Council on Competitiveness

Max S. Baucus

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**August-1992**

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**on the Council on Competitiveness**

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**09/06/1992**
George Bush and Dan Quayle’s Council on Competitiveness is subverting our process of government. It gives special access to special interests -- while slamming the door on the public interest.

It is the modern equivalent -- a reincarnation -- of the old "Star Chamber". Only today, it is the public interest that is tortured and subjected to arbitrary judgments in secret session.

That process was wrong in the middle ages. And it is wrong today. It’s a subversion of our open, democratic system of government.

If George Bush can’t see what’s right, then we must do what we can to reassert the public’s right to have the laws faithfully executed. And to ensure that Federal decisions that affect the public are made in public -- where they belong.

Let me cite one troubling example. In November of 1990, I went to the White House for the signing ceremony for the Clean Air Act. To commemorate that occasion, President Bush gave us each a pen used to sign that bill into law.

This is that pen. I have been proud to hang this pen in my office has a symbol of the decade long struggle for cleaner air. But the Bush-Quayle Council on Competitiveness has so undercut the Clean Air Act to the point that this pen should be replaced by a giant eraser.

As soon as the Rose Garden photo opportunity passed, the Council began their campaign to undermine the law. To date, George Bush has missed some 60 of the Clean Air Act’s deadlines. And, as with the permit rule last month, it has gutted many of the provisions that were signed into law by the President himself.

The Vice President’s Council on Competitiveness is directly responsible for most of these delays and alterations. And to make matters worse, the Council conducts all its matters in private, beyond the scope of public and Congressional scrutiny. Acting in secrecy, the Council is thwarting the will of Congress and undermining our democracy.
Many of us in Congress, the media and the general public have tried to examine the Council’s activities. But without much success.

Freedom of information requests are turned down. Decisions are made without any public record of who was involved or on what basis they were made. And Congressional requests for Council witnesses are denied.

Clearly, the door of the Council on Competitiveness is not open to everyone. Only to those who represent well-heeled special interests. They have a secret back door to the White House.

But it’s no secret what has been going on. The Council is continuing a decade-long tradition of protecting profits instead of public health.

George Bush himself began this tradition when he ran the Vice President’s Task Force on Regulatory Reform in the 1980’s. Now, the names have changed but the mandate is the same: give relief to special interests and give short shrift to the public interest.

Not only is the Council subverting our open, democratic process. It has even subverted the term "competitiveness." I’ve paid a lot of attention to what America can do to increase its competitiveness in the world economy.

And one thing that’s clear is that the Bush Administration, just like the Reagan Administration before it, is stuck in the outdated notion that environmental protection ruins companies and costs American jobs. The fact is they are just plain wrong.

In fact, two of our strongest economic competitors -- Germany and Japan -- have some of the toughest environmental standards. And those standards help prepare their companies to market environmental goods and services to the rest of the world. That was one of the messages I learned at the Rio conference.

Good jobs are being lost because of the actions of the White House and the Council on Competitiveness. Environmental goods and services are one of the fastest expanding areas of economic activity in the world.

The Clean Air Act, if implemented, would create 40,000 good new jobs. The kind of high-wage, advanced technology jobs that we must have if we are to be truly competitive.

Health protection and economic expansion can go hand-in-hand. Indeed, the only way to ensure long-term economic growth is with sound environmental policies. The sad truth is that this country is in danger of falling behind the rest of the world because of the Administration’s short-sighted, misguided approach to environmental protection.