

**TESTIMONY OF SENATOR BARACK OBAMA
SENATE RULES COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 7, 2006**

Chairman Lott, Senator Dodd, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today about this important subject.

I'm here to testify about three pieces of legislation that I've played a role in drafting and that I believe are worth serious consideration by this Committee.

Since the very first time I spoke out on lobbying reform, I have said over and over what I still believe to be true today: that while some are clearly to blame for the corruption that has plagued Washington, all of us - Democrats and Republicans - are responsible for cleaning it up. That's why I hope to work in a bipartisan manner on reform, and that's what I hope this legislation can provide a foundation for.

The first bill is the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, which already has the support of 41 members of the Senate. The bill takes a number of significant steps to fundamentally change the way we do business in Washington.

First, it would lengthen the cooling off period to two years for lawmakers and staff who seek to become lobbyists, and it would require immediate disclosure as soon as any job negotiations begin. This would end the stories we've heard about working on a prescription drug bill during the day while you're talking about your future salary with the drug industry at night.

Second, the bill would open conference committee meetings to the public and require that all bills be posted on the Internet for 24 hours before they're voted on, so the public can scrutinize them to prevent special-interest provisions from being slipped in during the dead of night.

Third, the bill would end all lobbyist-funded gifts, meals, and travel and strengthen the Senate office that monitors lobbyist disclosure forms.

If enacted, this bill would go a long way towards ending the cozy relationship between lawmakers and lobbyists. But I believe we can take some additional key steps. And that's why I'm introducing two more bills today.

The first deals with enforcement. We can pass all the new ethics rules in the world, but if we don't establish a body that can monitor and enforce those rules, it'll be easy to break them. That's why this bill calls for a nonpartisan, independent Congressional Ethics Enforcement Commission. This Commission would be staffed with former judges and former members of Congress, and it would allow any citizen to report a possible ethics violation by lawmakers, staff, or lobbyists. The Commission would have the authority to conduct investigations, issue subpoenas, and provide public reports to the Senate Ethics Committee or Department of Justice so that any wrongdoing can be punished

accordingly.

To prevent this Commission from being manipulated for partisan political purposes, the bill establishes stiff sanctions for the filing of frivolous complaints, and prohibits the filing of complaints 30 days before a primary election and 60 days before a general election.

This proposal is modeled after similar commissions in Kentucky, Florida, and Tennessee that have worked very well - particularly in Kentucky. I believe it's a good model for how to reform our ethics process in Congress, and I'm pleased that this bill is supported by Common Cause.

Norm Ornstein at the American Enterprise Institute, who is an expert on the workings of Congress, has said this about my enforcement bill: "This approach to ethics enforcement is just the kind of balanced and reasonable alternative we need. Enforcement of ethics in Congress needs independence and credibility to all, but cannot become either a vehicle for the criminalization of policy differences or an avenging angel like the Independent Counsel statute created. This commission would have on it people of integrity and institutional sensitivity, and could serve to educate members and staff about ethical behavior and performance while also providing vigorous and credible enforcement of ethical standards. It deserves strong bipartisan support."

I'm also introducing a second bill today that would bring greater transparency to earmarks so that we can save taxpayer dollars and end the special interest abuse of this process. This is area that many of our colleagues are interested in reforming. Sen. McCain has already discussed the proposals that he's working on with Sen. Coburn. And I know Chairman Lott and Sen. Feinstein have introduced an earmarks bill as well.

The bill I am proposing today builds on the earmark provisions in the CLEAN UP Act that I introduced last month with eight senators and includes language from a proposal by Rep. Obey. My new bill would require that information about all earmarks, including the name of the lawmaker requesting it and a justification of why they want it, be disclosed 72 hours before they are considered by the full Senate.

The bill would also place some common-sense limits on earmarks. Members would be prohibited from advocating for an earmark if they have a financial interest in the project or its recipient. Earmarks also could not be used to secure promises from lawmakers in exchange for a vote on a bill. These earmark reforms won't solve every abuse, but the idea is this: if you're proud enough about an earmark to issue a press release about it, then you should be able to defend it to the public.

I hope that this committee will take into consideration these proposals as well as others that can serve as the basis for real and effective lobbying reform. Again, I hope to do this in a bipartisan manner. But I will say this: the true test of bipartisanship is not whether we pass a bill that appeals to a lowest common denominator that we can all agree on, it's whether we pass the strongest bill with the strongest reforms possible that can truly

change the way we do business in Washington. That's what the American people will be watching for, and that's what we owe them in the end.