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Lobbying Compliance: Filing Your LD-2 and LD-203

Public Affairs Council

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GAO HLOGA Audits: 2014 Observations



- Approximately 100 LD-2 random audits per year
- Approximately 160 LD-203 random audits per year
- DOJ is responsible for civil and criminal enforcement
- 2009-2014: 2,308 referrals from Secretary of Senate and Clerk of House to DOJ for LD-2 failure to comply
- Pre-audit online survey asks about documentation and support for lobbying activity and issues, among other disclosures
 - GAO found numerous instances of failure to provide documentation for various disclosures

Federal Lobbying Law—Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 ("LDA") and Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007 ("HLOGA"): LD-1 Report

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- Three requirements must be met to trigger LDA registration and reporting requirements:
 - A company must have at least one employee who spends 20% or more of his or her working time engaging in lobbying activity;
 - That same employee must have 2 or more lobbying contacts; and
 - The company must spend more than \$12,500 on such lobbying activity over a 3-month period.
 - » Lobbying firm threshold: lobbying income for a particular client must exceed \$3,000 over a 3-month period.
- Register only the entity that employs the lobbyists.
- *Foreign-owned entities* – Requirement to list all foreign entities that are 20% equitable owners of the registrant (including intermediate foreign entities), in major part supervise or control the registrant's activities, or are affiliated with the registrant and have a direct interest in the outcome of the lobbying activity.

What is Lobbying Activity Under the LDA and HLOGA: LD-2 Report



- Lobbying activity
 - Lobbying contacts; and
 - Research and preparation for such contacts (*i.e.*, work done with the intent that the results will be used for lobbying contact).
 - » Includes strategizing, planning, possibly other background work
- Covered officials
 - Lobbying contact includes making the following communications in an attempt to influence legislation, federal contracts, or any other position of the federal government:
 - » Under Methods A and C, communications with Congressional members and staff; and
 - » Under Method A (LDA), communications with Covered Executive Branch Officials (*i.e.*, White House Staff, Military Personnel at or over pay grade O-7, and Presidential and Schedule C Appointees but not career SES employees).
 - > Plum book: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/GPO-PLUMBOOK-2012/content-detail.html>

LDA Method vs. IRC Method



- Under Method C (IRC), lobbying contact includes communications with Covered Executive Branch Officials (*i.e.*, White House Staff, top two officials in any office of the EOP, and Cabinet-level officials and their deputies).
 - » Includes communications with any executive branch official regarding federal legislation
- Other differences between Method A and Method C
 - Method A
 - » Only covers federal lobbying
 - » Does not cover grassroots lobbying
 - » No de minimis exception
 - Method C
 - » Includes federal lobbying plus state legislative and limited local lobbying
 - » Covers grassroots lobbying
 - » The time of employees with no contacts and who spend less than 5% of their time on lobbying activity does not need to be reported

Filing Dates – Quarterly



- Lobbying reports ("LD-2") are quarterly.
- Reports are electronic and placed on a public database.
- Reports are due 20 days after end of quarter. Due dates for 2015 activity are as follows:
 - April 20, 2015
 - July 20, 2015
 - October 20, 2015
 - January 20, 2016



- Disclosure only of lobbyist employer
 - In-House Personnel: Must include internal expenditures (employee salary and overhead). Must include compensation of all employees who lobby. Time tracking.
 - » Does time spent at PAC fundraisers count?
 - Outside Lobbyists: Must include payments made to outside lobbyists.
 - Trade Association and Coalition Dues: Must include the portion of dues payments made to trade associations for lobbying.
 - » Guidance requires reporting of dues in the quarter in which they are paid
 - Travel and Entertainment: Must include travel and entertainment expenses related to lobbying.

Backup Information and Reporting Issues



- Contemporaneous tracking of time
 - The identity of public officials is not disclosed
 - The issues worked on are disclosed only if a lobbyist works on the issues, not a non-lobbyist employee
- Washington Office method
- Documentation supporting contacts with covered officials
- Documents reflecting issues lobbied supporting representations on LD-2
- Should include bill and brief description of legislation.

Other Reporting Issues



- LDA registrants required to identify whether any client is a state or local government or government-controlled entity (e.g., agency, district)
- The interest of any foreign entities listed on the LD-1 with respect to an issue lobbied during the quarter should be disclosed on line 19 of the LD-2
- Updates to registration information are made on the last page (e.g., terminations, address change, etc.)
- Disclosure of Previous Legislative and Executive Branch Employment – Registrants required to disclose certain legislative and executive branch employment during the past 20 years (previous requirement: two-year look back).
 - Disclose only once per client (the first time a new lobbyist is reported).

Disclosure of Affiliate Relationship



- If a corporation has an affiliated entity and the affiliate contributes or has a "chargeback" to its profit-and-loss statement of more than \$5,000 in a calendar quarter and an employee of the affiliate actively participates in the planning, supervision, or control of the registrant's lobbying activity, that affiliate must be disclosed on the LD-1 at line 13.
 - Additions are made on the LD-2 at line 25, and deletions are made on the LD-2 at line 26.



