

colleagues to reject this bill and instead work to reduce corruption in Washington by reducing the size and power of the Federal Government.

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Chairman, it is an honor and a privilege to serve in the U.S. Congress. Having been entrusted by our constituents with the responsibility to serve their interests in this body, we hold a sacred trust to represent them openly, honestly, and selflessly.

Serving as a public official necessarily and rightly subjects an individual to heightened scrutiny of behavior. It is tragic that scurrilous actions perpetrated by Members of this body have further eroded the trust that Americans place in their electoral and representative system. Congress must act expeditiously and strongly to restore this trust.

Unfortunately, the legislation that we have before us today is nothing more than a sham. It is a feeble attempt to fool the public—a package of half-hearted cosmetic changes that merely nibble at the edges of a fundamentally flawed governing ethos.

H.R. 4975 falls far short of its two goals—fixing the systemic problems that have led to abuses of power, and restoring the faith of American citizens in the integrity of this institution.

Recent scandals prove that we need to do something to ensure that Congressional travel is legitimate. Domestic and international travel is an important way to inform our representation and see the effects of our decisions in different communities and countries. For example, Members of Congress should have the opportunity to travel to Israel, Burma, Greece, Brazil, or other destinations where the votes cast in this chamber have a real impact. Such trips are entirely different from golf junkets to Scotland. Nonprofits and educational agencies should continue providing this important service because it informs Members in a setting free of special interest lobbyists. However, H.R. 4975 does nothing to stop lobbyists from funding and arranging Congressional travel. Such travel should be permanently banned altogether. H.R. 4975 also fails because it imposes no restrictions on the use of corporate jets by Members, and does not require reimbursement of the flight's actual value.

Sunshine, as they say, is the best disinfectant, and H.R. 4975 does not do nearly enough to allow the public to know the interaction between elected officials and lobbyists. H.R. 4975 contains no meaningful disclosure requirements on lobbyist campaign finance activities on behalf of Members of Congress. We must let the public know about fundraisers, events "honoring" Members, or outright contributions that special interest lobbyists are lavishing upon elected officials. The bill has been stripped of any such requirements.

It is clear that the practice of "earmarking" is not the ideal way to fund the needs of the nation. Basing funding decisions not on merit, but on the influence and seniority of a Member of Congress inherently does a disservice to the nation. Earmarking needs to be severely restricted. At a minimum, each Member should be willing to fully disclose the requesting organization or person and explaining the purpose of the project publicly. Unfortunately, H.R. 4975 fails to achieve this goal. Its disclosure requirements apply only to appropriations bills—not to authorization or tax bills. It's a half-measure, at best, that would do nothing to stop wasteful and unnecessary projects like the "Bridge to Nowhere."

Sadly, the process by which this legislation comes before us has been fundamentally undemocratic. The Rules Committee disallowed the large majority of amendments that would improve this weak bill. It disallowed an amendment that would have required registered lobbyists to disclose lobbying contacts with Members of Congress and senior executive branch officials. It disallowed an amendment to increase the waiting period for Members and senior staff to lobby Congress. And it disallowed an amendment to require full payment and disclosure of charter flights.

The Democratic alternative is a better way. The Honest Leadership Open Government Act would address these shortcomings and more. It would prohibit special interest provisions from being inserted in legislation in the dead of night, before they can be adequately reviewed and debated. It would restore democracy in the House by prohibiting votes from being held open to twist arms and lobby Members on the floor, and would prohibit cronyism in key government appointments and government contracting. We would also permanently ban gifts and travel arranged or funded by lobbyists, mandate disclosure of lobbyist fundraising activities on behalf of Members, and close the revolving door between the public and private sector.

The Washington Post calls this bill, "a watered-down sham." USA Today calls it an "outrageous substitute for needed reform." Third party interest groups like Common Cause, Democracy 21, the League of Women Voters, Public Citizen, and U.S. P.I.R.G. have all condemned this weak and inadequate effort to kick the can down the road. We have an historic opportunity to reform the way business is conducted in Washington, D.C., and we are poised to miss that opportunity.

I urge my colleagues to oppose H.R. 4975 and support real reform.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong opposition to this legislation.

The American people are losing their faith in the integrity of Congress. Today we had a real opportunity to curb the influence of the special interests and lobbyists, and to disburse the cloud of corruption hanging over this Congress as a result of the improprieties of a small minority who have disgraced its good name.

Yet this watered-down attempt at reform falls far short of what we need to do to restore confidence in the legislative process. This bill is reform in name only. Under this bill companies could continue to fly members in their corporate jets at discount rates. Members could continue to accept lobbying jobs shortly after drafting and advocating for industry-friendly legislation. Members could influence private employment decisions with the threat of taking or withholding official actions. And special interest provisions could continue to be slipped into legislation at the eleventh hour. Instead of developing a real policy to govern gifts and meals, this legislation defers that decision until after the elections in November. This bill also postpones adoption of a clear policy regarding special interest and lobbyist-sponsored private travel.

The bill before the House is not going to fool anyone. Across the country, newspapers are blasting the GOP lobbying reform bill for the farce that it is.

The Washington Post has called it "a watered-down sham that would provide little in the way of accountability or transparency."

"Congress still doesn't get it," said USA Today. The New York Times writes "It's hard to believe that members of Congress mindful of voters' diminishing respect would attempt such an election-year con." And the Houston Chronicle asks "How many more members of Congress, their aides and lobbyists have to be convicted of fraud, bribery and abuse of voters' trust before legislators get the message that the public is serious about ethics reform?"

The Democratic reform plan, the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, which I have cosponsored, would address each of these serious inadequacies, while further strengthening lobbyist disclosure requirements to shine some light into the relationship between campaign donors, lobbyists and Members of Congress.

Yet, in what has become a standard abuse of House Rules, Democrats were denied the opportunity to debate a number of substantive amendments seeking to improve and strengthen many components of the bill. Consideration of substitute legislation was blocked as well, denying Members the chance to vote on the actual reforms included in the Democratic Honest Leadership and Open Government Act.

The American people have seen the impacts resulting from the lax policies of this Republican Congress in many ways. Spiraling prescription drug costs, the skyrocketing cost of gasoline, waste, fraud and no-bid contracts in the Gulf Coast and Iraq, are all cases where a more open legislative process with reasonable oversight could have saved consumers thousands.

While this Republican Leadership may be perfectly content in perpetuating a clearly flawed status quo, sticking to business as usual regardless of the multiplying and increasingly brazen cases of misconduct, and promising more reform at some indefinite date in the future, I know the American people both demand and deserve a real response. This is simply a smoke screen by Members of the Majority to delay real action right here and right now.

Today Member after Member from the Republican Party came to the House floor not to extol the virtues of this legislation but to assure their colleagues that this was just a compromise, and that more would be done in conference and in the future. The American people do not want a compromise. They don't want to hear any more false promises of future action. The continuing cost of inaction has resulted in the loss of the confidence of the American people.

I will vote against this legislation today and support the Democratic motion to recommit to send the bill back to Committee with instructions to immediately report the measure back to the House with the text of the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act.

Mr. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I rise to oppose the legislation before us today. I oppose it, not because I oppose clean, open, and transparent government; or because I don't want the American people to have faith in their legislators.

I oppose it, quite simply, because all it does is put lipstick on a pig. It allows the Republican majority to give themselves a self-congratulatory pat on the back and then proceed with business as usual. It allows those same Republicans, who have let K Street and corporate greed-heads to feast at the trough of