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United States Senate

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS
HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 220
SECOND AND CONSTITUTION AVENUE, NE
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6425

February 17, 2006

PRESS RELEASE

The Select Committee on Ethics today sent the attached letter to Fred Wertheimer, President of Democracy 21.

United States Senate

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS
HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 220
SECOND AND CONSTITUTION AVENUE, NE
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6425

February 17, 2006

Fred Wertheimer, President
Democracy 21
1875 I Street, NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Mr. Wertheimer:

This responds to your November 22, 2005, letter to the Senate Select Committee on Ethics referencing allegations in a November 17, 2005, *Associated Press* story that “Nearly three dozen members of Congress, including leaders from both parties, pressed the government to block a Louisiana Indian tribe from opening a casino while the lawmakers collected large donations from rival tribes and their lobbyist, Jack Abramoff.” In your letter you also quote the *AP* story as stating that “Many intervened with letters to Interior Secretary Gale Norton within days of receiving money from tribes represented by Abramoff or using the lobbyist’s restaurant for fund-raising . . .” You further cite the *AP* story as stating that “there were nine Senators ‘who wrote letters urging the Bush administration to reject a Louisiana Indian casino as they collected political money from rival tribes, their lobbyists Jack Abramoff and his associates between 2001 and 2004.’” You specifically cite Members of both political parties in your letter.

Your letter “calls on the Senate Ethics Committee to promptly investigate these latest revelations about the activities of Jack Abramoff and the serious questions raised by the *AP* story about whether Senators violated Senate ethics rules in this matter.” The Committee is also aware of other reports in the press concerning alleged improper conduct by Senate Members and staff in connection with lobbying and fund-raising by Jack Abramoff and others associated with him.

As a matter of general practice, and absent special circumstances, where the Committee has sufficient reason to believe that a law enforcement entity is conducting a criminal investigation in a matter that may overlap with matters of potential interest to the Committee in carrying out its investigative authority, the Committee will defer action on its part pending resolution of the criminal investigation. Moreover, the Department of Justice has made the Committee aware that it has concerns about the impact an Ethics Committee investigation may have on the Department’s ongoing criminal investigation into Abramoff-related matters.

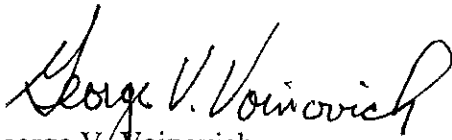
Therefore, based upon the Committee’s general practice, and upon consideration of the views of the Department of Justice, the Committee has decided to defer, at this time, its determinations as to the allegations referred to in your November 22, 2005, letter to the

Committee and in other press accounts about the Abramoff matter.*

The Committee takes with the utmost seriousness its duty to investigate and, when merited, undertake other appropriate Committee action when it receives a competent complaint, allegation of, or other information about misconduct by a Member, officer or employee of the Senate. The Committee also fully appreciates the significant level of public concern that exists regarding "Abramoff-related" allegations. The Committee believes strongly, however, that the interest of the American public in this matter will be best served at this time by allowing the criminal investigation to proceed without the risk of being impeded, even if unintentionally, by a potentially overlapping, non-criminal investigation by this Committee. By proceeding in this manner the Committee also expects that any related investigation it may undertake would be more efficient, more effective and more comprehensive.

Thank you for your interest in these serious matters. The Committee welcomes any further information or discussion you may wish to provide.

Sincerely,



George V. Voinovich
Chairman



Tim Johnson
Vice Chairman

* Neither this decision to defer, nor any statement in this letter, should be taken to indicate that the Committee has made any determination as to whether the allegations in your letter, or related allegations, against any named Member or Senate employee have merit or provide a sufficient basis for the undertaking of an inquiry by the Committee.