



September 8, 2009

EDITORIAL

Hustle and Bustle at the White House

Transparency doesn't come easy in Washington, where deal makers and favor seekers prefer to work from the shadows. But the Obama administration is taking a major step into the sunlight with the presidential order to post online the thousands of White House visitors who come and go each month.

Dick Cheney fiercely indulged White House secrecy as vice president, most notoriously in refusing to name the corporate moguls who visited to create energy policy. But the Clinton administration was no less secretive about fund-raisers and other favored drop-ins.

The policy requires the routine posting of the Secret Service's logs three to four months after White House visitations. Disclosure will name the visitor, who set up the meeting, where it was held and how long it lasted.

There are exceptions for national security and sensitive visitors, such as someone quietly under consideration for a Supreme Court nomination. But President Obama is promising citizens far more about "whose voices are being heard in the policy-making process."

It took a court challenge by a watchdog group, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, to remind the administration of Mr. Obama's campaign vows for a new era of openness. After a review, the president ordered the policy. We'd hope the White House aims for a shorter delay in postings so the names are more relevant to ongoing issues. But the administration is well on course to be the most open in modern times, with such earlier initiatives as the online Data.gov to allow citizen access to huge amounts of federal agency information.