

**Nomination of Robert I. Cusick to be
Director, Office of Government Ethics
Senator Joseph I. Lieberman
May 18, 2006**

Thank you, Madam Chairman. And welcome, Mr. Cusick, to you and your family. The Office of Government Ethics is a key player in maintaining the highest ethical standards throughout the executive branch. The director's job has been vacant since December 2003, and I am troubled the Administration waited a year and a half into the 109th Congress before nominating you to lead the office. I am pleased your nomination has been made and I hope it proceeds smoothly so the message going forward will be that ethics are at the core of everything we in public service do.

The OGE is responsible for establishing and maintaining a uniform legal framework of ethics for executive branch employees, supporting the ethics programs of each federal agency through educational programs, advisory opinions, and review of agency ethics procedures, and overseeing the financial disclosure of executive branch employees. Only through the transparency of financial disclosure can we prevent conflicts of interest that undermine the impartiality of government decision-makers.

As Mr. Cusick noted in written responses to the Committee's questionnaire, "government ethics" should not be an oxymoron. Unfortunately, the headlines of the past year have given the American public more than a few reasons to question whether some federal officials take their ethical obligations seriously.

David Safavian, the President's former top procurement officer, was indicted for lying about his dealings with lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Tony Rudy, a former aide to Congressman DeLay, pleaded guilty to conspiracy related to corrupt lobbying practices and admitted violating the prohibition on former Congressional staff from lobbying their previous bosses for one year. Mr. Abramoff pleaded guilty to fraud and conspiracy to bribe public officials, and his associate Michael Scanlon pleaded guilty to conspiracy to bribe a congressman and other public officials. Congressman Duke Cunningham pleaded guilty to accepting bribes. A former aide to Congressman Ney pleaded guilty to conspiring to influence the Congressman's actions through expensive gifts and travel. And a former aide to Congressman Jefferson pleaded guilty to bribing his former boss.

In no way do I mean to lay any of these ethical lapses at the feet of OGE. But in the context of today's hearing, these incidents remind us how a handful of selfish, corrupt individuals can inflict widespread damage on the public's confidence in the integrity of our government. We need strong leadership from OGE to make sure that executive branch personnel fully understand and fulfill their ethical responsibilities.

Public service is a privilege, and those who choose to pursue it must perform their duties in the public interest, not in their own self-interest. I look forward to hearing from Mr. Cusick today his vision for making that maxim a reality.