

Testimony before  
the Senate Committee on  
Rules and Administration

by  
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My colleague is Bob Hynes who served former President Gerald Ford as his principle Floor staffer when Mr. Ford was the Republican leader in the House.

I would like to make a “modest proposal” at this point. Remove all restrictions on accepting meals. Both watching Members from inside the institution and working with them as a lobbyist for NBC and later for others, I have never known a lunch or dinner to influence a decision. Even the priciest meal is not going to change a vote. So the rather complex rules governing meals are really not necessary,

A further point: I have always believed that the best regulator of political behavior is transparency. If the world can know what someone is doing, they are much less likely to do anything that would draw criticism.

So I would replace the current restrictions on meals with a straightforward reporting requirement. At the beginning of each month every Member would be required to list prominently on their official web-site the meals they and their staff have accepted. Lobbyists, of course would have to report it. But by having the Members make the information available you accomplish two things. You’ve got a double check on the activity. It should show up in both the lobby report as well as the Member’s web site.

The other virtue is that such an approach leaves discretion to the Member. He or she will need to determine what constituents will tolerate. And they would do so with the knowledge that besides the constituents, the information will be reviewed by reporters, editorial writers and opponents.

This is a direct and simply approach. It surely would also be more effective.

I would hope Members would not avoid dinners. Meals are a traditional and common place to discuss business in our society. They can be useful in obtaining information that is helpful in making public policy. Having a point of view presented over a steak is little different than getting the same information sitting in the Member’s office. But reporting such meals would surely be a moderating influence.

One last observation: No reform can prevent those determined to break the rules from doing so. Adding new layers of regulation doesn’t change that. Crooks will be crooks. So there needs to be sufficient penalties for violations. But here a good degree of transparency will also serve well. The political damage from – for example – a formal rebuke on the Floor of the body – would seem like a reasonable deterrent.

Whatever is done, there will be another scandal some day. With luck it will not be as breathtakingly greedy and crude as the one Mr. Abramoff has plead guilty to. But it will happen. Keeping the rules straightforward and simple will make it easier to detect, stop and punish.

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**BIOGRAPHY**

**Bob Hynes** has more than thirty-five years of Washington experience, having served in government, corporate, consulting, and strategic planning positions. Hynes has strong bipartisan ties on Capitol Hill, in the Executive Branch, and with the independent agencies, particularly the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Hynes served as Minority Counsel to the House Rules Committee during which time he co-authored a manual of House procedures, updated editions of which are still used by House Committee Counsels. He served as Legislative Counsel and Parliamentarian to Republican Leader Gerald R. Ford and was Assistant Parliamentarian at three Republican Conventions.

When Mr. Ford was nominated as Vice President, Hynes was a member of the team that handled the Congressional hearings leading to Mr. Ford's confirmation.

Hynes then joined NBC's Washington office where he served for twenty-one years, the last nine as NBC's Vice President. During that time he headed the network's successful efforts seeking to repeal the FCC's financial interest and syndication rules, which prohibited network companies from having any ownership interests in programs they financed and presented on the network. In that capacity he was responsible for the overall strategic planning and implementation of corporate efforts in both the regulatory and legislative arenas.

He is currently serving as chairman of the Arlington County Disability Advisory Commission and serves on the Executive Committee of the Citizens Counsel, advising the County Government on matters of emergency preparedness. Hynes is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati and the University of Cincinnati School of Law.