

**Testimony of the Hon. Norm Coleman
United States Senator for Minnesota**

HSGAC Hearing: "Lobbying Reform: Proposals and Issues"

January 25, 2006

I want to begin by thanking Chairman Collins and Senator Lieberman for your leadership on a range of issues. None is more important than the topic we address today.

We know from our Declaration of Independence that our government derives its "just Powers from the consent of the governed." That's why we need to take public doubts about the transparency of government and their leaders' honesty and integrity extremely seriously.

Recent allegations, and admissions of guilt in the abuse of power, corruption of public office and the disregard for rules and laws of Congress and our nation, have shaken the confidence of the American people in its institutions of government. We need to do more than bring the guilty to justice: we need to reform the system that bred the corruption. Let's be clear that what is at stake here is the future and credibility of this institution. Credibility is the foundation upon which this institution was built and without it we do not have the legitimacy to effectively govern and serve the people that elected us.

A number of worthwhile ideas are already on the table. I support the bill authored by Ranking Member Lieberman and Senator McCain. I also believe a central theme of reform must be transparency, so the American people can get a complete picture of how we get the information that helps us do our jobs. I have already acted on this so that any Minnesotan can now go onto my website and access my complete Senate travel records. I strongly believe there will not be restoration of public trust in government if they believe we have something to hide.

While I support the adoption of immediate measures to improve transparency, we still need to take careful stock of what kind of reforms we are proposing and what kind of short term and long term effects they will have. Change for change's sake is not the answer. Policy by press release and one-ups-man-ship will not bring about what we need which is real, just and workable change. These are sensitive and vital organs of government we are operating on, so we need both skill and speed as we work to improve their function.

In the final analysis, this is not about representative government looking at a policy and questioning whether we can bring independent judgment. This is about Congress taking a good hard look in the mirror -----and I believe that a thoughtful and comprehensive reform agenda can only be developed by a group of respected individuals from outside the institution conducting a thorough and bipartisan review and offering constructive recommendations to the House and Senate.

Churchill once admonished military commanders that they faced two potential dangers: inaction because they were timid or over-commitment because they were rash.

That is why Senator Nelson and I, along with Senator Allard are introducing legislation today that creates a bipartisan Commission to Strengthen Confidence in Congress.

The Commission will operate outside of the institutions of Congress to review ideas and to recommend reforms to strengthen the ethics, disclosure and transparency requirements governing the relationship between members of Congress and lobbyists. It will be modeled on initiatives like the 9-11 Commission and the Grace Commission, and premised in the belief that we have a responsibility to preserve the confidence of the American people. The Commission will stimulate a thoughtful national dialogue on reform and also provide a "bully pulpit" for Commissioners to hold us in Congress accountable for implementing the reforms they prescribe.

Specifically, the Commission will be strongly bipartisan consisting of an equal number of Republicans and Democrats, none of whom may be sitting members of Congress. The House and Senate Leadership from both parties will come together and pick a chairman and vice chairman. Senate Republican leadership, Senate Democratic leadership, House Republican leadership and House Democratic leadership will also be involved in the selection process. The Commissioners will be a combination of former members of Congress and other independent voices, including: academics, historians, public relations executives, and other experts.

The Commission will issue its first report containing findings, conclusions and recommendations for corrective measures on July 1, 2006, with annual reports thereafter. Commissioners will also be given the ability to hold hearings in order to carry out their duties.

This Commission will be able to provide a roadmap for the United States Senate and House of Representatives by examining how we handle things such as gifts, disclosure, earmarks and travel in a way which will help renew and reinvigorate the world's leading governmental institution.

On issues of this sensitivity and importance, Sen. Nelson and I believe that the greater the stature, INDEPENDENCE and legitimacy of the Commission, the more far-reaching its recommendations can be.

This legislation is designed to take the politics and partisanship out of the debate and put the issue in the hands of bipartisan, independent and wise leaders who can strike a proper balance that will both restore confidence and preserve the best of how the legislative branch operates today.

With the creation of the Commission to Strengthen Confidence in Congress, we can seize the historic opportunity to position the United States Congress to govern more effectively, transparently, confidently, and with the trust and faith of the American people well into the new Century.