

Dangers of the Revolving Door

Steven Pearlstein's July 2 column, "A Revolving Door? So What?" epitomizes what is wrong with Washington.

Pearlstein encourages apathy toward the revolving door between the government and its contractors. The blurring of lines between the public and private sectors and the failure to recognize that profit motives often contradict public interest is corrosive to good government.

Although Pearlstein accurately describes the appointment of recently retired chief Pentagon weapons buyer Pete Aldridge to Lockheed Martin's well-compensated board as "thoroughly unexceptional," he is wrong to imply that this doesn't undermine public policy. The revolving door degrades policymaking and promotes cynicism about government.

It is troublesome that future employment considerations may influence decisions by government officials who still ostensibly represent taxpayers. For example, in his last days at the Pentagon, Aldridge approved the controversial contracts for Lockheed Martin's R-22 and Boeing's V-22 aircraft. Both programs are severely over budget and continually fail to meet their technical requirements. Insiders report that Aldridge was unimpressed with these programs but approved them anyway. Was he rewarding these companies in order to keep his employment options open?

Former Air Force official and now Boeing executive Darleen Druyun is

another recent example. Druyun, the self-proclaimed "godmother" of Boeing's C-17 aircraft, tried to designate it a "commercial item"—freeing Boeing from government supervision over costs and quality. After a front-page New York Times story, her plan fell apart. Still, it seems that Boeing appreciated Druyun's efforts and hired her to lead the company's missile defense division.

Conflicts of interest also exist in oversight. Government employees hoping to enter the corporate realm are inclined to go easy on prospective employers. Was this the case with Gen. Bobby O. Floyd? Floyd led the government investigation of a fatal Hercules plane crash. He interrupted his probe for a job interview with the plane's manufacturer, Lockheed Martin, and later concluded that his new employer was free from blame. When the Air Force looked into Floyd's actions, it determined that, despite appearances, he broke no ethics rules.

Washington insiders need to stop yawning when business interests prevail over the public good. Increased corporate profits do not justify leaving taxpayers and the armed services with overpriced weapons that don't work. The outrage is that people like Steven Pearlstein don't even care anymore.

—Caleb Patrick Rowe

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