

HONEST GOVERNMENT AGENDA

**** Ban Gifts to Members of Congress**

Members of Congress and their staff should be prohibited from accepting for private benefit any gifts from lobbyists or the general public.

**** Overhaul The Congressional Ethics Process**

The House of Representatives and Senate ethics committees have been reticent to investigate powerful Members of Congress and to punish wrongdoing. This has led to a climate in Congress where corruption is increasingly possible. Congress should invigorate the House and Senate ethics committees by ensuring that outside counsel will investigate ethics complaints against Members of Congress, restoring citizens' ability to file ethics complaints in the House and making the ethics process more transparent.

**** Pass Tougher Federal Anti-Bribery And Gratuity Statutes**

In 1999, the Supreme Court punched a major loophole in the federal illegal gratuities law, making it harder to prosecute politicians who take gifts from favor-seekers like Jack Abramoff. Congress should strengthen federal anti-bribery and gratuity laws to prohibit special interests from using gifts to curry favor with public officials.

**** Prohibit The Purchase Of Influence**

The House and Senate should pass ethics rules to prohibit Members of Congress from providing influence or official action in exchange for campaign contributions or other consideration.

**** Strengthen Revolving Door Prohibitions and Improve Lobbying Disclosure**

Congress should swiftly pass legislation to double the current one-year "cooling off" period for former Members of Congress and top staff when they come back and lobby their former colleagues. And it should enact a "cross branch" restriction, prohibiting, for example, the Secretary of Defense from lobbying a Member of Congress for the two-year period. Lobbying disclosure should be improved by making such disclosure quarterly, and by requiring lobbyists to disclose contacts with executive branch staff, Members of Congress and their staff.

**** End Privately Financed Junkets And Improve Disclosure Of Government Travel**

Special interests with matters pending before Congress should not be able to pay for Members' travel, nor should political committees or charity golf or tennis tournaments be used as conduits to evade the current prohibitions against payment for Members' recreational travel. In addition, for travel on private jets, Members and federal candidates should be required to reimburse at a rate equivalent to the fair market value of a trip (charter), not the cost of an equivalent first-class ticket.

**** Ensure Floor Votes For Earmarks**

The growth of congressional earmarks - spending provisions inserted into appropriations bills - has turned the appropriations committees into "favor factories," as Jack Abramoff reportedly called them. Any Member of Congress should be able to require a floor vote on any congressional earmark. And earmarks should be contained within appropriations bills themselves, not merely committee or conference reports.

**** Reform the Corrupt Federal Campaign Finance System**

Broadcasters should be required to provide free or reduced cost TV and radio ads for candidates for federal office.

**** Replace The Federal Election Commission With A Tough Watchdog**

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) is crippled by partisan gridlock, investigative lassitude, institutional design and financial starvation. Congress should replace the FEC with a wholly new enforcement scheme for federal campaign laws.

**** Strengthen Enforcement Of Public Corruption Laws**

The Justice Department's once reliable Public Integrity Section has repeatedly failed to enforce criminal laws designed to deal with public corruption -- the 1996 election scandals being the most notable example.

**** Put Congressional Documents On The Internet**

Congress should place its most useful documents on the Internet, including texts of bills, draft committee and conference reports, a searchable

database of congressional voting records, and Congressional Research Service reports.

**** Tighten Congressional Conflict-Of-Interest Rules**

The House and Senate should strengthen their conflict-of-interest rules to make sure Members do not enrich themselves by their own official actions, and that the judgment of Members of Congress is not impaired by their own financial holdings.

**** Stop The Flood Of Gifts At The Political Conventions**

Because of huge loopholes in Federal Election Commission and ethics rules, Members of Congress and corporate lobbyists turned the 2000 and 2004 Democratic and Republican conventions into unseemly circuses of gifts and graft. Congress should shut down the convention gift loopholes.

**** Ensure Legal Defense Funds Don't Become Conduits for Special Interest Money**

Contributions given to a congressional legal defense fund should be limited to the federal campaign contribution limit to ensure that the funds don't become conduits for special interest money.

**** Reawaken The Office Of Government Ethics**

The Office of Government Ethics should resume its role in enforcing federal ethics standards, instead of merely providing so-called "leadership" in federal ethics matters.

The Honest Government Agenda was prepared by Commercial Alert, a non-profit organization that protects children and communities from commercialism. For more information, see www.commercialalert.org or call 503.235.8012.