



AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM

GROVER G. NORQUIST

PRESIDENT

August 27, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, DC 20501

Dear Mr. President,

There is no denying that members of Congress have been tempted to betray the American taxpayer for personal gain, be it political or financial. Legislative action to tighten ethics rules and promote cleaner government is a worthy goal that should be a top priority of your administration, and of Congress.

However, the Democrat lobbying bill, H.R. 2317, which has finally made its way to your desk is at best a mixed bag. Though most of the egregious infringements of free speech rights and the right to petition the government have been removed in this final version, the bill has emerged without any redress to the underlying problem. The bill bans the currently tolerated small and minor gifts, but it leaves billion-dollar gifts available. It requires sextuple disclosure of lobbying contacts, but no disclosure of the billions of taxpayer dollars extracted through these contacts.

In short, **the bill has a critical flaw in that it does nothing to address the underlying problem: earmarks, the “pot of gold” that leads to corruption.** The scandals of Representatives Cunningham, Mollohan, and Murtha would not have been prevented by the new lobbying bill, and neither would other countless cases. Yet, if H.R. 2317 becomes law without earmark reform, we will have allowed to slip by perhaps our only chance to rein in the earmark process.

For this reason, on behalf of American taxpayers, I urge you to veto the Lobbying Transparency Act of 2007 until it contains meaningful earmark reform. Ideally, earmarks should be eliminated. But barring that, legislation should include at least full disclosure online and provision for specific up or down votes. Any lawmaker who puts an earmark in for a business, city, or university should, together with his or her family, have a lifetime ban on employment with that entity. These measures would at the very least illuminate the current largely secret process.

Mr. President, without earmark reform, H.R. 2317 will do nothing to clean up Congress, and if this vehicle becomes law without earmark reform, we will have lost our chance to finally begin to protect taxpayers' money, and Congressmen from nearly irresistible temptation. To prevent this opportunity for reform from slipping away, please veto the Lobbying Transparency Act of 2007 until it contains meaningful earmark reform.

Onward,

Grover Norquist
President