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EDITORIAL

Appointed Hobblers of Government

Across six years, the Bush administration has mocked all standards of conflict of interest by choosing private industry zealots for high regulatory posts — where they worked to roll back hundreds of rules on transportation, workplace and mine safety, the environment and other issues. The latest in this subversive chain must surely take the fox-in-the-henhouse statuette: President Bush has nominated Michael Baroody, lobbyist for the powerful National Association of Manufacturers, to lead the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

If approved by the Senate, Mr. Baroody would be in charge of regulating corporate members of his association that have run up millions of dollars in civil fines for violating the commission's safety rules affecting millions of consumers.

As if the White House's colossal sellout to business power was not evident enough, Mr. Baroody's executive friends at N.A.M. are sending him off with a lucrative forget-me-not — a \$150,000 severance payment. Compensation experts find this extraordinary for someone supposedly volunteering for government service in behalf of taxpayers.

As a lobbyist for the N.A.M., Mr. Baroody was a key figure in industry's successful campaign to water down commission standards requiring notice from companies about defective products, from toys to appliances. He has lobbied to limit the liability of asbestos makers in damage suits. He has lobbied against the growing statehouse campaign to require safer burning cigarettes, arguing this is a national issue. Imagine the priority this safety concern would receive from an agency run by Mr. Baroody.

The White House insists its ethical guardians find everything on the up and up. That's neither surprising nor remotely reassuring. Democrats in the Senate are already trying to block this latest attempt at trashing government from within. If Mr. Bush decides to circumvent Congress with a recess appointment, the nation will see more clearly than ever that this administration puts the interests of corporations over that of citizens.

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