

**Opening Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins
Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs**

**Lobbying Reform: Proposals and Issues
January 25, 2006**

Today, the Committee begins an examination of lobbying reform. This hearing will focus on proposals before Congress to reform lobbying practices in the wake of scandals involving Jack Abramoff and Representative Randy “Duke” Cunningham.

Although the actions of both men violated current laws, they nevertheless have prompted a needed review of legal lobbying activities that raise questions of improper influence or the appearance of impropriety. We must act to strengthen the laws governing disclosure and ban practices that erode public confidence in the integrity of government decisions. We must reform rules that allow former lawmakers-turned-lobbyists special access to lobby their former colleagues on the Senate

floor. We must end the practice of allowing members to slip earmarks that have received neither scrutiny nor a vote by either the House or the Senate into the final versions of legislation.

All of us here today recognize that lobbying, whether done on behalf of the business community, an environmental organization, a children's advocacy group, or any other cause, can provide us with useful information that aids, but does not dictate, the decision-making process.

Indeed, "lobbying" is a word that has a long and noble history. It comes to us from Great Britain, where the tradition developed that citizens, whether acting on their own behalf or for a group, would approach Members of Parliament in the lobby of that building to offer their views on pending legislation. It was done in the light of day, and the medium of exchange was ideas.

Today, “lobbying” too often conjures up images of all-expense paid vacations masquerading as “fact-finding” trips, special access that the average citizen can never have, and undue influence that leads to tainted decisions. The corrosive effect of this image, and in some cases, reality, on the public’s confidence in the political process cannot be underestimated.

We have an obligation to strengthen the crucial bond of trust between those in government and those whom government serves. Our nation faces a great many challenges that the Congress should address. If the bond of trust between public officials and their constituents is frayed, if our citizens believe that decisions are tainted by improper influence, then our country will be unable to tackle the big issues. No major legislation can pass without the support of the American people. And the public’s trust in Congress is perilously low.

I am especially pleased that we have with us several of our colleagues, who will be testifying this morning. They are

champions of good government, of open and accountable government, and I very much look forward to hearing their proposals for reform.

Our other witnesses today offer a broad perspective on these issues. They represent business and labor organizations that engage in lobbying, a respected public policy institute that sponsors travel to conferences, a public policy expert who has long advocated reform, and a representative of an association of lobbyists (sometimes, even lobbyists need a lobbyist). I look forward to their testimony.

The issue we take up today is serious and pressing. The right of the American people to petition their government is a constitutional guarantee and must not be chilled. At the same time, it is imperative that the give and take of advocacy focus on the exchange of ideas, conducted in broad daylight. The American people deserve no less.