



# Pentagon's Revolving Door Spinning Faster

by Melanie Sloan

When people hear about the revolving door in Washington, DC, they usually think about former lawmakers — or their staff members — leaving government for lucrative jobs in the private sector. While the path from Congress to K Street (and vice versa) is well-tread, a recent report by my organization, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), highlighted how the revolving door phenomenon is alive and well in other sectors of the federal government, especially the Pentagon.

CREW's report, *Strategic Maneuvers*, shows the continuation of a trend identified in a 2010 *Boston Globe* investigation, which revealed the number of three-and-four star generals and admirals who retired from the armed forces to take jobs with the defense industry rose from less than 50 percent between 1994 and 1998, to 80 percent between 2004 and 2008. After earning their stars and stripes from years of military service, these retirees can finally cash in on their contacts and experience by taking highly-paid jobs with the defense industry. For example, retired generals can easily make more than their base government pay by serving on just a single corporate board.

CREW found 70 percent — or 76 — of the 108 three-and-four star generals and admirals who retired between 2009 and 2011 took jobs with defense contractors or consultants. In at least a few cases, these retirees have advised the Department of Defense while on the payroll of the defense industry. With these retirees' new corporate allegiances, how can Pentagon officials be sure they are receiving unbiased advice from former top brass whose paychecks now depend on bringing home the bacon for their new employers?

In 2011 alone, the Department of Defense committed to spending nearly \$100 billion in total with the five largest defense contractors — Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman. At least nine of the top-level generals and admirals who retired between 2009 and 2011 took positions with these five companies. Another 12 have gone on to work for Burdeshaw Associates, a "rent-a-general" consulting firm specializing in helping companies obtain defense contracts. Hiring a retired general can be a financial boon for a defense contractor, but it remains a mystery to Americans what exactly these former military officials do to earn their paychecks.

When it comes to the defense industry, the

revolving door is not just limited to the highest-ranking military officials. Defense companies also covet lobbyists with backgrounds in appropriations. Of in-house lobbyists registered on behalf of the five largest defense contractors, CREW found at least 68 percent had prior public sector experience — with nearly half having worked for Congress. Between 2007 and 2011, these companies' lobbying spending jumped from \$44.6 million to \$62.3 million. Over the same period, the total amount in federal contracts committed to these companies increased from \$100.6 billion in fiscal year 2007 to \$113.3 billion in 2011.

With the near-constant chatter of potentially massive cuts to the military's budget, defense contractors are scrambling to position themselves on the right side. In this equation, high-ranking generals and admirals and experienced lobbyists have been shown to be valuable assets in the competition for contracts. While retired generals and admirals do not appear to be breaking any rules by taking their talents to the private sector, their path raises important questions about the intersection of national security and the interests of multibillion-dollar companies.

There is no argument over whether those who have served in the US military are worthy of our praise and recognition. But unless the military implements new laws to manage its retirees' potential conflicts of interest, we can expect the revolving door to keep spinning for the foreseeable future.

*Melanie Sloan is executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW).*

**How can Pentagon officials be sure they are receiving unbiased advice from former top brass whose paychecks now depend on bringing home the bacon for their new employers?**



graphic: Geeks.US