



GUEST OBSERVER

By Al Swift and Bob Hynes

Lobby Reform: Just Keep It Simple

Life in official Washington, D.C., can be a merry-go-round in its predictability. What just revolved into view is another scandal. But this time, in response, why not try something simple? It just might be more effective. The more straightforward the rule, the less room for evading, avoiding or eviscerating it.

Start with a principle. Members of Congress and their staffs are here for only one purpose — to do the public's business. Therefore reforms should be based on that.

Here are a few suggestions:
Ban Entertainment, Gifts. Ban all entertainment outright such as theater, golf, sports events and any gifts. If Congress' purpose is the public's business, these nonbusiness activities should simply disappear. Members of Congress, goodness knows, need to play. Theirs is a frantic life filled with tension. But they can pay for it themselves.

Travel Must Be Authorized. Travel should also always be related to Congressional business — whether it is paid for publicly or privately. We happen to believe that official travel, if not abused, is a very good thing and we would encourage it. In any event, it is not a source of potential bribery.

As to travel paid for by third parties, we would suggest that no travel be permitted for any Member of Congress or staff member unless specifically authorized by a committee with jurisdiction over the "business" that is to be done. Committees would be responsible for determining the relevance, value and validity of any travel paid for by outside sources.

Committees would be required to file full disclosure of the trip within 30 days. Members would be required to report it on their Web sites.

Free Lunch. This proposal may come as a surprise. Lift all rules pertaining to meals paid for by someone else. Two reasons: No one is going to be influenced by a meal. The current arbitrary limit of \$50 rather suggests one might be influenced by a \$100 meal. Nonsense. How much can you spend on a meal for one person, anyway — even at the most fan-

cy restaurant? Not enough to influence anyone.

On the other hand, business is commonly, traditionally and effectively discussed over meals in this country. So abandon the pretense that a meal limit accomplishes anything. Do away with it.

But, in its place, demand transparency. Require Members to list prominently on their Web sites at the beginning of each month, along with any privately paid travel they have taken, all meals they or members of their staff have accepted from others. It would include information about who paid, what interests they represented, what business was discussed and how much the meal cost.

A constituent in New York, Los Angeles or Chicago would probably shrug off a \$100 dinner, but it might be considered an outrage in Butte, Mont., Topeka, Kan., or Macon, Ga. Let Members worry about how their voters will react. Leave whether their dining activity is being abused up to Members' discretion — and, by making it public, to that of the editorial writers, the press, their opponents and constituents.

These proposals would wipe away confusion. Members and staff either could or could not do specific things and would have to get express authorization for travel. That would eliminate a lot of uncertainty and opportunity for mischief in the current restrictions.

Campaign Fundraising. There are other problems, of which the stubbornly resistant issue of campaign finance is uppermost. This is probably a greater potential corrupter than all the others combined. Yet, we do not have a magic solution other than fast, complete, frequent and accessible reports of campaign giving and receiving. That may not be enough.

Finally, we have to note that Jack Abramoff has pleaded guilty to violating laws that are on the books already. But — as we have seen the previous times the merry-go-round revolved — when such a scandal explodes Congress feels the need to adopt new rules. Reforms will be passed. This time, why not do something simple, straightforward and effective? These suggestions can be a good place to start.

Former Rep. Al Swift (D-Wash.) served eight terms, retiring in 1995. Bob Hynes was President Gerald Ford's floor staffer when he was Republican leader of the House. Both are lobbyists with the firm Colling Murphy Swift Hynes.



Senators who have appeared most often on Sunday news shows in 2006



	Total	Face the Nation	Meet the Press	This Week	Late Edition	Fox News Sunday
Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.)	4	0	1	0	1	2
Arlen Specter (R-Pa.)	3	1	0	1	1	0
Dick Durbin (D-Ill.)	2	0	0	0	1	1
Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.)	2	1	0	0	0	1
Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.)	2	0	0	0	0	2
Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.)	2	1	0	0	1	0
John McCain (R-Ariz.)	2	1	0	0	0	1
Barack Obama (D-Ill.)	2	0	1	1	0	0
Pat Roberts (R-Kan.)	2	1	0	0	1	0
George Allen (R-Va.)	1	0	0	0	1	0
Evan Bayh (D-Ind.)	1	0	0	0	1	0
Joseph Biden (D-Del.)	1	0	0	0	1	0
Sam Brownback (R-Kan.)	1	0	0	1	0	0
John Cornyn (R-Texas)	1	0	1	0	0	0
Bill Frist (R-Tenn.)	1	0	1	0	0	0
Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.)	1	0	0	1	0	0
Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.)	1	0	0	1	0	0
John Kerry (D-Mass.)	1	0	0	1	0	0
Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.)	1	1	0	0	0	0
Trent Lott (R-Miss.)	1	0	0	0	1	0
Dick Lugar (R-Ind.)	1	0	0	0	1	0
Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.)	1	0	0	0	0	1
John Thune (R-S.D.)	1	0	0	0	0	1



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