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Jon Kyl's lobbyist past is a problem

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John McCain, the late Republican senator from Arizona, was beholden to no one. Jon Kyl, the former Republican senator tapped to replace McCain, cannot say the same. Kyl was a lobbyist for K Street giant Covington & Burling.

It is easy enough to skim his full list of former clients and, after a little digging, realize, not just potential conflicts of interest, but also lobbying positions that might conflict with conservatives and the Trump administration.

“During Senator Kyl’s 26 years in Congress, he built a reputation for mastering the complexities of legislative policy and coalition building, first in the House of Representatives and then in the Senate,” reads his bio on the Burlington and Covington website. “In 2010, Time magazine called him one of the 100 most influential people in the world, noting his 'encyclopedic knowledge of domestic and foreign policy, and his hard work and leadership’ and his 'power to persuade.'”

It was that power to persuade that made the second-ranking Senate Republican a hot lobbying commodity. And it was a fat lobbying paycheck that allowed for certain political flexibility.

While Kyl developed a reputation as a free-trade senator, Kyl lobbied for the aluminum industry through this year. He was lobbying for JW Aluminum a domestic manufacturer who supports President Trump’s tariffs on foreign metal in domestic markets. It’s a far cry from the senator who once received a 92 percent rating from the libertarian think tank Cato Institute.

Either the new senator is still as pro-trade as the old senator or the lobbyist in him has brought Kyl around to Trump protectionism. Either way, it's hard to call him consistent.

While Kyl was generally friendly to immigration during his Senate career, he helped advance much more liberal policies when getting paid as a lobbyist. For instance, in 2012, the senator introduced an alternative to the DREAM Act but without a pathway to citizenship. Six years later, Kyl was lobbying on behalf of the American Council on Education, Georgetown University, and former Washington Post publisher Donald E. Graham to keep the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrival programs.

When a senator, Kyl also developed a close friendship with his colleague then-Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala. As the Daily Beast notes, he later worked to help guide Sessions through the confirmation process after Trump nominated him as attorney general. If the president decides to give Sessions the boot after the midterms, Kyl could gum up the confirmation process for his successor. More plausibly, Kyl could also serve as a defender for the beleaguered attorney general.

It is clear that Kyl was as good a lobbyist as advertised, and it is more than possible that Kyl may now vote on some of the issues he lobbied on. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., should keep this in mind when the Senate determines committee assignments.

Kyl shouldn't sit on the Armed Services Committee — he lobbied on behalf of defense contractors such as Raytheon.

Kyl shouldn't serve on the Financial Services Committee — he lobbied for H&R Block.

Kyl shouldn't do any work on the Energy and Commerce — he lobbied on behalf of all sorts of pharmaceutical companies, including Merck and Co.

One wonders whether he should work on any committees at all.