- Disclosure by Trade Associations and Informal Coalitions – HLOGA requires registrants to disclose any entity that:
 - (i) contributes over \$5,000 per reporting period to the lobbying effort of the Registrant; and
 - (ii) "actively participates" in the planning, supervision, or control of the Registrant's lobbying activities (under pre-existing law, the threshold is contribution of \$10,000 per reporting period and "in whole or major part plans, supervises, or controls" lobbying activities).
 - » The term "actively participates" sets a lower threshold than the pre-existing law.
 - » Certain foreign entities affiliated with or interested in such entities must also be disclosed.



- Disclosure by Trade Associations and Informal Coalitions
 - There is an exemption from this disclosure requirement if:
 - » (i) the Registrant lists the member entity on its public website as being a member of the Registrant or a contributor to the Registrant's lobbying effort (the specific Internet address must be provided); and
 - » (ii) the member does not in whole or major part plan, supervise, or control the Registrant's lobbying activities.

LD-203 Reports – Semi-Annual



- Reports are due 30 days after the end of a semi-annual period. Due dates for 2015 activity are as follows:
 - July 30, 2015
 - February 1, 2016
- Semi-Annual Disclosure Report ("LD-203") – Lobbyists, lobbying firms, and lobbyist employers are required to file a semi-annual report detailing political contributions, charitable contributions, and other expenditures related to covered legislative and executive branch officials.
- Even if an employee had no activity or activity that fell below the threshold for becoming a lobbyist, if he or she was listed on an LD-2 report, that employee must file an LD-203 for that semi-annual period.

LD-203 Report: Expenditure Categories



- The current LD-203 form provides five categories for filers to use when disclosing reportable contributions and expenditures:
 - "FECA"
 - "Honorary Expenses"
 - "Meeting Expenses"
 - "Presidential Library Expenses"
 - "Presidential Inaugural Committee"



- FECA
 - The name of all PACs established or controlled by the lobbyist, lobbying firm, or lobbyist employer.
 - Each federal candidate or incumbent, leadership PAC, or party committee that received contributions of \$200 or more (aggregate) from the lobbyist, lobbying firm, lobbyist employer, or their PACs during the semi-annual period.
 - » The date and amount of each contribution is required.
 - When reporting contributions to joint fundraisers, break out ultimate recipients. Merely importing FEC data does not always properly reflect them.



- Honorary Expenses
 - Donations to entities or events related to a covered official (unless required to be reported under FECA), including:
 - » Events held to honor or recognize a covered legislative or executive branch official.
 - » Entities designated by, or established, financed, maintained, or controlled by, such an official.
 - > A charity established by an official prior to becoming a covered official is not covered if the official has no relationship to the organization after becoming a covered official.
 - » Entities named for a legislative branch official.
 - » Any entity in recognition of a legislative branch official.



- Meeting Expenses
 - Any funds paid or contributed by a lobbyist, lobbying firm, lobbyist employer, or their PAC(s) to pay for a meeting, conference, or similar event held by, or in the name of, one or more covered legislative or executive branch officials.
- Presidential Library Expenses and Inaugural Committee
 - Each Presidential library foundation and inaugural committee to which contributions of $\geq \$200$ (aggregate) were made by a lobbyist, lobbying firm, lobbyist employer, or their PAC(s).



- With each semi-annual report, lobbyists, lobbying firms, and lobbyist employers must provide a certification that (i) they are familiar with the House and Senate gift rules, and (ii) they have not provided, requested, or directed a gift (including travel) to a Member or staff with knowledge that receipt of the gift would violate such rules.

Due Diligence Regarding Certification



- Who signs the LD-203 report and certification
 - For internal governance purposes, companies should identify who is ultimately responsible for the certification.
- Robust gift policy
- Training
 - Ensure appropriate employees are familiar with gift rules
- Conduct due diligence to support the gift certification
- Various methods of compliance
 - Conduct gift "look-back" confirmation for first filing (unless filer has already implemented robust internal gift ban or pre-clearance policy)
 - » "Negative sign-off" vs. affirmative response
 - Sub-certification
 - Expense voucher certification



- The LD-203 provides an optional comment box (fits 250 characters)
- With regard to the certification, filers may insert "disclaimer" language such as, "to the best of my knowledge," "after reasonable due diligence" or "after good faith efforts"
- Filers may also insert comments related to other parts of the LD-203
- Note if filer serves on a corporate, trade association, or other PAC Board

Federal Congressional Gift Rules



- Lobbyist/Lobbying Firm/Lobbyist Employer Gift Ban – the gift limit from lobbyists, lobbying firms, and lobbyist employers is \$0, except for the following exceptions:
 - Reception exemption
 - Nominal food in certain settings
 - Widely attended gathering
 - Outside activities
 - Friendship (cannot be expensed and subject to increased scrutiny)
 - Site visits: food and local travel outside D.C. (House rules vs. Senate rules)
 - Attendance at events sponsored by charity (House rules vs. Senate rules)
 - Home district products
 - Nominal items (baseball caps, t-shirts, and greeting cards)
 - Training
 - Informational materials
 - Items paid for at market value or promptly returned
 - Commemorative items (allows certain gifts during site visit)
 - Personal hospitality exemption is not permitted for lobbyists
 - Political contributions

