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# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Statement of Chairman Henry A. Waxman Committee Report on Jack Abramoff's Contacts with the White House June 12, 2008

This report is the culmination of an investigation that commenced two years ago under the leadership of Ranking Member Tom Davis when he was chairman of the Committee. It was courageous of Mr. Davis to open an investigation into the relationship between Jack Abramoff and the White House. He didn't agree to the investigation because it was in his political interest. He did it because it was the right thing to do. And I commend him for his independence and his leadership.

Throughout this investigation, Mr. Davis and I have worked together on a bipartisan basis. We started out together two years ago, and we end together today. We haven't always agreed on the significance of the facts we have learned. But we have agreed that we should report the facts fairly and accurately to Congress and the public.

In 2006, the Committee obtained records from Mr. Abramoff's former lobbying firm and based on this information issued a bipartisan staff report finding that Mr. Abramoff and his associates had hundreds of lobbying contacts with White House officials ... that they had influenced White House actions ... and that they had provided White House officials with expensive tickets and meals.

When the Committee issued its September 2006 bipartisan staff report, the White House disavowed its findings, asserting that the Abramoff records were not reliable. White House officials stated that Jack Abramoff got "nothing out of" the White House and claimed that their "thorough" investigation showed he had no influence on official actions.

When I became chairman, the Committee continued its inquiry by issuing document requests to the White House and by seeking depositions and interviews with Mr. Abramoff's lobbying team and White House officials.

We encountered significant resistance. Three of the seven White House officials the Committee sought to question declined in whole or in part to respond to Committee questions, citing their rights under the Fifth Amendment to avoid self-incrimination. Three of the seven Abramoff lobbyists declined to testify to the Committee, expressing similar concerns, and the

Department of Justice requested the Committee defer speaking with three other lobbyists, including Mr. Abramoff.

Despite these limitations, the Committee obtained significant new information regarding Mr. Abramoff's relationship with the White House from White House documents and from testimony the Committee received.

The Committee report summarizes what we have learned. It includes the following findings:

- The White House documents show over 70 additional contacts between the Abramoff team and White House officials and confirm over 80 of the contacts described in the Abramoff lobbying firm documents;
- There are photos showing Mr. Abramoff with President Bush on at least six different occasions;
- Top White House aides, including two former Directors of the White House Office of Political Affairs, held Mr. Abramoff and his associates in high regard, viewing Mr. Abramoff as a "point of information" based on "his knowledge and his experience and his judgment";
- Mr. Abramoff and his team influenced some White House actions and persuaded White House officials to intervene to remove a State Department official, Allen Stayman, whose policies conflicted with those of Mr. Abramoff's clients; and
- Mr. Abramoff and his associates offered White House officials expensive tickets to numerous sporting and entertainment events.

These findings raise serious issues. Federal law prohibits White House officials from soliciting gifts from persons seeking official action from the White House. It also prohibits White House officials from accepting gifts worth more than \$20. These laws may have been violated.

Because the Committee was unable to obtain the testimony of several key White House officials and Abramoff lobbyists, there are questions we could not answer. But we do know that Mr. Abramoff and his associates offered White House officials tickets to events at least 21 times. We know that these tickets were used at least six times. And we have evidence that they were rejected just three times.

After two years of investigation, we could document only one instance where a White House official paid for tickets provided by Mr. Abramoff.

The record before the Committee also contradicts White House claims that Mr. Abramoff got "nothing out of" his White House contacts. And it makes clear that the White House misled the public when it claimed to have thoroughly investigated the extent of Mr. Abramoff's relationship with the White House.

Our investigation has already led to one conviction. In our September 2006 report, we released evidence that as part of its successful effort to win a \$16 million grant from the Justice Department for a jail for the Choctaw tribe, the Abramoff team offered concert tickets to DOJ officials. Earlier this year, former DOJ official Robert Coughlin pled guilty to providing assistance to the Choctaws while receiving tickets and meals from Abramoff associates.

I do not know whether today's report will lead to additional convictions, and Mr. Davis and I are not making any referrals. But I expect the Justice Department will look closely at what we have discovered.

The report before the Committee today is a bipartisan effort. The report has benefited greatly from the input of Mr. Davis and his staff, and I am very pleased that we are both supporting this report.

I urge my colleagues to approve this Committee report.