

LT COLONEL (RET)

AMY McGRATH

C O N G R E S S



AMY McGRATH'S PLAN

TO *REALLY* DRAIN THE SWAMP, PART I:
REMINDING CONGRESS WHO THEY WORK FOR



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Democratically elected representatives are entrusted with a sacred duty to serve the People. Today, however, too many politicians seem to be working hard for everyone *but* you.

Secret money in political campaigns is not consistent with democratic values, and an election system that effectively allows for unlimited corporate and lobbyist contributions has become a breeding ground for corruption. While some unethical politicians manipulate this system for personal gain, even those with good intentions are compelled to seek ever larger contributions – under pressure by *both parties* – from any source, simply to keep up. It's a runaway train – *away* from integrity in government.

People are fed up with watching Congress look the other way when its members sell their power to lobbyists and corporate interests for campaign contributions and for their own profit. We're fed

up with a Congress that passes and upholds special laws that benefit only themselves and their families. And, we're fed up with a Congress that is supposed to serve the people, but is unwilling to roll back its own exclusive perks even as working Americans have been expected to do more with less.

It's time to change all that. I pledge to work for *you*, not for corporations, lobbyists, or other special interests. I pledge to run both a campaign and a Congressional office that is financially transparent. And I pledge *never* to use my office for personal gain or to obtain special privileges not available to other Americans.

But you shouldn't have to take my, or anyone else's, word for it. **These standards should be the law of the land** – and they're not. **It's time to remind Congress who they work for.** That is why, if you elect me, I will *hold myself and every other Member of Congress responsible* to enact ethics and

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campaign reforms that will bring transparency and accountability to Congress – and restore the voters to their rightful place at the heart of our democracy.

- I will fight for commonsense limits and meaningful transparency in campaign finance. Voters have a right to know who really “paid for this message” before deciding who will best represent them.
- I will fight to end the inappropriate and unethical “pay-to-play” influence of lobbyists in Washington, where big money buys special access and billion-dollar government contracts.
- I will fight to reduce fundraising pressures on elected officials – and to impose enforceable rules to limit fundraising activities on the taxpayers’ dime. Members of Congress must spend their time doing the jobs they are elected and paid to do, not “dialing for dollars” and negotiating their future jobs.
- I will fight to raise ethics standards and toughen penalties for those who abuse the privileges they have been given as representatives of the people. We must no longer tolerate violations of the public’s trust by those who would exploit their elected office for personal gain.

Making Clear Our Democracy Is Not For Sale

Money in politics is not new to our democracy. Back in 1907, Congress passed the first ban on political donations by corporations and banks,¹ after it was discovered that insurance companies were secretly funneling hundreds of thousands of dollars (millions, in today’s money) into federal elections. Since then, there have been many efforts to set commonsense

rules and limits on the ways in which corporations and special interests can use their fortunes to influence what are supposed to be democratic elections.

Many of these efforts were undone in the 2010 *Citizens United* case, when the Supreme Court ruled that corporations were entitled to unlimited political spending, and the same free speech rights as individual citizens – and allowed the creation of Super PACs (political action committees) that could also spend unlimited amounts of money to influence elections. Unlike ordinary PACs, these Super PACs are not required to disclose donors. This was a terrible mistake for our democracy.

For most of our country’s history, Republicans and Democrats alike have been rightfully suspicious of elections driven by millions of dollars of corporate fortunes. If the people of Kentucky’s 6th congressional district send me to Washington, I will work with Republicans as well as Democrats for laws that reflect the will of *real* people like you and me.

As your representative, I will:

Fight to pass a constitutional amendment making it clear once and for all that both Congress and the states have the power to regulate election spending.

Honest brokers from both parties have worked together in the past to find the right balance between protecting the freedom to communicate political ideas, beliefs, and opinions – and protecting our democracy from a government beholden to corporations and special interests. The Supreme Court got this balance wrong in *Citizens United*. We need a constitutional amendment to make clear that

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commonsense limits on vast sums of money used by corporations and special interests to influence elections do not violate the First Amendment's freedom of speech. This would enable us to ban the Super PACs that funnel billions of dollars in dark money from secret donors into our elections.

Insist on complete campaign finance transparency.

We must require that *all* spending on campaigns – including by outside groups – be reported and publicly disclosed in a timely manner. This should include:

Requiring publicly traded corporations to disclose their political spending.

