

October 22, 2008

Letters to the Editor  
The Indianapolis Star  
P.O. Box 145  
Indianapolis, IN 46206-0145

Members of the Editorial Board:

In response to the grievances with Congressman Dan Burton you noted in the endorsement of his opponent, I can not, in good conscience, allow your condemnation of his lone vote against Title II of the 2007 House ethics legislation (H. Res. 6, roll call no. 7) to go unanswered.

If you dig deeper than the politically correct name “Ethics Reform” and look at the actual language of Title II in House Resolution 6, you will find a bill easily exploited by loopholes. As the House and Senate Ethics Committees have sought to interpret the broad language of the bill in 2007-08, countless bizarre and confusing parameters for Members of Congress and Congressional staff have been created, and actual reform is nowhere to be seen. Here are a few examples of why the so-called ethics reform has become the joke of Washington, D.C.:

Regarding free meals, Members of Congress and staff can still eat dinner paid for by lobbyists, as long as they are not sitting down and not using a fork.

If Members of Congress plan on attending a reception with live music, they will have to pay for the cost of their ticket, unless the music group is deemed “unpopular” by the Ethics Committee.

As for the so-called gift ban, gifts valued at \$50 or under are not banned, and if the giver is a “close, personal friend” the dollar value can be much higher. Guess how many people on the Hill have lobbyists that are “close, personal friends”? All of them. Why? In many cases, Members of Congress and staff will live, work, and possibly date or marry people who *eventually* get hired to do government relations, or “lobby.” (Speaking of marriage, women were advised by the Ethics Committee to say “yes” before placing an engagement ring on their finger, or risk violating the ethics rules.) The laughable list, sadly, goes on.

The fact is, these so-called ethics rules, which were introduced to House Members on January 4, 2007, and quickly passed *just hours later*, have proven to be an utter failure in bringing meaningful reform to a legislature that so badly needs it. Let's call this what it really was: the new Democrat Majority was eager to endear itself to the American people, and 430 legislators voted in favor of the measure because they either believed it would be an improvement, or knew that voting “yes” would at least provide some easy political cover.

Congressmen Burton went against the grain and cast the lone “no” vote because he wanted to draw attention to the legislation's loopholes and maintain his voice against confusing ethics laws, not because he is an “embarrassment” as you so often claim in The Indianapolis Star.

Burton has long, and loudly, supported this very simple approach to ethics reform:

Members of Congress and staff should provide timely and full disclosure on gifts and travel, with few exceptions. Those reports should then be itemized on an Internet database that can be easily accessed and searched by the general public. Public scrutiny alone would be powerful enough to ward off many corrupt practices of people on Capitol Hill.

In reading this analysis, I hope most would agree that Congressman Burton was right to stand against the long tradition of window dressing ethics in Congress. If you still disagree, I believe Congressman Burton's vindication will be undeniable when the Democratic Majority, at the urging of numerous Democrats and Republicans, rewrites the ethics rules in the upcoming 111<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Sincerely,

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