

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION  
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BY  
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My name is Bob Hynes. I served as Minority Counsel to the House Rules Committee from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s. I also served former President Gerald Ford as his Floor staffer when Mr. Ford was the Republican leader in the House.

I would like to make a modest proposal. Remove all restrictions on accepting meals. Both watching Members from inside the institution and working with them as a lobbyist for NBC and later for others, I have never known a lunch or dinner to influence a decision. Even the priciest meal is not going to change a vote. So the rather complex rules governing meals are really not necessary.

A further point: I have always believed that the best regulator of political behavior is transparency. If the world can know what someone is doing, they are much less likely to do something that would draw criticism.

So I would replace the current restrictions on meals with a straightforward reporting requirement. At the beginning of each month every Member would be required to list, prominently on their official web site, the meals they and their staff have accepted. Lobbyists, of course, would have to report these meals as well. By having the information made available in this way, you accomplish two things. You've got a double check on the activity. It should show up in both the lobby report as well as the Member's web site.

Such an approach leaves discretion to the Member. He or she will need to determine what their constituents will tolerate. The second virtue is that Members would use that discretion with the full knowledge that – besides the constituents – the information will be reviewed by reporters, editorial writers and their opponents.

This is a direct and simple approach. It surely would also be more effective.

I would hope Members would not avoid dinners. Meals are a traditional and common place to discuss business in our society. They can be useful in obtaining information that is helpful in making public policy. Having a point-of-view presented over a steak is little different than getting the same information sitting in the Member's office. It is, after all, the information – not the steak – that will or will not be persuasive. Besides, reporting such meals would surely be a moderating influence on both their frequency and opulence.

One last observation: No reform can prevent those determined to break the rules from doing so. Adding new layers of regulation doesn't change that. Crooks will be crooks. So there needs to be sufficient penalties for violations. Here a good degree of transparency will also serve well. The political damage from – for example – a formal rebuke on the Floor of the body – would seem like a reasonable deterrent.

Whatever is done, there will be another scandal some day. With luck it will not be as breathtakingly greedy and crude as the one Mr. Abramoff has plead guilty to. But it will happen. Keeping the rules straightforward and simple will make transgressions easier to detect, deter, stop and punish.