

# The Numbers Are in... The First LD-203 Reports in Retrospective

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September 2008

The first wave of LD-203 reports were filed on July 30 and contained a wealth of numerical and statistical information for journalists, reform groups and DC insiders to parse. According to published reports in BNA's "Money and Politics," the filings indicate that federally-registered lobbyists made nearly 97,000 separate contributions to candidates totaling almost \$26 million in the first half of 2008. A separate analysis done by *Congressional Quarterly* found that, through their employees and the PACs that they control, the top 15 Washington lobbying firms contributed an average of \$280,000 during the same period. The same article also noted that lobbyist principals spent nearly \$1.5 million on parties, meetings and events to recognize or honor covered officials, including \$61,000 spent by a labor union conglomerate to honor Democratic Committee Chairman James Oberstar as their "Legislator of the Year."

Although some groups reported few difficulties in complying with the new reporting requirements, some press sources (including *The Washington Post*) noted that other organizations encountered a number of issues when completing the process. Some of these problems appear to be technical in nature, such as where a particular lobbyist was reported to have made a \$2,300,000 contribution to a particular candidate's campaign (the limit is \$2,300 per election).

In other instances, filers continued to express uncertainty over precisely what information must be disclosed on the reporting forms. Some of the confusion resulted from some last-minute changes to the interpretive guidance—prepared by legislative branch officials—that provides specific examples of the information that must be reported.

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The July 16 guidance from the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House can be found [here](#). It narrowed, for the most part, the amount of information that needed to be reported by corporations, trade associations and their lobbyists.

Although the reports have been filed, the headaches for some organizations may not be over yet. The Comptroller General will randomly audit the information contained in some of the reports through questionnaires and follow-up requests for underlying documentation.

The next quarterly lobbying disclosure reports are due on October 20, 2008. The next LD-203 contribution reports, covering activity for the period from July 1 through December 31, 2008, are due on January 30, 2009.