Federal Executive Branch Gift Rules



- Gifts to executive branch officials and employees are generally limited to \$20 per occasion and \$50 per calendar year.
- Commonly used exceptions include:
 - There is no reception exception
 - Widely attended gathering (but requires pre-clearance from agency)
 - Meals and entertainment from non-prohibited source
 - Personal relationship (factors: personal payment and relationship history)
 - Modest items of food and refreshments, such as soft drinks, coffee and donuts, offered other than as part of a meal
 - Greeting cards and items with little intrinsic value, such as plaques, certificates, and trophies, which are intended solely for presentation
 - Gifts the receipt of which is specifically authorized by statute (e.g., Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act)
 - Gifts to the President and Vice President

Obama Executive Order Federal Executive Branch Gift Rules



- Obama Executive Order prohibits most gifts to executive branch officials and employees from lobbyists, lobbying firms, and lobbyist employers.
 - Non-Obama employees may be covered as well
- May not utilize \$20/\$50, widely attended, or reception exceptions, among others.
- Limited exceptions remain, including:
 - Personal relationship (factors: personal payment and relationship history)
 - Modest items of food and refreshments, such as soft drinks, coffee and donuts, offered other than as part of a meal, but not including receptions with alcohol like in the legislative branch
 - Greeting cards and items with little intrinsic value, such as plaques, certificates, and trophies, which are intended solely for presentation
 - Gifts the receipt of which is specifically authorized by statute (e.g., Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act)
 - Gifts to the President and Vice President
- Press and charity exceptions

Terminating Registrations and Lobbyists



- Registrations
 - Termination is permitted if an individual has no reasonable expectation of further lobbying contacts, even if the individual continues to meet the 20% threshold.
- Lobbyists
 - A registrant can terminate a lobbyist by listing the lobbyist's name on Line 23 of the LD-2 report
 - The registrant (not the lobbyist) must sign in to the LD-203 Contribution System and update the lobbyist's status to "inactive" and enter an effective date of termination
 - The lobbyist must file an LD-203 report for any reporting period for which he or she was an active lobbyist, even if for only one quarter of the LD-203 semi-annual period

When a Lobbyist Switches Employers



- Prior employer registrant terminates the lobbyist on line 23 of LD-2
- Once the individual meets the registration threshold under new employer, new employer registers the individual by listing the individual's name on Line 18 of the appropriate LD-2 report
- Registrants should not create an account for new lobbyists who already have a lobbyist ID
- The lobbyist must sign in to the LD-203 Contribution System and, in the Manage Your Profile section, click on the Request Employer Transfer link and follow the instructions.

Bundling per HLOGA: Disclosure Requirements



- Bundling Disclosure by Candidates – HLOGA amends FECA to require candidates' campaigns, leadership PACs, and political party committees ("Covered Recipients") to disclose for each reporting period the name, address, and employer of each lobbyist, lobbying firm, or lobbyist employer that has provided two or more "bundled" contributions totaling over \$17,600 (and the specific amount bundled) during that period.

Bundling per HLOGA: Disclosure Requirements



- Bundling Disclosure by Candidates
- A contribution is considered to be "bundled" under HLOGA if:
 - (i) the contribution is forwarded from the contributor(s) to the Covered Recipient by the lobbyist, lobbying firm, lobbyist employer (including its in-house lobbyists), or their PACs, or
 - (ii) the contribution is received by a Covered Recipient from the contributor(s) but will be, or has been, credited to a lobbyist, lobbying firm, lobbyist employer (including its in-house lobbyists), or their PACs through written records, designations, or other means of recognizing that a certain amount of money has been raised.
- Attribution of \$17,600 is per sponsor of the fundraiser

HLOGA Enforcement: Criminal and Civil



- Donor Liability – HLOGA amends the Lobbying Disclosure Act ("LDA") to make lobbyists, lobbying firms, and lobbyist employers liable for providing gifts or travel not permitted by Senate or House rules.
- Increased Penalties – HLOGA amends the LDA to increase civil penalties for violations and add criminal penalties (up to 5 years in prison and/or fines under Title 18 of the U.S. Code). HLOGA sets a "knowingly and corruptly" standard for criminal penalties.
- There is still a 60-day cure provision for reporting violations, but not for violations of the gifts law, which are the basis of the LD-203 certification.

HLOGA Enforcement: Criminal and Civil



- Meeting the good faith standard
 - No definition in the law
 - Rounding (up or down) to the closest \$10,000
 - » GAO found 21% in non-compliance for not rounding
- Random GAO audits
- DOJ recently announced increased focus on HLOGA compliance
 - Biassi Business Services
 - » December 2, 2013: \$200,000 default judgment
 - Mauk
 - » March 14, 2014 complaint filed
 - » Potential fines of \$5.2 million
 - > \$30,000 settlement