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is tasked with ensuring transparency in the finances of publicly traded companies. Transparency ensures that the public has reliable information on which to base decisions about investing in a company, and it allows shareholders to evaluate how effectively the company is utilizing their funds. Yet certain

Members of Congress have been working on behalf of these companies to *prevent* the SEC from doing its job by making it *more* difficult for a company's shareholders to request disclosure of political spending² – and you can guess who was the very first co-sponsor: my opponent, Andy Barr.³ This is a fine example of our representatives working *against* us. When I go to Congress, I will change that.

Stopping campaign donors from hiding behind secret-money groups to pay for political advertising.

Any organization that spends significant funds on political advertisements should be required to file a timely online report disclosing its major donors.

Requiring immediate disclosure of political fundraising and spending

These reports should be made readily available online to the public in every election cycle, *in time for voters to use the information when casting their votes at the polls.*

Overturning the new IRS rules that allow political groups to hide where their funds come from and who their donors are.

Our government should be on the side of the voters' right to know who is trying to influence them and their representatives, not on the side of "dark money."

Require release of complete federal tax returns by Members of Congress, the President, the Cabinet, and the Supreme Court.

These are the people entrusted with making the most important decisions facing our country. We have a right to know where our leaders' wealth and

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income comes from, and whether they have ongoing conflicts of interest as they make these decisions.

Demand enforcement of existing laws to prohibit and punish PAC coordination.

In theory, PACs are supposed to make their political expenditures “independently” of the candidates they are supporting, without coordinating their spending in cooperation with their campaigns. This has been the justification for allowing corporations and wealthy individuals to contribute larger amounts of money to political groups than they would be able to give directly to a candidate under existing federal rules. But today’s elections make a mockery of this prohibition.

Strengthen conflict-of-interest rules.

Congress makes its own rules: It ought to require members to declare all possible conflicts of interest before voting – and to recuse themselves from voting when they or a member of their immediate

family – or an active business partner – has a financial conflict of interest. Corporations demand no less of their board members, and we require the same of public servants in other branches of government. It’s time to hold our elected representatives to common ethical standards. And, unlike many others in Congress, I’ll observe this rule myself *even if* other members won’t require it.

Ending “Pay-to-Play” Lobbying And Government Contracting

Congress is entrusted by citizens to make decisions on their behalf every day. They write the laws that ensure the safety of food and drug products, protect privacy in the digital age, spend our tax dollars, and affect almost every other area of our lives. Their decisions impact whether we will have war or peace, whether schools will have enough money to educate children, and about who will be able to afford health care. It is no exaggeration to say that these are life

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and death decisions that shape America's economy, our quality of life – and our very character as a democracy.

Today, however, nearly \$3.5 billion in lobbying money per year are at play in influencing how Congress makes these vital decisions.⁴ Corporations are profit-seeking entities: They do not spend an astronomical amount of money year after year on activities that are not effective for them. On the contrary, an analysis by the Sunlight Foundation found that for every \$1 spent influencing politics, the most politically active corporations received \$760 from the government.⁵ Corporations, as well as special interests and even foreign governments, find lobbying expenditures to be so effective that their spending has doubled since the turn of the millennium – with encouragement from *Citizens United*, which expanded the kinds of political spending they may undertake without public disclosure. Political spending by lobbyists has been compared to “buying a ticket to the party”⁶ – you have to pay to play. Those who aren't paying these outlandish sums aren't invited.

And you know who isn't invited? You.

It has become normal for insurance companies to literally write the bills that will become laws about medical malpractice,⁷ for Wall Street lobbyists to write laws insuring their risky investments with taxpayer dollars,⁸ and for oil and gas companies to write laws about drilling in sensitive areas.⁹ The biggest spenders on these lobbying activities are pharmaceutical companies, insurance companies, commerce associations, and oil and gas companies. What do we have to show for it? Opioid epidemics,

government bank bailouts, and ever-more-devastating oil spills and contaminated water are a few results that come to mind.

Those who defend these practices say that lobbyists merely “educate” Congress on areas that require special policy expertise; in fact, this “education” often involves all-expense-paid trips to lavish events, and large contributions to Super PACs to fund their reelections. This is not simply “free speech,” but plain political bribery.

Let's stop members of Congress from selling our democracy.

Instead of what we get now, *I will work in Congress to:*

Bar politicians from taking money from lobbyists.

