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## A Habitat for Influence

As I write this article, events in Washington, D.C., are both promising and troubling. In the past few months, we have witnessed Senate hearings on Supreme Court nominees, and we have seen one confirmed and another who will receive a vote on his qualifications. Although the hearings were less than enlightening (but predictably rife with accusations, platitudes, demagoguery, etc.), they were nonetheless a rare glimpse at an important Constitutional process. Just as when administrations change political parties, the appointment and confirmation of Supreme Court justices followed an orderly and restrained process as the framers of the Constitution envisioned. As Americans, we should feel proud when we compare these solemn transitions to the violent struggles that often precede transfers of power in other countries' governments.

On the other hand, we have also witnessed the beginning of a corruption scandal that will, no doubt, continue to play out long after you read this column. The indictment of a member of Congress and an indictment and plea bargain from a (formerly) influential lobbyist in Washington precipitated an upheaval within Congress and the lobbying industry. With nearly 27,600 registered lobbyists in Washington, their influence is pervasive. Numerous bills to address lobbying activities have and will be drafted, debated, and voted upon in the next few months in an attempt to respond to public indignation about the scandal. There are so many troubling aspects to this situation that it is difficult to compile a comprehensive list. How did this lobbying environment in Washington evolve? Why did it take judicial action and media coverage to prompt our representatives to correct a situation that they knew to be unethical, at best, and appalling to the public? What bills and decisions rendered by Congress were potentially affected by personal greed

and power, rather than by statesmanship and concern for our nation's well being? And just what do these ramblings that sound like something you might hear in a high school civics course have to do with the business and interests of the Boone and Crockett Club and its members?

Quite simply, it has to do with the fact that much of our nation's fish and wildlife conservation successes and failures have been driven by Congressional action. There is a long compilation of federal laws, regulations, policies, and budget decisions that has and continues to drive conservation efforts. As you are aware, our model of conservation is the envy of the world. As members of the Boone and Crockett Club, we share a rich tradition with Club members who worked tirelessly and effectively to build that model — a model based on wildlife as a public-trust resource.

We accept that special-interest money has always played a role in public-policy decisions. However, the recent revelations about the potential of private individuals or organizations using private money, trips, and favors to unduly influence Congressional decisions related to public resources should cause our entire membership — Regular, Professional, and Associate — to sit up and take notice.

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The conservation community typically does not compete significantly with other special interests in the political fund-raising or fund-contribution arena. Therefore, what has transpired in Washington should serve as a call to action for all Club members to engage in conservation issues on a personal and organizational basis. The Boone and Crockett Club is a cornerstone conservation organization. Its members have a history of serving as catalysts for effective conservation. However, the Club should not

rest on its reputation. Regular, Professional, and Associate members alike must make a personal commitment to provide effective leadership on conservation issues. The tasks at hand and the peddling of influence that occurs in Washington demand that all of our members become engaged in some fashion. Leaving the effort to just a few members is a formula for failure. Failure to engage in future political decisions about conservation issues, could lead to the diminution of the hunting heritage, tradition, and opportunities that we all hold dear.

In case you think this is an exaggeration, consider just a few items of interest for Congressional action or discussion in the 109<sup>th</sup> and the upcoming 110<sup>th</sup> Congress: the 2007 Farm Bill, hunting-access legislation, further energy legislation, Endangered Species Act reform, National Environmental Policy Act reform, climate change, wilderness designations, federal land acquisition budgets, federal resource agencies' budgets, forest planning, refuge comprehensive conservation plans, disposition of federal lands, conservation tax incentives, roadless area management, and state fish and wildlife agency funding. The Wildlife Management Institute's Wildlife Partners Network provides timely updates and information on these issues. The Boone and Crockett Club is an important member of that network. Each of these issues directly or indirectly has the potential to improve or impair wildlife, its habitat, and hunting. Be assured that other interest groups will weigh in on each and every issue in a way that might not reflect our values. Regardless of your position on any of these issues, your voice and the Club's voice should be heard.

It is clear that Washington is a city where political influence rules the day. That influence, apparently, can be bought or earned. The Boone and Crockett Club has earned and must continue to earn its influence by providing time, expertise, and conviction to conservation issues. It also is apparent that if we are to continue developing sound conservation policy and laws, we must increase our individual and collective efforts to support science-based, professional wildlife conservation. In light of current events, our active involvement in the Boone and Crockett Club appears to be more necessary now than ever before. ■