



Calls for oversight come as Congress prepares for fourth relief bill

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WASHINGTON (SBG)-- Congress is eager to pump money into the struggling economy and many are lobbying to get in on the bailouts.

After passing the record-setting \$2.2 trillion CARES Act, lawmakers on Capitol Hill are already crafting plans for another package that could cost trillions more- money corporations and other private interests want a piece of.

“We’re thinking about really anyone who might try to grab more than they deserve and even more importantly, once they have it in hand, how they use it.” Lisa Gilbert said.

Gilbert works as the president of legislative affairs at the consumer advocacy group Public Citizen. The group is calling for a provision that would ban corporations from lobbying while using government assistance.

Gilbert cites what happened in 2008, when big banks used government money to lobby for weaker regulations.

“We want to make sure that nothing like that can happen when we’re dealing with the aftermath of this crisis, a health crisis is not the time to be opportunistic if you’re a big corporation,” Gilbert said.

Many are calling for strict oversight on how the trillions of taxpayer dollars are spent. This, as President Trump just removed the official appointed to lead a panel of federal watchdogs to oversee coronavirus relief spending.

“I think we need to audit government agencies and we need to audit the businesses and all these handouts,” Chris Edwards, an economist at the Cato Institute said.

Elements of the CARES Act raised questions, like whether or not money for the Kennedy Center or a big check to Boeing was relevant to immediate economic relief needed during the pandemic.

“I think the benefits for business ought to be equal across the board,” Edwards said.
“Many, many businesses in America are hurting and we shouldn’t be carving out special interests for certain powerful lobby groups.”

Edwards said the timing of the next stimulus package will play a role in how much sway lobbyists have over spending.

“One of the things that kept special interest lobbying to a minimum in the last couple relief bills was that they moved so quickly through Congress,” Edwards said. “The way that a lot of sort of Christmas tree ornaments get attached to Congressional bills usually because they’re usually a couple months in progress and the lobbyists have a lot of time to twist arms.”