

Statement of Senator Rick Santorum
“Lobbying Reform: Proposals and Issues”
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
January 25, 2005

Chairman Collins, Senator Lieberman, and Committee members, good morning and thank you for this opportunity to testify before you on the issue of lobbying reform. I am pleased to join my colleagues on this panel and hope that our discussion today will lead us to a bipartisan bill that we can take to the floor of the Senate. Senator McCain, Senator Feingold and I have very similar goals, and I am hopeful that will translate into a cooperative bipartisan process. I have enjoyed the opportunity to work with my colleague from Arizona, Senator McCain, on these issues to date and want to give you a brief outline of some of the work that we have been doing with respect to lobbying reform.

I am excited about the opportunity to be the Senate Republican point on these important issues. However, I should be clear that congressional reform is not new to me. In fact, I came to the United States Senate having spent four years in the United States House as a member of the “Gang of Seven”, one of the original congressional reformers. Our band of freshman Congressmen uncovered Member abuses at the House Bank scandal including a host of Members who bounced checks with impunity. We exposed the “stamps-for-cash” scandal and the drug dealing out of the House Post Office. We forced real changes in the way the House operated. I was one of the leaders in pointing the finger at members of BOTH parties to make sure that we had congressional accountability, that we had reforms that made the body more accountable to the people.

But I did not stop with reforming the House. When I came to the United States Senate I did the same thing. One of the reasons I got on the Rules Committee was because I wanted to carry those reforms forward. Along with my colleague, Senator Kyl, I pushed for term limits on committee chairmen and term limits on leaders. I supported the passage of the Congressional Accountability Act, which says that Congress will live under the same laws as the rest of the country.

I also took on some other “sacred cows” that do not necessarily endear you to your colleagues – things like reforming the Senate barber shop and restaurant. Those of you who

have been here for some time know that the prices at the barber shop and restaurant are not what they were when I came to the United States Senate in 1995, and that is because when I came to the Senate these institutions were being subsidized by the taxpayers. Now I still get some looks and occasional comments from my colleagues about the fact that the prices at the barber shop and restaurant are higher than they used to be, but I am not deterred. Each of us has the incredible privilege of serving in this great body and while there are, of course, needed services here like the restaurant, these services can and should be run like the businesses in our respective states, without taxpayer subsidies.

I am at the bottom of the lost for privately funded travel. I know we hear a lot about wining and dining, but the only whining in my evenings is from my children.

All of that to say, that I have a track record of reform, and I am looking forward to taking on this responsibility.

It is important that we have a strong system of ethics and lobbying reform. Senator McCain and Senator Lieberman's bill, which he introduced in December, will be the basis upon which we build the architecture of my reform bill and we will be working from there and going further. The primary issue will be to increase transparency – to make sure that the people's body is a transparent body and one where the people of our states know what is going on here in the formulation of policy. I expect we will also address other areas such as privately funded congressional travel, gifts and meals, the revolving door of access of Members and staff, spouses of Members and their access, Members' access to the floor, earmarks and the regulation of so-called 527 organizations.

One of the other issues that I hope this Committee will look into is the use of self-regulatory organizations. Many other professions – doctors, lawyers, and accountants – all have their own self-regulatory bodies. This is an area that could improve the integrity and perception of lobbying activities and is something I think merits your investigation.

When you take on the issue of congressional reform, one of the first people you turn to in the United States Senate is Senator McCain. We have had some good discussions and I expect to

have an ongoing dialogue. My goal is to work with my colleagues in a bipartisan manner to develop a robust, comprehensive reform package that becomes a strong bipartisan bill that we can pass on the floor of the United States Senate. This bill will be focused on making this body more accountable to the people that we represent. Nonetheless, we must be deliberative in this process. Every citizen in our country –regardless of income, regardless of political affiliation, regardless of campaign contributions – has the right to petition their government. It is also an honorable and fundamental principle of our democracy that groups and associations such as the Salvation Army or the Boys and Girls Club can come together and petition Congress – their elected government – to hear and address their concerns. Despite recent headlines, despite contentions from many sides, the acts of organizations to communicate their concerns and seek action – whether or not through a paid lobbyist – is an exercise of liberty in this country. Nothing we do here should diminish the bedrock principles of free speech, free association and the ability to petition one’s government. In my office I have an “open door policy.” My staff or I meet with every Pennsylvania constituent who requests a meeting – whether we agree or disagree on the merits of an issue, whether they are a large manufacturer, a small business, a large statewide nonprofit, a mom-and-pop local nonprofit, or an individual. So as we approach this task we do not, nor will we, infringe upon that fundamental right of every citizen to petition their government and make their voice heard in the process.

We are in the preliminary stages of this process. As you all are aware, the Members of the Senate have been scattered around the country and in their states during the recent recess. I believe it is important to hear the thoughts and concerns of our colleagues in a deliberative process. I will reiterate, it is my hope that we can develop a comprehensive, bipartisan package that we can move forward in an expeditious manner. The Majority Leader has laid out a time frame for the quick introduction and passage of these necessary reforms. My hope is that we will move forward on this together, in a collegial manner. I appreciate that this Committee is taking the initiative by providing this opportunity to discuss the issues in an open and bipartisan manner.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today, and I look forward to working with you as we move forward.