

the Senate for the past three weeks. It has now been exactly four months since Duke Cunningham resigned from the House after pleading guilty to bribery, tax evasion, and mail fraud charges. It has now been almost three months since Jack Abramoff pled guilty to defrauding Indian tribes.

In the aftermath of both guilty pleas, Members on both sides of the aisles in both Houses of Congress brought forward good proposals to change the culture that led to these scandals, and yet here we are on March 28th with a half-finished ethics bill in the Senate and even less in the House.

I know there are many important issues facing our country—health care, education, the war in Iraq, and, as I just mentioned, immigration—but it is equally important that we as Members of Congress consider how we are going to deal with the cloud of corruption that hangs over the Capitol and how that affects the issues which are important to the American people. For that reason, I sincerely hope the leadership of both parties will be able to reach an agreement to bring this bill back to the floor before our next recess.

The American people are tired of a Washington that is only open to those with the most cash and the right connections. They are tired of a political process where the vote you cast isn't as important as the favors you do. And they are tired of trusting us with their tax dollars when they see them spent on frivolous pet projects and corporate giveaways.

It is not a game that is new in this town. It is not particularly surprising to the public. People are not naive about the existence of corruption. They know it has worn the face of both Republicans and Democrats over the years. So the hope is that we could find a bipartisan solution to the problem.

Before the recess, we made some progress on the ethics bill. I was pleased to join with Senator DODD on an amendment to ban Members and staff from accepting meals from lobbyists. And when we get back to the bill, I will be joining Senators SANTORUM, MCCAIN, LIEBERMAN, and FEINGOLD in offering an amendment to define the way we reimburse corporate jet travel. I would like to spend a few minutes talking about this amendment.

During the past 5 years, Members of Congress, Presidential candidates, and political parties have used the corporate jets of 286 companies a total of more than 2,100 times. Despite the fact that a single flight of these jets can cost tens of thousands of dollars, the average reimbursement rate has only been about \$1,700 per trip. So far, politicians have gotten away with this because current law only requires us to reimburse the cost of a first-class ticket on these charter flights, not the actual cost of operating the plane. But since we are usually the only passengers on the plane who don't work for the company, this rule is effectively giving us thousands of dollars in

unwarranted discounts. This has to change.

Let me say this to my colleagues: Although I discontinued the practice earlier this year, I have used corporate jets in the past. I know some of the other proponents of this amendment have done the same. I know how convenient these charters can be. I know that a lot of my colleagues, particularly those from large States, will oppose this rule change because it makes it significantly more difficult and costly to interact with their constituents who live in less populated parts of their States. So I am not unsympathetic to these concerns. There are many parts of Illinois in which there is no commercial air service.

But this isn't about our convenience. It is about our reputation as public servants who are here to work for the common voter, not the highest bidder. We all know that corporations are not allowing us to use their jets out of the kindness of their hearts. It is yet another way that lobbyists try to curry influence with lawmakers.

One lobbyist told USA Today about the advantages of allowing Members of Congress to use his jet. He said:

You can sit down and have a cocktail and talk casually about a matter, rather than rushing in between meetings on Capitol Hill.

A lobbyist for a telecommunications company is quoted as saying that providing a jet to a lawmaker "gives us an opportunity to form relationships, to have a long stretch of time to explain issues that are technical and complicated. If it wasn't useful, we wouldn't do it." The vast majority of the people we represent don't have the money to buy that access and form those relationships. They don't have the ability to fly us around on their private planes. In fact, they are having enough trouble paying the mortgage and their medical bills and their kids' college tuition. And they expect us to listen to their issues with the same concern we would any lobbyist or corporation with a jet.

I know that some say that legislation isn't really being discussed on these flights. But appearances matter. If we want to be serious about showing our constituents that we are fighting for them—and not just for the wealthy and powerful—we can't allow a small number of special interests to be subsidizing our travel.