Technically, it is illegal for lobbyists to pay, or give gifts to, members of Congress in an attempt to influence their vote. However, these laws are vague, weak, easily skirted, and rarely enforced.¹⁰ There are also legal limits on the amounts that lobbyists may contribute directly to campaigns – but thanks to *Citizens United*, they can, and do, contribute unlimited amounts to Super PACs set up to circumvent these limits. Further, current laws do not prevent lobbyists paying for expensive travel, lavish meals and alcoholic beverages, exclusive events and entertainment, and other prestigious perks. We need to strengthen existing rules so they do more than pay lip service to honest dealing. Members of Congress and candidates for office should simply not be allowed to accept election contributions from lobbyists. Further, there should

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be strict, commonsense limits on the dollar amount an elected official or candidate can accept in from lobbyists in payments for travel, meals, and other expenses, just as there are for other public servants at the federal and state level. Members of Congress should be required to file timely electronic reports on all lobbying activity and privately financed expenses.

Ban lobbyist bundling.

“Bundling” is a form of political fundraising where a lobbyist, or representative of an industry, business, or special interest, works to pool hundreds of political contributions, and then donates them together in a lump sum to a politician’s campaign. This is technically legal. However, the practice enables special interests to circumvent campaign contribution limits to effectively deliver hundreds of millions of dollars directly to one candidate’s campaign. These “bundlers” are rewarded routinely by leaders in both parties with high paying, powerful jobs in an administration, or with tremendous access

not available to regular citizens.¹¹ It is largely left to the individual candidate to voluntarily disclose the amount of money raised by “bundlers,” and whether and how they were rewarded for amassing these super-contributions. A number of cities and states have enacted laws to end this practice¹² – but it is even more important that we do so at the congressional level.

Require corporations that hold contracts with the federal government to disclose their political spending.

Of the 41 companies listed in the top 100 campaign contributors over the last 20 years, 33 (or 80 percent) hold federal government contracts – including JP Morgan Chase, Exxon Mobil, General Electric, and Koch Industries.¹³ If that doesn’t prove that these companies are “paying to play,” it certainly creates that appearance. This undermines integrity and public trust in government. Such corporations with federal contracts are also entitled, today, to spend unlimited funds on outside political groups without disclosure. This must change.

Strengthen the definition of lobbying and penalize lobbyists who fail to register.

Lobbyists, generally, are individuals who are compensated for their activities in attempting to influence government actions. The rules about who must register as a federal lobbyist is very narrow compared to the definitions adopted by many state governments.¹⁴ For example, individuals who spend less than 20 percent of their time lobbying Capitol Hill are not required to register as lobbyists and are exempt from certain restrictions. However, few resources are devoted by Congress to the monitoring

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or enforcement of these rules, and penalties for violations are very rare.¹⁵ On the other hand, state and local governments are strengthening laws, and cracking down harder on rule violations by lobbyists – in places like Florida¹⁶ and Chicago.¹⁷ We should be taking these rules even more, and certainly not less seriously at the federal level, where the sums of money involved are greater, and where lawmakers' decisions impact every citizen in the nation.

Strengthen rules on foreign interest lobbying.

The American people have a right to know who's working on Capitol Hill in the interests of foreign governments and other foreign interests. Lobbying Congress on behalf of foreign entities is, in fact, a multi-billion dollar industry with very little oversight: The Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), enacted in 1938, is virtually the only law governing lobbyists who seek to influence Congress on behalf of foreign interests. It is a simple disclosure law that requires

lobbyists for foreign entities to register, creating a degree of transparency so these activities are not conducted in complete secrecy – and yet, it has been blatantly ignored for years due to lack of enforcement and broad loopholes. In fact, according to a 2016 report by the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, only seven enforcement actions were taken in the 50 years between 1966 and 2015. More than half of those who did register (63 percent) were late to do so.¹⁸ Non-compliance with FARA has been described by many insiders, including a leading law firm as “common,”¹⁹ and by lobbyists as unlikely to result in charges.²⁰ It has even been reported that the FARA team at the Department of Justice “usually investigates failures to register only when its staff reads about them in the media.”²¹ Too many lobbyists working on behalf of foreign entities are abusing weak enforcement of FARA – as we've learned, at least, from the special counsel investigation into foreign interference in our democracy.²²

I will work to:

Close the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) loophole that exempts lobbyists for foreign interests from FARA compliance by simply registering as lobbyists.

Clarify and provide more stringent guidance about the rules governing commercial, academic, and other exemptions from FARA so they apply only to bona fide businesses and researchers not engaged in political activities or acting on behalf of a foreign government or political party.

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Create a robust enforcement and public disclosure mechanism.

The FARA unit of the Department of Justice lacks the resources and authority to meaningfully enforce existing law. It must be authorized to coordinate with national security agencies in conducting investigations and be granted similar subpoena authority as other federal compliance agencies.

Make FARA registrations available to the public, online, and in a timely fashion, in order to fulfill the law's purpose and intent to provide public disclosure.

