

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION
FEBRUARY 8, 2006
BY
THE HONORABLE AL SWIFT**

I am Al Swift, a former Member of the House of Representatives from Washington State who served in the House for eight terms, retiring in 1995. For two sessions I headed the Democratic effort in the House to reform Campaign Finance – unsuccessfully, I ruefully add. I am now a principal in the lobbying firm of Colling Murphy Swift Hynes.

It is worth noting at the outset that the people who have recently plead guilty did so for violations of current law. They were caught under rules and legislation that already exist.

However, one must go on the assumption that Congress will adopt some additional lobby reforms.

We personally believe that the vast majority of lawmakers are willing to abide by whatever rules there are, as are most lobbyists. But the public has less confidence of that than we do and, thus, Congress needs to respond to that more skeptical perception.

When Congress has reacted to similar scandals in the past, it has generally crafted rules that are complex, often difficult to understand if you are law abiding, and easy to circumvent if you aren't.

So, this time, why not adopt solid, simple, effective reforms instead of the usual patchwork of well-intended but often meaningless changes?

In addition to simplicity we propose a guiding principle: Members of Congress and their staffs are here for one purpose only – to conduct the public's business. So what is useful for that "business" is what the rules should be about.

For example, the theater, sports events, golf outings and such all have no essential relationship to the public business. Nor do gifts. The first suggestion, then, is to just ban all gifts and entertainment — period. Fooling around with dollar amounts just makes a game out of it. And who needs a \$49 gift anyway?. So, do the simple thing: get rid of both gifts and entertainment.

Travel is different. Travel that is connected to public business can be very useful. It has also been abused. But we believe there is a way to keep even privately funded travel available to Members and staff while reducing the chance for abuse. Require that all privately sponsored travel be authorized by the 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. Of course, committees would be required to file full disclosure of the trip promptly. Members would be required to report their and their staff's trips on their websites.

There are additional suggestions and I would refer you to the testimony of my colleague Bob Hynes.