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Dobbs: Middle class needs to fight back now

By [Lou Dobbs](#)
CNN*Editor's note: Lou Dobbs' commentary appears every Wednesday on CNN.com*

NEW YORK (CNN) -- I don't know about you, but I can't take seriously anyone who takes either the Republican Party or Democratic Party seriously -- in part because neither party takes you and me seriously; in part because both are bought and paid for by corporate America and special interests. And neither party gives a damn about the middle class.

Our country's middle class is not just collateral damage in what has become all-out class warfare. Political, business and academic elites are waging an outright war on working men and women and their families, and there is no chance the American middle class will survive this assault if the dominant forces unleashed over the past five years continue unchecked.

They've accomplished this through large campaign contributions, armies of lobbyists that have swamped Washington, and control of political and economic think tanks and media. Lobbyists, in fact, are the arms dealers in the war on the middle class, brokering money, influence and information between their clients our elected officials.

Yet in my entire career, I've literally never heard anyone in Congress argue that lobbyists are bad for America. In 1968 there were only 63 lobbyists in Washington. Today, there are more than 34,000, and lobbyists now outnumber our elected representatives and their staffs by a 2-to-1 margin.

According to the nonpartisan Center for Public Integrity, from 1998 through 2004, lobbyists spent nearly \$12 billion to not only influence legislation, but in many cases to write the language of the laws and regulations.

Individual firms, corporations and national organizations spent a record \$2.14 billion on lobbying members of Congress and 220 other federal agencies in 2004, according to PoliticalMoneyLine. That's nearly \$6 million a day spent to influence our leaders. We really do have the best government money can buy.

But as I discuss in my new book, "War on the Middle Class," what if we all resolved that we would not permit either the Republicans or Democrats to waste their time and ours with wedge issues? Both parties love to excite their bases by focusing on wedge issues like gay marriage, the pledge of allegiance, school prayer, judicial appointments, gun control, stem cell research and welfare reform.

Each of these wedge issues is important in varying degrees to large numbers of us, but none of them rises to the level of urgency or the requirement of immediate change in public policy.

These issues are raised by both political parties to distract and divert public attention from the profound issues -- like educating our youth, economic inequality and the war against radical Islamic terrorists -- that affect our daily lives and the American way of life. Imagine the consternation in Washington if both parties had to contend with a national electorate whose political affiliation had dramatically changed within a matter of weeks or months.

In both Republican and Democratic administrations, Congress has passed and sustained billions of dollars in royalty payments and subsidies to big oil companies; pushed through a corporate-written, consumer-crippling bankruptcy law; embraced the death of the estate tax; approved every free trade deal brought to a vote; and supported illegal immigration for the sake of cheap labor.

The party strategists and savants are telling us that fewer Americans will turn out to the polls than ever before, disgusted by a disgraced former congressman. But we don't have to wait for the midterm elections to begin to engage in our new political life.

There's something all of us could do that would have an immediate impact and send a powerful message to both corporation-dominated political parties and to our elected officials in Washington. Our so-called representatives in both parties have been working against the interests of the middle class for so long that they take our votes for granted, or they take advantage of the fact that a sizable number of us don't vote at all.

So what if a majority of us decided once and for all to walk into our town and city halls all over the country and change our party affiliation from Republican or Democrat to independent? What if that sizable number of us who don't vote at all decided to register as independents? For the first time in decades, working middle-class Americans might just get the attention of our elected officials in Washington.

Our middle class has suffered in silence for far too long, and it cannot afford to suffer or be silent much longer. Hardworking Americans have not spoken out about their increasingly marginalized role in this society, and as a consequence they've all but lost their voice.

Without that strong, clear and vibrant voice, all the major decisions about America and our future will be made by the elites of government, big business and the dominant special interests. Those elites treasure your silence, as it enables them to claim America's future for their own.

I sincerely hope that we will find the resolve to face these challenges to our way of life, and we do so soon. George Bernard Shaw said, "It is dangerous to be sincere unless you are also stupid."

I'm stupid enough to be absolutely sincere in the hope that middle-class America will awake soon and take action.

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