

Today: February 03, 2004 at 12:40:10 PST  
Lobbyists Upset by Campaigning Barbs

By SHARON THEIMER  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON (AP) -

One group watching Democratic presidential candidates criticize each other for taking lobbyist donations wants them to stop portraying lobbying as a dirty word.

The American League of Lobbyists sent the Democratic candidates letters Tuesday defending the profession and asking them to "accurately describe this necessary and essential part of the public policy process" when talking about it on the campaign trail.

Lobbying is protected by the First Amendment "and one of the major ways that politicians are held accountable to the people," league president Deanna Gelak wrote. "Lobbyists represent all points of view on the major issues that confront the country."

Candidates Howard Dean and John Edwards have criticized front-runner John Kerry for accepting campaign contributions from lobbyists, calling him a friend to special interests.

An analysis by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics in Washington found that Kerry, a senator from Massachusetts, accepted the most campaign money from lobbyists over the past 15 years of anyone in the Senate: about \$638,000.

However, an Associated Press review of the candidates' 2003 presidential campaign finance reports found Dean and Edwards among those who accepted lobbyist contributions.

Dean received at least \$8,300 from donors identifying themselves as lobbyists; Edwards, at least \$6,200; and Kerry, at least \$4,500.

Edwards spokeswoman Jennifer Palmieri said all the lobbyists who gave to Edwards were registered to lobby state governments, not Congress, so he saw "no conflict" in taking the contributions.

Among other Democrats in the race, Joe Lieberman's presidential campaign raised at least \$40,200 from lobbyists. Wesley Clark, a former lobbyist, collected at least \$6,100.

The lone Republican candidate, President Bush, raised at least \$294,000 from lobbyists, his reports show.

The nonpartisan league isn't endorsing any candidate. It is commenting because "we feel it's our responsibility to promote the reputation and professional ethics of government affairs professionals," Gelak, a lobbyist, said in an interview.

The Washington-based league represents more than 600 lobbyists, including those who work for trade associations, corporations, public-interest groups, labor unions and law and lobby firms.

---

On the Net:

American League of Lobbyists: <http://www.alldc.org/>