

HONEST LEADERSHIP/OPEN GOVERNMENT RULES PACKAGE

Ethical and legal scandals plagued the 109th Congress - from the resignations of Reps. Tom DeLay and Duke Cunningham to the admission of illegal or improper conduct by Reps. Bob Ney and Mark Foley. Special interest influence, secret legislating, and lobbyist gifts compromised the integrity of the Congress and the legislative process and Republicans failed to respond.

Reform of the Republican culture of corruption is a top priority of the American people and a top priority of House Democrats. Republicans lost 30 seats, with 74 percent of voters citing corruption an extremely important or a very important issue in their choice at the polls. As our first responsibility in fulfilling the mandate of this critical election, Democrats are offering an aggressive reform package to reverse Republican excesses and restore the public trust. Our program for change embodies the following provisions:

Bans Gifts from Lobbyists: Bans gifts and meals from lobbyists and the organizations that employ them, and requires that tickets to sporting and other events given to Members and staff are valued at market prices.

WHY: Lobbyists' Gifts Created Unethical Relationships Among Republican Congressmen. "First came the dinner invitations, then the tickets. Staffers in the office of former House Majority leader Tom DeLay could dine -- usually, free of charge -- at Signatures, the expense-account restaurant conveniently owned by lobbyist Jack Abramoff...the DeLay staffers began to think that Abramoff's box at the arena was their box, and, in the cozy way of Washington, it might as well have been." [[Newsweek](#), 1/16/06]

Bans Lobbyist Travel: Bans lobbyists and the organizations that employ them from planning, organizing, requesting, financing, arranging, or participating in travel for Members or staff.

WHY: Rep. Ney pleaded guilty to public corruption and accepted \$170,000 worth of trips from Jack Abramoff and other lobbyists, including an all expense trip to play golf in Scotland, and provided legislative favors for their clients. "Ney...admitted to offering legislation at the behest of Abramoff and his team of lobbyists, which included former Ney chief of staff... In exchange, Ney accepted a stream of things of value, such as luxury vacations to Scotland, Lake George, N.Y, and New Orleans; tens of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions; restaurant meals; and tickets to sporting events, including the use of exclusive stadium suites. Prosecutors valued the trips alone at more than \$170,000. In 2002, Ney sought to insert four amendments into an election-reform bill to benefit Abramoff's clients. He further admitted to helping another Abramoff client win a multimillion-dollar contract to provide wireless communication service to the U.S. Capitol, and to inserting comments into the Congressional Record to help Abramoff purchase a casino cruise line in Florida." [[Washington Post](#), 9/16/2006] Super lobbyist Jack Abramoff, who pleaded guilty to bribery charges, "says he used such extravagant trips to get officials to take action on behalf of his clients." [ABC News, 5/30/06]

Prohibits use of Company Planes: Prohibits the use of official or campaign funds to pay for the use of non-commercial, corporate jets. This provision does not apply to charter plane services.

Federal politicians and political parties reimbursed 286 corporations, including FedEx, U.S. Tobacco, and Union Pacific, \$3.7 million for 2,154 trips in the past five years. “Destinations include resorts, golf courses, and even the Super Bowl. In one unusual case, R.J. Reynolds flew then-House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) home for his criminal arraignment last October on charges of laundering political contributions.” [PoliticalMoneyLine, USA Today, 3/6/06; Business Week, 5/22/06] “Abramoff also reportedly flew aides to Sen. Burns and Rep. DeLay to the 2001 Super Bowl and, during that trip, provided each with \$500 worth of gambling chips on a SunCruz ship partly owned by Mr. Abramoff.” [Washington Post, 3/5/05; The Hill, 12/7/05] “They [DeLay staffer Tony Rudy and Abramoff] traveled aboard a corporate jet belonging to SunCruz Casinos, a Florida cruise line Abramoff was negotiating to buy...Rudy did not report this trip in his House travel records.” [Washington Post, 10/16/05]

Shut Down Pay-to-Play Schemes Like the “K Street Project.” End efforts like the “K Street Project,” which Republicans created to tell corporations and lobbying firms whom they should hire in exchange for political access.