Holding Elected Officials Accountable For Doing Their Job

There are few rules holding members of Congress accountable outside of the ballot box. For example, nothing prevents our elected representatives from negotiating future high-paying positions as lobbyists

and executives with the corporations funding their campaigns and their congressional careers. In fact, more former Congresspersons than ever – nearly half (47 percent) – join the lobbying industry after holding office.²³ Many of these deals are made while still in office, meaning that a high percentage of Congress knows they are actually *future* employees of some firm whose interests they can affect while in Congress. They are free to use their time in office serving the interests of the company or industry that will reward them with very high-paying jobs upon leaving office – often worth millions of dollars. There is a strong chance my opponent Andy Barr, for instance, will go to work for the banking industry when he is voted out of office in November, because he's basically been working for them his whole career on Capitol Hill anyway.

When Congresspersons aren't spending their time doing the bidding of special interests they hope to

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work for after *leaving* office, they're spending most of their time raising money from them in order to *stay* in office. Members of Congress have been encouraged by *both* parties to spend 30 hours a week, or up to 50 percent of their working hours, on making fundraising calls.²⁴ Former Members of Congress have complained about this burden competing with their sworn duties as representatives of the people.

It's no wonder they then let these same special interests literally write the laws for them: They don't have any time to do their *real* jobs themselves.

Members of Congress wind up thinking they work for a wide range of bosses. These bosses include lobbyists, campaign funders, future employers, party leaders, their party's President – everyone except the voters who ought to be their *only* boss. Let's make it easier for Congress to do their job right, by reminding them who their boss *really* is.

I will work to:

Stop the “revolving door” between Congress and lobbying that allows special interests to buy the power of an elected official.

In fact, immediately upon leaving office, members of Congress get a 1,452 percent raise *on average*.²⁵ This amounts to bribery pure and simple, and it is shameful. The power of an elected office belongs to the people and should not be for sale. I will fight for legislation to prohibit the negotiation or offer of future employment to an elected official while serving in public office, and bar Members of Congress and their senior staffs from working as a lobbyist for five years after their term.

Prohibit fundraising during working hours.

I will propose and support legislation prohibiting Members of Congress from soliciting political contributions during regular business hours while Congress is in session.

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Work aggressively to enforce finance and ethics rules.

It is not enough to have campaign finance and lobbying rules on the books if they are easily avoided and rarely enforced. Politicians have demonstrated they cannot be trusted to police themselves. I will work to ensure that the Federal Election Commission has the appropriate authority and resources to enforce the laws we have enacted to guarantee the integrity of our government, and that violators are prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Ending The Exploitation Of Public Office For Personal Gain

Unfortunately, as a whole, Congress has demonstrated an inappropriate bias toward its own members. How else can we explain laws that provide a greater death benefit for a Member of Congress' family than that provided for the surviving spouse and children of a soldier killed in action?²⁶ Or special health care coverage for Members of Congress that are unheard of for (and many Members of Congress don't want to provide to) the average American? Or a special exemption from the discrimination and sexual harassment laws with which every other employer must comply?

If Members of Congress cannot stop themselves from making laws that benefit themselves only, and if it cannot find the will to give up special privileges they have enjoyed at the taxpayers' expense – but which few other Americans could ever access – then the voters must vote them out. I will be a representative who knows who I work for. And I will

proudly serve the citizens of Kentucky – *no one and nothing else.*

I will fight to:

End Cadillac Benefits designed by Congress for Members of Congress only, including:

Outsized Death Benefits.

If a member of Congress dies in office, his or her family is entitled to a full year of their salary, or \$174,000. Compare this to a soldier whose family is entitled to just \$100,000 if they are killed (and sometimes less since other benefits for which they are eligible may be deducted from this amount). I guess this is why my opponent equated his serving in Congress with serving the country in the military – but better, because serving in Congress, in his view, involves more brains. Of course, he's never had to operate one of this country's most sophisticated pieces of technology. Flying miles above the earth at hundreds of miles an hour. In life-or-death combat.



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The median net wealth of a Member of Congress in 2015 was at least \$1.1 million,²⁷ and their average age is between 57 (House) and 61 years (Senate).²⁸ They have had access to every resource and many years to plan for their families' security – unlike service members, especially those with young children, who have sacrificed their lives in their prime. If anyone's family should be taken care of like this, it's the families of our fallen servicemen and women. Sorry, Andy, but congressional service just doesn't require combat death benefits.

Health Benefits Like No One Else.