If there isn't enough commercial air service in a state and there is a need to take a charter flight, then we should pay the full cost of the charter. If there is not enough money in our Senate travel accounts to cover these costs, then we should increase our travel budgets. What we shouldn't do is allow lobbyists to pick up the tab.

I know this may not be a popular amendment. I know many of my colleagues will be inconvenienced if it is adopted; I will be as well. But if we are serious about cleaning up the way we do business in Washington, it is an important step for us to take. I hope my

colleagues will do the right thing and support this amendment.

In closing, let me say it is obvious we are not going to be able to finish ethics reform today. I know Senator LOTT and Senator DODD are working diligently to try to get this bill back on the floor. I also am aware of the importance of the immigration bill that we are going to be considering for the next two weeks. But I have to insist that we bring this ethics and lobbying bill back to the floor as soon as practicable and that we get to work on getting a bill passed and sent over to the House. The American people expect us to take strong action to clean up the way we do business in this city. They have been waiting for a long time. It is time we got to work.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LOBBYING AND RULES REFORM

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, for the information of all of our colleagues, we should be getting some indication from our leadership soon as to when and how we will proceed on the lobbying and rules reform legislation. Of course, a major part of our time this week will necessarily be involved in considering the immigration reform legislation that was reported out of the Judiciary Committee on a bipartisan vote on Monday night. But I do think that we should go back to this very important issue also, which has been pending now for 3 weeks.

This is a bipartisan piece of legislation from two different committees. It is one of those rare but blessed occasions when Republican and Democrat, chairman and ranking members, can work together. Senator DODD and I worked together on this legislation, along with Senator FEINSTEIN and other Democrats, to shape the package that came out of the Rules Committee. Senator COLLINS, the chairman of the very important Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, was able to get legislation out of her committee working with Senator LIEBERMAN of Connecticut. Good work is being done. We were making progress and were about to get into a position where we could have wrapped the legislation up in a couple of days.

However, Senator SCHUMER proposed an amendment involving the Dubai World ports issue, and that caused the legislation to be stopped. That issue now is being dealt with by transferring the responsibility for the operations of those terminals to domestic companies. So that issue is being addressed, for now. I believe Senator SCHUMER has

indicated that he is willing to withdraw his amendment, and we can go forward.

The pending business then would be the Wyden amendment on the issue of holds and how secret holds could be dealt with in this body. Some Senators have some concerns about the amendment. I would like for us to step up and address that issue and work with our leaders. That is a Rules Committee issue and I have held a hearing on the issue of holds. I support the Wyden-Grassley approach, but I think that when it involves rules that directly impact how the Senate operates day-to-day, the leaders of our two parties in the Senate have to have major input in how we deal with the issue in the future.

There are other issues that are pending that have interest and support. Obviously, one of those is the amendment by Senator COLLINS and Senator LIEBERMAN dealing with establishing a new Office of Public Integrity. That issue was considered in their committee, and they would like for it to be considered on the floor. I certainly understand that and would be supportive of that because it is supported by these two leaders of that committee. But we have 77 amendments filed as first-degree amendments, most of which are not germane to the bill. So I have to ask my colleagues: Are we serious about lobbying reform and rules reform?

There are some good things in here. I don't support all of them, and on a bill of this magnitude nobody is going to support all of it. But I think we need to step up and resolve these issues. We do need reform in the lobbying area and some changes in the rules especially in the area of disclosure. We also need a mechanism to deal with earmarks that have not been considered by either the House or the Senate, and then are inserted in conference reports.

We are going to have to deal with all these issues sooner or later. We can do it now or we can do it later. Some people I suspect hope this entire package of reforms will slide off the face of the Earth and disappear. It is not going to. It is here, and it is going to come back. We can do it today if the leaders give us that charge or we can come back to it later as filler or we can be the legislative yo-yo. But this issue is going to be dealt with. I hope we can come up with a way to get it done even today, if possible.

