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Joan Claybrook, President

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Contact: Craig Holman (202) 454-5182
Angela Bradbery (202) 588-7741

Public Citizen Calls on Pelosi to Fulfill Promise to Immediately Introduce Lobbying and Ethics Reform

Statement of Public Citizen President Joan Claybrook

The new majority leader of the House, Nancy Pelosi, has promised that the first day the Democrats take over the House of Representatives, they will introduce legislation to “break the link between lobbyists and legislation.” Last month, Public Citizen and other good government groups asked Representative Pelosi to add one essential element to the Democratic plan, and that was to create an Office of Public Integrity to administer new ethics rules and investigate violations.

The current House leadership this year refused to allow votes on key lobbying and ethics reform proposals. With the new leadership in January, there will likely be new openness and stronger support for strengthened ethics and reform legislation. The Senate last year considered strong lobby reform legislation, but it was watered down, and procedural devices were used to stop debate and block amendments. Given that the new Senate will be almost split evenly between the parties, we expect that such tactics will stop.

The American public has given Congress a mandate. Voters are outraged by congressional scandals – sex scandals, money laundering, travel junkets, lobbyist abuses and ethical lapses. The only way these will be stopped is with new legislation. It is time for the 110th Congress to carry through and to do what the 109th Congress would not:

- Break the nexus between lobbyists, money and lawmakers.
- Prohibit private interests from paying for trips for members of Congress and staff.
- Ban lobbyist gifts to members of Congress and staff.
- Establish an independent congressional Office of Public Integrity to oversee and enforce ethics rules and lobbying laws.
- Slow the revolving door by prohibiting members of Congress and senior executive branch officials from lobbying for two years after leaving their positions.
- Shed sunshine on lobbying activities and strengthen financial disclosure reports.

Voters are fed up. The time to act is now.

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Public Citizen is a national, nonprofit consumer advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C.

1600 20th Street NW • Washington, DC 20009 • (202) 588-1000 • www.citizen.org
215 Pennsylvania Ave SE • Washington, DC 20003 • (202) 546-4996 • www.citizen.org