WHY: Republicans Dictated Hiring at Corporations, Trade Associations and Lobbying Firms - and let Special Interests Dominate the Republican Agenda in Return. “DeLay, Santorum, and their associates organized a systematic campaign, closely monitored by Republicans on Capitol Hill and by Grover Norquist and the Republican National Committee, to put pressure on firms not just to hire Republicans but also to fire Democrats. With the election of Bush, this pressure became stronger...Several Democratic lobbyists have been pushed out of their jobs as a result; business associations who hire Democrats for prominent positions have been subject to retribution.” In addition, “while it’s not uncommon for lobbyists to have a hand in writing legislation on the Hill, the Bush administration has sometimes shifted the locus of executive policy making so far towards K Street that Bush’s own appointees are cut out of the process.” [New York Review of Books, 6/23/05; Washington Monthly, July/August 2003]

Commits to a fair and Democratic process and an end to the 2-day work week.

WHY: This Do-Nothing Congress met for only 70 full days, failing to pass bills funding 13 of the 15 departments of the federal government. “The 2005-06 House and Senate met for fewer days than any Congress did in the past half century - fewer even than the “do-nothing Congress” President Harry Truman railed at in 1948, which passed the Marshall Plan that helped rebuild postwar Europe. The 109th boasts nothing that comes close.” [USA Today editorial, 12/11/06]

Bans Arm Twisting for Votes: Prohibits holding votes open for the sole purpose of affecting the outcome.

WHY: Republicans Held Votes Open to Twist Arms on the Medicare Prescription Drug Bill, for example. On November 22, 2003, the majority held open the vote on final passage for 3 hours -- the longest period in House history -- in the middle of the night when it became obvious that the Medicare prescription drug bill was about to fail. During that time, Former Rep. Nick Smith claimed to have been offered a bribe by then Majority Leader Tom DeLay, which ultimately led to DeLay's formal admonishment by the Ethics Committee.

Prohibit "Dead of Night" Special Interest Provisions. Reforms conference committee process by requiring adequate notice of meetings to ensure Member attendance, ensuring information is available to all conferees, providing that at least one vote is held in conference, and ensuring that the text of conference reports cannot be changed after signatures. Requires that Members have adequate time to review any bill or joint resolution that contains an earmark or limited tax benefit before voting.

WHY: Frist and Hastert Inserted a Special Interest Liability Provision in the Middle of the Night. According to Congressman David Obey, "The conference committee ended its work with the understanding, both verbal and in writing, that there would be no legislative liability protection language inserted in this bill...But after the conference was finished at 6 p.m., Senator Frist marched over to the House side of the Capitol about 4 hours later and insisted that over 40 pages of legislation, which I have in my hand, 40 pages of legislation that had never been seen by conferees, be attached to the bill. The Speaker joined him in that assistance so that, without a vote of the conferees, that legislation was unilaterally and arrogantly inserted into the bill after the conference was over in a blatantly abusive power play by two of the most powerful men in Congress..."
[Congressional Record, 12/22/05]

Earmark Reform: Requires full disclosure of all earmarks. Requires that a Member certify that earmarks provided would not financially benefit them or their spouses.

WHY: Earmarks have grown seven-fold, and Rep. Duke Cunningham went to jail for bribery from defense contractors who received earmarks. The scandal of former Rep. Duke Cunningham pleading guilty to accepting bribes from defense contractors in return for his help in securing defense contracts highlights the damage of the explosion of earmarked special interest projects over the last 12 years. Republicans have increased earmarked projects in federal spending "... from 2,000 earmarks to 14,000..." according to Republican Rep. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz. and that does not include the authorizing or tax bills. The highway bill more than doubled to 5,671 earmarks in 2005 totaling \$22 billion, including the famous Bridge to Nowhere in Alaska. [Transportation Weekly, 8/4/2005; 4/10/2002]

Requires pay-as-you-go budget rules. Provides that it shall not be in order to consider reconciliation legislation that reduces the budget surplus or increases the deficit.

WHY: Deficits have skyrocketed over the past six years as additional spending and tax cuts have not been paid for. The Bush Administration has turned projected 10-year \$5.6 billion surplus into a nearly \$3 trillion deficit.

America's debt has already climbed 50 percent to more than \$28,000 per person, and President Bush has borrowed more from foreign nations than previous 42 U.S. presidents combined. [House Budget Committee, 9/27/06]