

January 23, 2006 Last week I mailed each of my congressional colleagues a copy of a speech outlining my views on the lobbying and ethics scandals engulfing Washington. I'm afraid many of them won't like my conclusion: to reduce corruption in government, we must make government less powerful-- and hence less interesting to lobbyists. I find it hard to believe that changing the congressional ethics rules or placing new restrictions on lobbyists will do much good. After all, we already have laws against bribery, theft, and fraud. We already have ethics rules in Congress. We already have campaign finance reform. We already require campaigns and lobbyists to register with the federal government and disclose expenditures. We already require federal employees, including the president and members of congress, to take an oath of office. None of it is working, so why should we think more rules, regulations, or laws will change anything? Lobbying, whether we like it or not, is constitutionally protected. The First amendment unequivocally recognizes the right of Americans to "petition the government for a redress of grievances." We can't deal with corruption in government by ignoring the Constitution. I don't believe the problem is corrupt lobbyists or even corrupt politicians per se. The fundamental problem, in my view, is the very culture of Washington. Our political system has become nothing more than a means of distributing government largesse, through tax dollars confiscated from the American people-- always in the name democracy. The federal budget is so enormous that it loses all meaning. What's another million or so for some pet project, in an annual budget of \$2.4 trillion? No one questions the principle that a majority electorate should be allowed to rule the country, dictate rights, and redistribute wealth. It's no wonder a system of runaway lobbying and special interests has developed. When we consider the enormous entitlement and welfare system in place, and couple that with a military-industrial complex that feeds off perpetual war and encourages an interventionist foreign policy, the possibilities for corruption are endless. We shouldn't wonder why there is such a powerful motivation to learn the tricks of the lobbying trade-- and why former members of Congress and their aides become such high priced commodities. The dependency on government generated by welfarism and warfarism, made possible by our shift from a republican to a democratic system of government, is the real scandal of the ages. If we merely tinker with current attitudes about the role of the federal government in our lives, it won't do much to solve the ethics crisis. True reform is impossible without addressing the immorality of wealth redistribution. After all, criminals by definition ignore laws; unethical people ignore the rules of ethics. Changing the rules or the players is merely a band-aid if we don't change the nature of the game itself.