



JIM MESSINA, on CNN.com, "Why we're raising money to support Obama agenda Why we're raising money to support Obama agenda"

By Jim Messina, Special to CNN

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***Editor's note:** Jim Messina is the national chairman of Organizing for Action, a nonprofit issue advocacy group. He is a former deputy White House chief of staff to President Barack Obama and was the president's campaign manager for the 2012 election.*

(CNN) -- You can't change Washington from the inside. President Obama was criticized for stating that simple truth during the campaign, but without Americans organizing in support of the issues they believe in, lobbyists and special interests will drive the agenda in Washington.


At this crossroads for our economy, we can't afford business as usual. That's why we've formed Organizing for Action, to ensure that the voices of the majority of Americans who voted for policies that will strengthen the middle class will be heard.

As we worked for change during the president's first term, we saw special interests spend unprecedented amounts in an attempt to persuade Congress to vote against policies the American people voted for.

History is repeating itself. Gun manufacturers are well represented. The NRA is running advertisements to defeat common sense gun safety measures like universal background checks, which more than [90% of Americans support](#). Groups with unnamed backers are advocating against comprehensive immigration reform. We have no plans to shrug this off and tell those Americans organizing their communities to stand down.

While the president delivered the State of the Union address, volunteers at more than 1,200 events were asking their friends and neighbors to join them in ensuring that agenda is enacted. Since Organizing for Action was established six weeks ago, volunteers have held more than 100 events in more than 80 congressional districts demanding a yes vote on the president's plan to curb gun violence. Whether it's participating in a social media campaign or hosting a press conference, 964,000 Americans have already mobilized through Organizing for Action -- and we've ensured they have the tools they need to get the attention they deserve.

Push-back from some quarters has been fierce. Members of Congress who are used to just worrying about a few interest groups will face broader based opposition because of organizing efforts by Organizing for Action volunteers around the country. Those who previously had special access will no longer be unchallenged.



There has been some confusion about what Organizing for Action is and is not. Organizing for Action is an issue advocacy group, not an electoral one. We'll mobilize to support the president's agenda, but we won't do so on behalf of political candidates. The president has always believed that special interests have undue influence over the policymaking process, and the mission of this organization is to rebalance the power structure.

While Organizing for Action is a nonprofit social welfare organization that faces a lower disclosure threshold than a political campaign, we believe in being open and transparent. That's why every donor who gives \$250 or more to this organization will be disclosed on the website with the exact amount they give on a quarterly basis. We have now decided not to accept contributions from corporations, federal lobbyists or foreign donors.

Supporters of Organizing for Action will dedicate their time to mobilize their friends and neighbors on behalf of the president's agenda. Whether you're a volunteer or a donor, we can't and we won't guarantee access to any government officials. But just as the president and administration officials deliver updates on the legislative process to Americans and organizations across the ideological spectrum, there may be occasions when members of Organizing for Action are included in those updates. These are not opportunities to lobby -- they are briefings on the positions the president has taken and the status of seeing them through.

Special interests shouldn't have a stranglehold on the policymaking process. Too many Americans worked too hard over the past six years to ensure that the middle class gets a fair shot to stop now. For every lobbying group that puts a dollar on the air tearing down the president's agenda, an Organizing for Action volunteer will mobilize to counter it. Instead of coming from the highest paid lobbyists on K Street, change will come from Americans organizing across the nation.