We have actually lost a full day. We could have been working on this yesterday afternoon. We could have been working on it this morning. There are other issues that are of interest and concern to the Members and to the leaders, so I understand how that goes. But if every Senator presumes to offer his or her amendment and demand a recorded vote, we will not ever finish it. Maybe the American people are not that focused. Obviously, when I was home I got a lot of questions about immigration, about taxes, but I got one

call, just one, about this bill. It was from somebody who was concerned about something they hoped we would not put in the bill. Actually, it was a lobbyist, and I didn't even agree with what he was saying.

I think we should reconsider the cloture vote as soon as possible. I will support it no matter at what point it occurs. We can consider two or three of these amendments or several of them or not. But we need to step up to the issue, vote cloture, and complete this legislation as soon as possible.

I ask my colleagues: Who wants to take the blame for not getting this done? I was very disturbed about the way this was brought to a halt because I had yielded for what I was clearly told were going to be comments and all of a sudden, we were hit with a second-degree amendment that had no applicability to this at all.

We need to get together in a bipartisan way to address this issue, and we need to do it now. If we do not, somebody is going to have to explain it. The way I will explain it is not going to be positive because we have a commitment and we need to go forward with it.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The time for morning business has expired.

The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed as in morning business for a period of time not to exceed 15 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LOBBYING AND RULES REFORM

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, let me begin my comments by commending the Senator from Mississippi for his excellent statement. The Senator from Mississippi deserves great credit for working with his ranking member, Senator DODD, to craft a lobbying reform and disclosure bill on the provisions that were under the Rules Committee jurisdiction. Similarly, I worked very closely with the ranking Democrat on the homeland security committee to come up with a bipartisan bill that reflects issues that are under the jurisdiction of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

The result is a strong bill. We have married the bills reported by the two committees on the Senate floor. We have produced legislation that I think would help to restore the public's confidence in the integrity of the decisions that we make in Washington. Some may ask: Why does this matter? Why should we enact lobbying disclosure and reform legislation? The reason is, if the public does not trust us to make

decisions that are not tainted by undue influence from special interests, then we will not, as a Congress, be able to tackle the major issues facing our country. If the bonds of trust between those we represent and public officials are so frayed, then we are not going to be able to make the tough decisions, the hard choices that are necessary when tackling the big issues and challenges that confront our country.

The issues before the Senate in this bill are pressing and serious. Recent scandals involving Jack Abramoff and former Representative Duke Cunningham have brought to light the need for Congress to reevaluate practices that, although legal, raise questions about the integrity of decisions that are made or at least create the appearance of conflicts of interest and undue influence. We need to ban practices that erode the public's confidence in the integrity of Government's decisions. We need to have greater disclosure of the amount of money spent on lobbying and how it is spent. I think sunlight is the best disinfectant in many cases, and providing and requiring greater disclosure will make a real difference.

All of us here today recognize that lobbying, whether done on behalf of a business organization, an environmental cause, a children's advocacy group, an educational institution or any other cause can provide us with very useful information that does not dictate but does aid our decision-making process. We should remember that lobbying actually has a noble history. The word comes to us from Great Britain when individuals would gather in the lobby of Parliament in order to talk to members, and the medium of exchange was ideas and not favors.

Today, unfortunately, the word "lobbying" too often conjures up images of all-expense-paid vacations masquerading as factfinding trips, special access that the average citizen can never have, and undue influence that leads to decisions not being made in the public interest. The corrosive effect of that image on the public's confidence in the decisions that we make cannot be underestimated.

We in Congress have an obligation to strengthen that crucial bond of trust between those in Government and those whom Government serves. This legislation is a significant step in that direction, and we need to pass it promptly, without delay.

As my colleague, the Senator from Mississippi, has mentioned, there are some 77 amendments that have been filed to this bill. Many of them have nothing to do with lobbying or ethics reform. Others only have a very tangential connection. If we are serious about delivering lobbying reform legislation, if we believe that we need to clean up questionable practices, if we want to restore that bond of trust between the public and its elected officials, then we should move forward with this legislation without delay,