

Senator Michael Bennet's ZOMBIE Act:
Zeroing Out Money for Buying Influence after Elections

The Problem: When politicians retire or lose elections, they often have significant leftover funds in their campaign accounts. These “zombie accounts” are ripe for abuse. When politicians take jobs as lobbyists or foreign agents, they often donate leftover campaign funds to policymakers with jurisdiction over areas of interest to their new employer. In other cases, they give the money to charities run by their relatives or use the money to found an organization to glorify their legacy. These zombie accounts are overlooked instruments of pay-to-play politics and corruption that are overdue for reform.

The Proposal: The ZOMBIE Act would require all politicians to close their campaign accounts if they are no longer an active candidate for federal office. This would apply to a candidate’s personal campaign committee and their leadership PACs. If a politician does not file the paperwork to run in the next election, they would have six months to close their campaign accounts. They would also have to close their campaign account *before* registering as a lobbyist or foreign agent. After paying any outstanding bills, politicians would have to return leftover campaign funds to their original donors or give the money to charities, as long as they do not employ any of their relatives. They could also not use leftover campaign funds to found their own organization.

Here’s an Example: John Doe is a Congressman from Colorado. He loses his reelection but still has \$5 million left in his campaign account. A major bank hires John as a lobbyist, recognizing the value of his political contacts. Today, John can donate the leftover funds to politicians with jurisdiction over banking. John could also give the money to charities run by his family members or found the “John Doe Foundation” to increase his public profile.

Under the ZOMBIE Act, John would have to close these accounts before he registers as a lobbyist by returning all \$5 million in leftover campaign funds to his original donors, charity, or the U.S. Treasury. He could not donate the money to politicians or charities run by his family members, and he could not use the money to found his own organization.