The Cadillac health benefits enjoyed by Congress have been an open secret for years, and it is time for Congress to take Americans' health care as seriously as they do their own. Members of Congress receive larger federal subsidies on their health care premiums (72 percent) than most low-income Americans do, in addition to access to free or low-cost health care on site at the Capitol.²⁹ No matter what health care laws are passed by Congress for the people, Congress can rest easy knowing that they will not be negatively affected. This is an insult to the many Americans who live in uncertainty about whether they will have access to adequate health care for themselves or their families. Congressional health care should not be governed by special rules that do not apply to the rest of Americans; it should be limited to whatever plans or coverage is available to the American public. That should mean no free health care on the taxpayers' dime for the people who can most afford to pay.

Limit congressional pensions to those who serve for at least ten years, rather than five years as at



present. Few other Americans enjoy such a lifetime benefit after just five years on the job.

End first-class international jet-setting on the taxpayers' dime.

Even though Members of Congress are provided large allowances for their staff and office expenses, international travel for Members of Congress is paid out of the U.S. Treasury under a law last updated in the 1970's.³⁰ And there is no set limit for foreign travel spending. In 2016, 557 international trips were made by Members of Congress and staffers that cost over \$10,000 each. That isn't normal. Less than 0.2 percent of airline tickets purchased by the general public are that expensive. Nevertheless, trip expenses of over \$10,000 made up 40 percent of publicly reported individual travel costs. And first-class jet-setting is a growing trend. In 2017, Congress spent at least \$14.7 million on taxpayer-funded trips, an amount 27% more than the year prior.³¹ There are legitimate and important reasons for Members of

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Congress to travel internationally, such as to witness ground conditions where we have troops. But there is no reason Members of Congress must travel like royalty, without regard to cost.

I will sponsor and support legislation to put the same commonsense limits on travel and per diem expenses charged to the taxpayers that we already apply to general officers in the military.

Require that all personal assets and investments be placed in a blind trust for the duration of their terms in office, for all Members of Congress, the President, the Cabinet, and the Supreme Court.

These powerful individuals are entrusted with enormous and far-reaching decisions that affect the future of the country and the lives of everyday Americans. They have access to classified and sensitive information that other Americans do not. We should demand that they not be able to

profit from, or make business decisions based on, their access to special information – or their votes in Congress. This also protects them from being required to continuously identify and disclose potential conflicts of interests between their finances and their sworn duties.

Stop Congress from holding itself above the law when it comes to discrimination, sexual harassment, and worker protections.

It has been a long time coming, but it's finally time for Capitol Hill to enter the 21st Century and abide by the workplace laws that apply to everyone else – and the same professionalism and accountability expected of executives in the private sector. Congress has legally exempted itself from some of the basic employee protections afforded in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, by requiring employees to go through mediation and waiting periods before taking legal action in response to violations; in spite

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of these unusual requirements they must file their legal complaint within 180 days of the violation.³² These extra hoops are designed to make it far more difficult for employees to pursue legitimate claims than it is for employees in the private sector, or other branches of government. This is an embarrassment; the Congress should stop shielding its own bad actors from consequences.

Stop making taxpayers pay settlements and hush money for misconduct by Senators and Congresspersons.

You might assume that when an elected official or their staff is found to be guilty of misconduct, they must pay for their own misdeeds. If only that were the case. In fact, between 1998 and 2014, 235 awards and settlements for Capitol Hill workplace violations have been paid by the U.S. Treasury, amounting to \$15.2 million in taxpayer dollars.³³ Still, Congress feels no need for its members or staff to

undergo harassment training that is standard for employees in the public and private sectors. If they were held accountable for their own actions like everyone else, they might strive for a better track record.

Put an end to Congress as a lifetime career.

I've long believed that one of the systemic problems plaguing Congress—aside from the corrosive effect of money in politics—is the seemingly permanent class of career incumbents in Washington that I believe is contrary to what our founders intended. It is certainly one of the reasons that Congress is so unpopular. By creating a system where members are constantly running for re-election, requiring the raising of millions of dollars each year, and then voting on legislation pushed by those very donors, it's impossible to have faith that such an institution will truly be “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

I'm not running for Congress to be a career politician. For me, this is about wanting to become one of the new generation of leaders who views elected office as a continuation of my service to country and who will work in good faith with all colleagues, regardless of party, on the things that really matter to the voters. But I very strongly believe that it's time for Congress to follow the example of 36 states that place term limits on its governor, and 15 that have them on their legislature. While I recognize that term limits alone will certainly not fix what is wrong with Congress, it is an important step towards regaining some of the public's massive loss of trust in our political leadership.



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Notes

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