

House pushed to pass lobby reform bill this year

(AP) — Pressure is building in the U.S. House to approve a Senate-passed bill that would overhaul the loophole-ridden legislation governing those who lobby Congress.

But in the end, passing such a lobby reform bill may hinge on whether Republican House members can convince their leadership that it can be debated quickly enough to be put on this year's agenda.

ready crowded and heavy-hitting GOP legislative agenda.

"Our lobbying registration laws have become a joke, leaving more professional lobbyists unregulated than registered," Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., testified Thursday before the House subcommittee responsible for starting the bill on its way toward the House floor.

"This Congress has a real opportunity to act, and it will enhance public confidence if we do act," said Levin, who has been working on lobby reform legislation for five years.

Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Conn., the head of a 12-member bipartisan reform group, said Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga.,

has promised that lobbying and gift reform will be taken up early next year. Shays wants to speed up that schedule.

Shays said the group hoped the Senate-passed bill could go straight to the House floor without getting bogged down in changes. He appealed to Rep. Henry Hyde, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, to help get Gingrich to raise the legislation this year under an agreement that it be debated for a single day.

Shays said the leadership's concern was that lobby reform could generate tremendous debate and divide Republican ranks already dealing with big issues such as balancing the budget and

overhauling the welfare system.

The Senate lobby reform bill, crafted mostly by Levin and Sen. William Cohen, R-Maine, passed that chamber 88-0 in July.

Under the bill, professional advocates who spend more than 20 percent of their time lobbying Congress or the executive branch would have to register and identify their clients, which issues were lobbied and roughly how much was spent.

The General Accounting Office, Congress' investigative arm, said fewer than one-third of the thousands of individuals listed as paid advocates actually were registered as lobbyists. Of 1,000 lobbying reports filed in 1989, the GAO found more than 60 percent re-

ported no serious expenditures.

"We need to address the concern that special interests have undue influence over Congress," said Rep. Paul McClellan, D-Pa., who with Shays on Wednesday introduced the House lobby reform bill identical to the Senate version.

Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., a member of the Constitution Subcommittee, said, "I'm afraid this bill will be the recipient of more nice words and less legislative action than anything in the House."

Rep. Michael Castle, R-Del., worried if the House did not take up the Senate-passed bill, opponents would use the differences

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Retailers: SBT bill favors big

State retailers are beating their drums against a Senate-passed bill that would provide a \$217 million tax "windfall" to a handful of large corporations and none to the majority of Michigan's 189,000 business taxpayers.

Today's legislative testimony by a national tax expert and the Michigan Department of Treasury shows why lawmakers should kill Senate Bill 342 — which would change Michigan's Single Business Tax (SBT) in unfair and harmful ways — and come up with more broad-based business tax relief, the Michigan

Retailers Association (MRA) said.

Professor Walter Hellerstein, of the University of Georgia Law School, testified before the House Tax Policy Committee last week that his research shows Senate Bill 342 "may well trigger retaliation by other states that will ultimately come back to haunt local businesses."

Nick Khouri, chief deputy state treasurer, said the department is opposed to SB 342. He called the bill "inappropriate budget policy and unwise tax policy."

Hellerstein and Khouri testified on the Sen-

ate-approved bill to change the formula for determining the tax base of companies operating in Michigan and other states.

"Today's testimony clearly shows that SB 342 is unfair, unwise and unconstitutional legislation," said Peter Kuhnmueller, MRA's vice president of governmental affairs. "We continue to urge lawmakers to scuttle the current bill and change the SBT to provide broad-based relief to the tens of thousands of business taxpayers in this state."

The Michigan Retailers Association represents more than 4,400 retail business members operating more than 8,000 stores.

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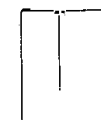
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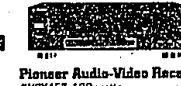
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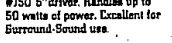


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