

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN CHRISTOPHER SHAYS
RULES COMMITTEE ORIGINAL JURISDICTION HEARING
H.R. 4975, THE LOBBYING ACCOUNTABILITY AND
TRANSPARENCY ACT
MARCH 30, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing.

It has been over a decade now since my Party took over the majority, and I feel like we have forgotten how we got here. Republicans were united by three common issues: enacting tax relief, growing the economy and reforming Congress.

It was amazing after the 2004 election we considered repealing the rule requiring a Republican leader to step down if indicted. Next, we proceeded to remove the members of our Ethics Committee who had voted to hold our former Majority Leader accountable for his actions. And then, we proceeded to make it more difficult to initiate an Ethics Committee investigation.

It is clear to me power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. We need bold action. We need bold reform.

I would like this Committee to consider three reforms: create an Office of Public Integrity to strengthen the Ethics Committee, strengthen lobbying disclosure requirements beyond what this legislation includes, and enact a gift ban.

Office of Public Integrity

To restore public trust in Congress, it is essential we have a functioning Ethics Committee. To this end, Congressman Meehan and I have introduced legislation to create an Office of Public Integrity to assist the Ethics Committee.

This legislation would maintain the Ethics Committee as the final arbiter of whether ethical violations have occurred. The legislation would allow the Office to investigate non-frivolous complaints and present its findings to the Ethics Committee for adjudication. If the Director of the Office dismissed a

complaint as frivolous, the person filing the complaint would be barred from filing any future complaints with the Office and would be responsible for paying the Office's costs associated with the complaint. Additionally, the results of the Committee's work would be made public.

To ensure there are adequate checks and balances, a two-thirds majority of the Ethics Committee can vote to stop investigations at several points in the process, provided they do so by recorded vote and provide an explanation for their position.

The Office would have many duties in addition to investigating ethics complaints. It would be responsible for receiving lobbying reports and monitoring reports to ensure the reports meet required criteria. The Office would be able to provide both formal and informal guidance to members and staff on the permissibility of conduct under House and Senate rules.

Lobbying Accountability and Transparency Act

Senator McCain and I introduced legislation to increase disclosure of lobbyists' activities, which I believe would greatly strengthen our process.

It is important for the public to understand lobbyists aren't the problem, but inappropriate contact between lobbyists and members is the problem. Sunshine tends to have a cleansing effect, and sunshine is what this bill would provide.

This legislation requires disclosure of the what lobbying firms, lobbyists, and their political action committees contribute to the campaigns of Federal candidates and officeholders, their political action committees and political party committees. The bill also would require disclosure of fundraisers hosted, co-hosted, or otherwise sponsored by these entities.

To understand who is behind the anonymous coalitions and associations seeking to influence our Government officials, the bill requires registrants to list as clients those entities that contribute \$10,000 or more to a coalition or association. The bill expressly keeps intact, however, existing law governing the disclosure of the identities of members and donors to organizations designated as 501(c) groups under the Internal Revenue Code.

Furthermore, our legislation would require members to pay the cost of a charter fare when they fly on corporate jets, rather than the cost of first-class fare, and would prevent lobbyists from accessing members in plush skyboxes by making the reported cost of the ticket more accurately reflect its true cost.

We are also seeking to further strengthen limitations on the revolving door by proposing a two-year ban on members of Congress and senior Executive and Congressional staff from lobbying.

Gift Ban

Finally, I believe we should enact a gift ban. In H.R. 4575, we proposed lobbyists to disclose gifts over \$20, but it would be far more effective to end gifts to Congressional offices, exempting plaques, t-shirts, books or small items a member might receive from a proud constituent.

Given the admonishments by the Ethics Committee and the indictment of our former Majority Leader, the actions of Mr. Abramoff, and the conviction of former Congressman Duke Cunningham for taking bribes, this Congress needs to not only deal with the reality of corruption, but the appearance of corruption as well. Only then can we begin to restore the public's trust.