

**Lobbying Reform Hearing
Senator Joe Lieberman
January 25, 2006**

Good morning and thank you, Madam Chairman, for moving quickly on lobbying reform. By doing so, our committee sends a strong and clear signal that Congress will come together across party lines to reform our lobbying laws and remove the cloud of suspicion that currently hangs over this institution.

It is no secret that the Jack Abramoff scandal is the primary reason for Congressional-wide acknowledgement that lobbying regulations need reform. Elsewhere, people may argue about whether this scandal is partisan. On this committee, we know the response to it must be bipartisan. The consequences of Abramoff's crimes are so antithetical to our way of governance and so embarrassing to Congress that Democrats and Republicans, House members and Senators agree Congress must act. And we will.

Trust between the people and their elected leaders is essential to our democracy. The behavior of Mr. Abramoff and his associates undercuts that

trust and sends the message that in Washington, results go to the highest bidder, not to the greatest public good.

By his guilty pleas, Mr. Abramoff has acknowledged that he violated the law. However, his sordid story reveals activity that, while technically legal, is nonetheless clearly wrong. In government, we must hold ourselves, and be held to, a higher standard – to do not just what is legal, but what is right. As lawmakers, we now have the opportunity and responsibility to make what is clearly wrong also illegal.

Excellent lobbying reform proposals have been referred to our Committee and are now pending. I have joined with Senator John McCain in cosponsoring one of them, the Lobbying Transparency and Accountability Act of 2005.

Our legislation directly responds to the abuses uncovered by the Indian Affairs Committee in the investigation which Senator McCain chaired, and also by the Justice Department investigation that lead to his guilty plea earlier this month.

The McCain-Lieberman proposal requires more frequent and detailed disclosure of lobbyist activities and, for the first time, requires full disclosure from grassroots lobbying firms that are paid to conduct mass television or direct mail campaigns to influence Members of Congress. Mr. Abramoff used one of these firms, controlled by his associate Mr. Scanlon, to conceal millions of dollars of payments he overcharged to Indian tribes, which was then forwarded to him.

Under the legislation Senator McCain and I have introduced, lobbyists would be required to disclose all payments for travel made or arranged, including detailed itemizations of trips, and for all gifts over \$20. Members of Congress and their staffs who fly on corporate jets would have to pay the equivalent of a chartered plane, rather than just the first class price of their ticket. Lobbyists would have to disclose campaign contributions, as well as contributions made to honor public officials, and the revolving door between Capital Hill and K Street would spin more slowly under our proposal.

Senator Reid also has lobbying reform legislation, the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, which I am co-sponsoring, and which incorporates most the McCain-Lieberman bill. With respect to gifts

and travel, Senator Reid's proposal would institute an outright ban on gifts and a prohibition on Members of Congress from accepting travel from private entities. Those are certainly proposals that are worth considering.

Another important element of Senator Reid's bill would prohibit the kind of pay-for-play operation embodied by the K Street Project, where Members of Congress demanded that lobbying firms hire members of a particular party if the lobbying firms wanted Congressional attention to their clients' issues.

Senator Feingold also has a strong bill that contains parts that are similar to the Reid bill and the McCain-Lieberman bill, and I expect that Senator Santorum's proposal will do the same.

All three bills share several provisions: all three call for increased disclosure by lobbyists; for disclosure of paid grassroots lobbying efforts and by lobbying coalition members; for slowing down the revolving door between Capitol Hill and K Street; and for ending the abuse of gift and travel rules.

That is why I believe we have a once in a generation opportunity to reach agreement on a broad set of reforms that will reduce cynicism with which many of the American people view their government. We cannot and will not let partisanship or institutional defensiveness stop us from achieving that goal. The status quo stinks and cries out to us to lead the way to clear the air.

Today, we have an outstanding group of witnesses, starting off with our colleagues Senators McCain, Durbin, Santorum, Feingold and Coleman.

I look forward to working with them and you, Madame Chairman to pass lobbying reform legislation – and to get it done soon.

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