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September 7, 2006

Dear Representative,

As we head into the final weeks of the 109th Congress, this Congress has done nothing to address the worst congressional corruption scandals in decades. Congress has enacted no reforms to address the ethics, lobbying and influence-money scandals that have been a hallmark of the 109th Congress.

As of today, one former member of the House in this Congress sits in jail convicted of bribery; a second House Member is under criminal investigation for potential bribery, having been found with \$90,000 in cash in his freezer; a third House Member, who has resigned, is under indictment for criminal campaign finance violations and is a central figure in the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandals; and a fourth House Member, who has also resigned, is another key player in the Abramoff scandals and reportedly is under criminal investigation for participating in corrupt activities.

In addition, as of today, the Justice Department is conducting a criminal corruption investigation into the Abramoff lobbying scandals in Congress, with several additional members of Congress reportedly also under investigation for their activities in connection with Abramoff. Another criminal corruption investigation is being conducted in the aftermath of the Cunningham bribery conviction that reportedly may involve other House Members and their roles in earmarking federal funds for private interests; and yet another investigation of a House Member reportedly is being conducted by the FBI in connection with the Member's real estate interests, nonprofit groups he founded and federal earmarks he provided to the nonprofits.

In addition, as of today, four former congressional staff members have entered into criminal plea bargain agreements for activities that they undertook either while they were on staff or after they left, and additional criminal investigations involving other former congressional staff are reportedly taking place.

Meanwhile, the status quo in Congress remains intact.

There have been no steps taken to restrict or curb the many avenues that influence-seekers use to provide influence-money to House Members whose votes and official actions they seek.

There are no new laws and no new congressional ethics rules to deal with the campaign contributions that influence-seekers provide for Members, the domestic and

foreign vacation-type trips they pay for, the company planes they provide at bargain rates, including for campaign fundraising trips, and the numerous other financial favors and perks they make available to Members.

Furthermore, the lobbying and ethics legislation passed by the House and Senate, and purportedly waiting to go to conference, is not expected to produce meaningful lobbying and ethics reforms, even if a conference agreement is reached.

There are reports that the House and/or Senate may enact some earmark reforms in September. This, however, does not address the fundamental problems that exist with the lobbying laws and congressional ethics rules. These critical issues must be dealt with to address the widespread corruption problems that have been revealed in this Congress.

The failure of Congress to respond in any real way to the congressional corruption scandals is a national disgrace.

While there have been serious lobbying and ethics reform bills introduced in the House in this Congress, such as H.R.5677, introduced by Representatives Christopher Shays (R-CT) and Marty Meehan (D-MA), none of these reform bills has been passed by the House.

The Shays-Meehan legislation would make the following lobbying and ethics reforms:

- Prohibit private interests that lobby Congress from paying for trips by Members;
- Require Members to pay charter rates, rather than reduced fares, for the use of company planes made available by corporations for their travel;
- Ban gifts to Members;
- Establish an Office of Public Integrity to help enforce congressional ethics rules and lobbying disclosure laws;
- Require lobbyists to disclose the campaign funds and financial benefits they provide to assist Members;
- Require disclosure of the amounts spent by professional lobbying firms and lobbying groups on campaigns to generate lobbying of Congress by the public; and
- Slow the revolving door.

We deplore the failure of this Congress to take any meaningful steps to deal with the extraordinary congressional corruption scandals that have occurred.

We are committed to continuing to fight a major battle in this Congress, and the next Congress, to enact the fundamental lobbying and ethics reforms that are essential to restoring the health and integrity of our democracy and of the House as an institution.

We believe it is time for members of Congress to make this commitment as well. We would appreciate your response.

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