbyists and the special interest groups they represent is an informed and engaged electorate coupled with a vibrant and tenacious media.

Jack Slibar, Toronto.

Credit: Jack Slibar; National Post

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