Google Lobbyist's Appointment to Technology Post Raises Ethics Rules Questions for White House

WASHINGTON, /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Two consumer groups today urged the White House not to move forward with the pending appointment of Google's top global public policy official to the position of Deputy Chief Technology Officer in the White House, saying it would violate the intent of President Obama's ethics rules meant to end the revolving door between lobbyists and the executive branch.

Although the choice of Andrew McLaughlin, Google's Director of Global Public Policy, for the position has been widely reported, it has yet to be announced by the White House.

In a letter to President Obama, John M. Simpson, consumer advocate at Consumer Watchdog, and Jeffery A. Chester, executive director of the Center for Digital Technology, wrote: "Given Mr. McLaughlin's role over the years at Google, and most recently his position with its political action committee, any post at the White House would violate the intent of your executive order."

The letter said that Google's growing influence in government and on the economy is not the primary reason the appointment should be withdrawn. "We do not object to Mr. McLaughlin's appointment because he is associated with Google per se," the letter said. "The problem is that he has been a lobbyist for the biggest digital marketing company in the world, and we believe no special-interest connected person should assume a position of vital importance to the country's future. It would be just as inappropriate for a lobbyist from Microsoft, Yahoo! or any similar technology company to be appointed Deputy Chief Technology Officer."

As Google's Director of Global Public Policy, McLaughlin led a team of corporate policy advocates working to influence a wide range of issues in the United States and globally. Simply put, he has been responsible for Google's worldwide lobbying efforts. McLaughlin was a registered lobbyist in 2007 working on Google's behalf. The statement of organization for Google's political action committee, Google Inc. NetPAC, filed on March 16, 2009, lists him as the committee's assistant treasurer and its designated agent.

"No lobbyist or special interest political operative from one of the leading Internet companies should be placed in such a key position where they can influence technology policy," said Chester. "Appointing someone from a Google (or Microsoft, AT&T, etc.) lobbying shop to this position sends the wrong message -- that the well-connected can still make a quick trip to the White House through a special interest revolving door. The goal of the Obama Administration to use new technology to improve how the government works requires someone whose background ensures they can make independent decisions that will benefit all Americans."

Read the Consumer Watchdog -- Center for Digital Democracy letter here: http://www.consumerwatchdog.org/resources/LtrMcLaughlin060309.pdf.

Read the Google Inc. NetPAC statement here: http://www.consumerwatchdog.org/resources/Googlenetpac.pdf.

Read the Google lobbying report here: http://soprweb.senate.gov/index.cfm?event=getFilingDetails&filingID=F1EDF8D7-EFEB-497A-B452-9D6CAB1B4BDA.

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