

**Testimony of the Hon. Norm Coleman  
United States Senator for Minnesota**

**Rules Committee Hearing to examine procedures  
to make the legislative process more transparent**

**February 13, 2006**

I want to begin by thanking Chairman Lott and Ranking Member Dodd for holding this hearing, and in particular for their focus on transparency, which is at the heart of the matter before us today. I appreciate the opportunity to share my views about reform with the distinguished members of the Rules Committee, as I did recently with the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee.

Few would disagree that the time has come for us in Congress to begin examining reform proposals. Recent allegations and admissions of guilt in the abuse of power, corruption of public office and the disregard for rules and laws of Congress and our nation, have shaken the confidence of the American people in its institutions of government. We need to do more than bring the guilty to justice: we need to examine the system that bred the corruption.

What is at stake here is the future and credibility of this institution. Credibility is the foundation upon which this institution was built and without it we do not have the legitimacy to effectively govern and serve the people that elected us. Our Declaration of Independence states that our government derives its "just Powers from the consent of the governed," and that's why we need to take public doubts about the transparency of government and their leaders' honesty and integrity extremely seriously.

I applaud this Committee's focus on transparency. I have supported Senator McCain's legislation related to increased transparency in our contacts with lobbyists. I have recently taken the additional step of posting on my website all of my Senate travel records. I would note the Chairman's proposal for earmark reform is largely premised on transparency. Transparency is fundamental; there will not be restoration of public trust in government if they believe we have something to hide.

While I strongly support the adoption of immediate measures to reform this body, such as the legislation being advanced by my colleague from Arizona, I would submit that we and the American people would also be well served by the establishment of a truly independent panel that can take careful stock of reform and its short term and long term effects. Change for change's sake is not the answer. These are sensitive and vital organs of government we are operating on, so we need both skill and speed as we work to improve their function.

After all, this is not about representative government looking at a policy and questioning whether we can bring independent judgment. This is about Congress taking a good hard look in the mirror. I firmly believe the best way to make sure our reforms are having the desired effect is

through the development of a truly independent and bipartisan commission comprised of respected individuals from outside the institution.

Senator Nelson of Nebraska (who I am pleased to see here today) and I, along with Senators Allard, Coburn, Enzi, Thomas and Burns, have introduced legislation that creates a bipartisan Commission to Strengthen Confidence in Congress.

We believe this Commission should operate outside of the institutions of Congress to review ideas and to recommend reforms to strengthen the ethics, disclosure and transparency requirements governing the relationship between members of Congress and lobbyists. It will be modeled on initiatives like the 9-11 Commission, and premised in the belief that we have a responsibility to preserve the confidence of the American people.

The Commission will stimulate a thoughtful national dialogue on reform and also provide a "bully pulpit" for Commissioners to hold us in Congress accountable for implementing the reforms they prescribe.

Specifically, the Commission will be strongly bipartisan consisting of an equal number of Republicans and Democrats, none of whom may be sitting members of Congress. The House and Senate Leadership from both parties will come together and pick a chairman and vice chairman, and designate the other members. The Commissioners will be a combination of former members of Congress and other independent voices, including academics, historians, and other experts, and will have the resources and focus needed to do an appropriate analysis of such complex and interrelated issues as earmarks, gifts, disclosure, travel and other relevant matters.

The Commission will issue its first report containing findings, conclusions and recommendations on July 1, 2006, with annual reports thereafter. Commissioners will also be given the ability to hold hearings in order to carry out their duties. In this way, the American people can be assured that reforms we implement are more than cosmetic – that they are working.

This Commission is designed to take the politics and partisanship out of the debate and put the issue in the hands of bipartisan, independent and wise leaders who can strike a proper balance that will both restore confidence and preserve the best of how the legislative branch operates today.

While I do not always believe a Commission represents the most constructive approach to an issue, when the question is one of restoring public confidence in Congress, only through an on-going Commission can we demonstrate to our constituents our seriousness about reform. The greater the stature, independence and legitimacy of the Commission, the more far-reaching its recommendations will be, and the more confidence our constituents will have in this body.

I would like to stress that a Commission need not be viewed as an alternative to pending reform proposals. Regardless of what reforms we do or do not enact here, having an independent commission to monitor this issue over the next several years will only add credibility and accountability to our efforts.



In conclusion, Churchill once admonished military commanders that they faced two potential dangers: inaction because they were timid, or over-commitment because they were rash. Mr. Chairman, one fear I have is that in our haste to demonstrate that we are doing all we can to root out corruption, we will take steps that will ultimately impair our ability to do our jobs for our constituents.

What we need is for a group of trustworthy individuals to do a thorough analysis of the long- and short-term effects of the reforms we are undertaking, to report to us regularly with its findings about the adequacy of these reforms, and hold our feet to the fire.

With the creation of the Commission to Strengthen Confidence in Congress, we can seize the historic opportunity to position the United States Congress to govern more effectively, transparently, confidently, and with the trust and faith of the American people well into the new Century.