

Ethics law boosts lobbyists' ranks

By SCOTT WILLIAMS

Under tough new disclosure requirements for those wielding influence in Austin, EDS Corp. and Arco Oil and Gas Co. are leading Dallas business in a category that the companies dismiss as a misnomer — lobbying.

Since broad ethics reforms took effect in January, the number of lobbyists registering as EDS representatives has skyrocketed to 30-plus, far more than any other Dallas-area company.

EDS, the holder of lucrative state contracts for data processing, previously had disclosed only a single lobbyist working in the state capital.

Arco Oil and Gas registers the second-largest contingent of lobbyists, with a

dozen, followed by a group that includes Nations-Bank Corp. and real estate giant Centex Corp., each with eight.

Supporters of the new ethics laws applaud the sweeping disclosure, saying it provides accountability where lobbyists once escaped detection while engaging Texas politicians and bureaucrats in back-room dealing.

Businesses, however, decry the registration exercise as burdensome and misleading, because, they say, many of those now considered lobbyists are regular employees who contact the state to conduct routine business.

“There’s a lot of gray area there,” said EDS spokeswoman Cathie Hargett.

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