Feb. 21, 2007

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the millions of hard-working taxpayers represented by our organizations, I am writing to encourage you to co-sponsor and support important legislation that would close a gaping loophole in U.S. House Rules that exempts lobbyists for state and local government agencies from the tough new gift ban that private-sector and not-for-profit lobbyists must obey. The legislation will be introduced soon by U.S. Reps. Jeff Flake (6th Dist. – Ariz.), and will be identical to bipartisan legislation he introduced as H. Res. 960 in the 109th Congress.

As you know, on Jan. 5, 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted H. Res. 6, which included strict new ethics guidelines, including a ban on almost all gifts from registered lobbyists. Specifically, Section 203 of the resolution stipulates: “A Member, Delegate, Resident Commissioner, officer, or employee of the House may not knowingly accept a gift from a registered lobbyist or agent of a foreign principal or from a private entity that retains or employs registered lobbyists.”

However, H. Res. 6 preserves a curious loophole that exempts gifts from lobbyists paid for by state or local governments. In those situations, there is absolutely no monetary limit on the gifts that can be accepted.
This exemption allows lobbyists for entities like public universities and city governments to ignore the new gift ban and attempt to unfairly influence Members of Congress and their staff with free luxury skybox tickets to sold-out sporting events like the Final Four or the Rose Bowl, or free front-row tickets to the most popular concerts. Convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff even tried to exploit this loophole when he flew several Congressional staffers to the Super Bowl in Florida a few years ago.

While this kind of unlimited gift-giving is considered completely unethical or even illegal if it is done by lobbyists representing private companies or not-for-profit groups like ours, for some reason it is considered perfectly fine when it is done by taxpayer-funded government lobbyists, who are usually lobbying for additional federal funding at the expense of the taxpayer.

Congressman Flake’s legislation will largely close this loophole, and finally treat state and local government lobbyists like every other citizen. In addition to restoring fairness to lobbying rules, this resolution also helps curb government spending on all levels. Under the current system, the taxpayer ends up paying for both the lavish gifts and the pork-barrel earmarks the government lobbyists are usually pushing for.

For these reasons, we strongly encourage you to co-sponsor and support this legislation, and to help level the playing field for taxpayers. To co-sponsor the resolution, please contact Lydia Morgan in Congressman Flake’s office at (202) 225-2635. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tim Phillips
President
Americans for Prosperity

Grover Glenn Norquist
President
Americans for Tax Reform

Thomas Schatz
President
Council for Citizens Against Government Waste

John Berthoud
President
National Taxpayers Union

Jim Martin
President
60 Plus Association

Karen Kerrigan
President and CEO
Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council
Dan Clifton
Executive Director
American Shareholders Association

J. William Lauderback
Executive Vice President
American Conservative Union

Geoffrey Segal
Director of Government Reform
Reason Foundation

Danielle Brian
Executive Director
Project on Government Oversight

Ryan Alexander
President
Taxpayers for Common Sense

Ellen Miller
Executive Director
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