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## **Lobbyists aren't the problem**

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Say this much for convicted felon Jack Abramoff -- he's still out there pushing the envelope. But his onetime associate Neil Volz -- who also pleaded guilty to bribery -- has a much more thoughtful take on the issue of lobbying.

Recently Volz, who unlike Abramoff seems to have reflected on his actions and grown wiser and better, wrote, "The idea that most members of Congress are taking bribes is ludicrous. Jack and I both know better. The concept of everyone in Washington being on the take is a dangerous narrative. It suggests that people like Jack and I were merely victims of our environment. Under that theory, we were just doing what everybody was doing, as if giving elected officials the gift of a free no-work, six-figure golf trip to Scotland is somehow the same as the Farm Bureau hosting an event on Capitol Hill or a community leader giving a congressman a free sweatshirt from his local university."

The big problem is not bribery, and it is not lobbyists. We can extend the cooling off period for former members and staffers, but we'd be kidding ourselves to think that that will fundamentally change Washington. Just because former members and staffers have to wait longer to lobby doesn't mean that there won't be lobbyists.

Moreover, most lawmakers and lobbyists are honest people trying to make government work. Lumping honest lobbyists together with Abramoff is unfair; blaming them for Washington influence peddling is like blaming fleas for landing on a dog.

The problem is power, and the government has too much of it. When the government spends \$3.6 trillion dollars annually, including substantial amounts trying to pick "winners" in green industries or bailing out companies and even whole industries; when it operates a tax code designed to "nudge" people to preferred activities and purchases; when it claims the right to regulate every aspect of your life -- then you are going to have lobbyists seeking to influence what that government does. Until the power is gone, the lobbyists, and the favoritism that creates them, will remain.