

**Campaign Legal Center • Common Cause • Democracy 21
League of Women Voters • Public Citizen • U.S. PIRG**

January 8, 2007

Dear Senator:

On January 4, 2007, the House adopted a strong comprehensive package of ethics reforms by an almost unanimous vote of 430 to 1.

Our organizations strongly urge you to vote for Senate ethics reforms this week that are at least as strong as the ethics reforms adopted last week by the House.

The organizations include the Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, Democracy 21, the League of Women Voters, Public Citizen and U.S. PIRG.

There is simply no basis or rationale for Senators to establish lower ethical standards for themselves than the ethical standards that apply to House Members.

New Ethics Rules

Senators should adopt new ethics rules to prohibit lobbyists and lobbying organizations from paying for travel and gifts, including meals and entertainment for Senators and staff. Lobbyists and lobbying organizations should be subject to sanctions for violating these rules, as Senators and staff would be.

Senators should also adopt new ethics rules to prevent Senators from using corporate jets for official, campaign or personal trips at artificially reduced costs. Senators should either be prohibited from using corporate planes for such trips or should be required to pay full charter rates for the use of corporate jets.

In addition, for those privately-funded trips by non-lobbying organizations that are still allowed, a system should be established to require pre-approval of such trips by an Office of Public Integrity or the Senate Ethics Committee and quick public disclosure of these trips, including the activities that occurred on the trips.

The pre-approval process should filter out and prevent privately-funded, vacation-type trips for Senators and staff, as opposed to trips that meet a legitimate test of officially-connected business. If this does not occur, then our organizations will advocate additional travel rules to stop such abuses.

In the end, ethics rules, new or old, will only work if they are properly implemented and enforced. Our organizations strongly believe it is essential to establish a

new professional, nonpartisan enforcement entity to help enforce the Senate ethics rules and that such a new enforcement entity is a lynchpin for all the other ethics reforms.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has made a public commitment that the House will consider a new approach to enforcing the House ethics rules, shortly after a bipartisan task force of Members makes recommendations on such an approach by March 15, 2007.

We strongly urge Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to make a similar public commitment that the Senate will consider a new ethics enforcement process in March.

Lobbying Reforms

New lobbying law reforms should require lobbyists and lobbying organizations to disclose the numerous ways in which they provide money to assist members of Congress, including the campaign contributions they provide, the fundraising events they hold and the contributions they “bundle” or arrange for candidates, parties and leadership PACs.

It is very important to require public disclosure of contributions “bundled” or arranged by a lobbyist or lobbying organization for members of Congress and other federal candidates.

A lobbyist, for example, can contribute a total of \$4,200 to a Senator, but can provide far more “bundled” or arranged funds for a Senator – \$25,000, \$50,000, or more. Lobbyists have “bundled” or arranged \$100,000 and \$250,000 for presidential candidates under systemized fundraising programs that code and disclose to the presidential candidate the lobbyist responsible for raising the contributions received.

The public is entitled to know the extent of the contributions that a lobbyist has provided to a Senator, presidential candidate or other federal candidate. Lobbyists should be required to disclose the fundraising events they hold and the contributions the “bundle” or arrange, in addition to the contributions they directly make.

New lobbying reforms should also require lobbyists and lobbying organizations to disclose other financial benefits they provide for Members, including the contributions they provide to foundations established or controlled by a Member or Members; the amounts they spend to finance retreats, conferences and other events held by Members; and any other financial benefits they provide to Members.

The lobbying reforms should also require lobbyists and lobbying organizations to disclose the earmarks they lobby for, the congressional sponsors of the earmarks; and the clients who are seeking the earmarks.

The public is entitled to know all of the earmarks that a lobbyist or lobbying organization is seeking in Congress and the members of Congress who are sponsoring and pursuing their earmarks.

New lobbying reforms also should require professional lobbying firms and registered lobbying organizations to disclose the large amounts they spend on “Astroturf”

lobbying campaigns urging the general public to lobby Congress on specific issues. *This lobbying disclosure reform would not in any way restrict any lobbying activities.*

The disclosure provision would not apply in the case of any individual or organization that is not otherwise required to register and report as a lobbyist or lobbying organization, other than currently unregistered professional “Astroturf” lobbying firms.

The provision also does not require registered lobbying organizations to report the amounts they spend to communicate with their own members about lobbying Congress (traditional grassroots lobbying campaigns), but only applies to paid media and other lobbying campaigns urging the public to lobby Congress (professional “Astroturf” lobbying campaigns).

Today, for example, a professional “Astroturf” lobbying firm can spend large amounts on a media campaign to stimulate the public to lobby for a tax break for the oil industry, or an advocacy group can spend large sums on a media campaign to stimulate the public to lobby for or against a judicial nominee, without any information being publicly provided on the amounts being spent on these “Astroturf” lobbying campaigns.

The proposed reform would require professional “Astroturf” lobbying firms to register and report the amounts they receive to conduct “Astroturf” lobbying campaigns, and require organizations already required to register under the law to report the aggregate amount they spend on “Astroturf” lobbying efforts if the spending is substantial — more than \$25,000 per quarter.

The lobbying reforms also should strengthen and make effective existing revolving door provisions. The “cooling off” period in which Members who leave Congress are prohibited from lobbying for pay their former colleagues should be increased from the current one-year restriction to two years.

Importantly, the reforms also should expand the scope of the prohibition to include all lobbying activities for pay by former Members to influence Congress, and not just direct lobbying contacts. The expanded prohibition should cover planning and directing lobbying campaigns, and participating in lobbying strategy sessions.

Lobbying reforms also should require that lobbying disclosure reports are filed quarterly, instead of semi-annually, are filed in an electronic format and are made available to the public on the Internet in an easily searchable online database.

We strongly urge you to vote for strong ethics and lobbying reforms and to oppose any amendments that would weaken these reforms.

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