

Government Reform

It's no secret that America's faith in its government has been declining. The 2000 and 2004 Presidential elections were both closely contested and concerns were raised that votes were not counted properly and that other deceptive practices were employed to influence their outcomes.

In addition, a growing level of corruption and unethical behavior in Washington has diminished the public trust. The ethical abuses revealed go beyond a few isolated instances of government officials misusing their offices to benefit themselves, their political agenda or their allies. Ultimately, the American public is the victim of these ethical lapses.

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Ethics and Lobbying Reform

Under the new leadership of the House, the 110th Congress moved quickly to adopt reforms after years of mismanagement. During the first 100 hours of the new Congress, Eshoo voted for and the House overwhelmingly adopted the Honest Leadership and Open Government Rules Package that Speaker Pelosi proposed to restore the integrity of the House of Representatives. The reforms will sever the link between lobbyists and legislation and make the Congress more accountable to the public.

Specifically, the reforms will:

- Ban Gifts and Travel from Lobbyists: Members and staff will be prohibited from accepting gifts, meals, and travel from lobbyists.

- Require Adequate Time to Review Legislation: Members will be given three days to review any bill or joint resolution before a vote occurs.

- Ban "Dead of the Night" Special Interest Provisions: The conference committee process will be reformed to require adequate notice of meetings to ensure that Members can attend. The reforms will ensure that information is available to all conferees, that at least one vote is held, and that the text of conference reports cannot be changed after the committee has completed its work.

- Curb Abuses of the House Voting Process: During the 109th Congress, the Majority leadership changed the outcome of key votes by extending the time for votes beyond the typical 15-minute allotment so they could "twist arms" to change votes. A glaring example was the adoption of the Medicare prescription drug bill in 2003, when the vote was held open for nearly three hours. The reforms adopted by the new Congress will prevent votes from being held open for the purpose of changing the result.

- Reform the Use of "Earmarks": The sponsor of each Congressional earmark must be identified in the legislation or the Congressional Record. Members who request earmarks must certify that neither they nor their spouses will financially benefit from them, and that the earmark has a national benefit and not a special interest benefit.

- Reinstate Pay-As-You-Go Budgeting: All new spending as well as tax cuts must be offset to ensure that the federal debt is not increased.

- Mandate Ethics Training: All House employees and Members of Congress will be required to complete ethics training annually.

On July 31st, Rep. Eshoo voted for and the House approved S. 1, the Honest Leadership, Open Government Act of 2007. The vote was 411 to 8. The legislation, which has been sent to the President for his signature, is the most sweeping lobbying reform in a generation and will bring unprecedented transparency to lobbyists' activities and change the way business is done in Washington.

The reforms in S.1 will:

- Provide Greater Transparency: Requires disclosure for lobbyists' contributions to Members of Congress, their charities, and lobbyist-financed travel.

- End the "K-Street Project": Members of Congress are prohibited from influencing the hiring decisions of private organizations solely for the purpose of partisan political gain.

- Establish Online Disclosure: Member travel and personal financial disclosure forms will be available through an online, searchable database.

- Institutes Congressional Accountability: Taxpayer-funded pension benefits are denied to Members of Congress convicted of corruption while serving the American people.

- Closes the Revolving Door: Imposes a one-year 'cooling off' period for Members of Congress and a two-year period for Senators during which they may not lobby former colleagues after leaving office. A similar rule applies to senior staff.

Election Reform

Every election for every public office is important. With more elections being decided by smaller margins, voters need assurances that our voting systems are accurate and not subject to outside influence or manipulation.

Both the 2000 and 2004 Presidential elections were decided by extremely small margins and in both, significant questions were raised regarding the integrity and accuracy of our election process.

The wavering confidence in our election process is not something to be taken lightly - elections are the oxygen of our democracy. Congresswoman Eshoo is committed to do everything she can in Congress to improve our election process to ensure the utmost integrity in our elections.

In response to the 2000 Presidential election, Rep. Eshoo was proud to cosponsor the Help America Vote Act, which was enacted in 2002. This law created the Federal Election Assistance Commission to assist states in dealing with the administrative duties related to elections, authorized funding to assist states in replacing outdated voting equipment and created federal minimum standards for conducting elections.

Rep. Eshoo is an original cosponsor of H.R. 811, the Voter Confidence and Increased Accessibility Act. This legislation requires a voter-verified paper ballot for electronic voting machines to allow voters to see the ballot they are casting and provide a record for a manual recount should one be required. H.R. 811 would also require random, unannounced, hand-count audits of the voter-verified paper records in two percent of all jurisdictions, including at least one precinct per county.

Finally, Rep. Eshoo is also a cosponsor of H.R. 1281, the Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act. This legislation establishes harsh penalties for knowingly deceiving any person regarding the time, place or manner of conducting federal elections. It also requires the Attorney General, in cooperation with the Federal Communication Commission and the Election Assistance Commission, to study the feasibility of using public service announcements, the emergency alert system and other forms of public broadcast to provide correct voting information.

These bills are aimed at improving our election process and ensuring the utmost accuracy and integrity in our elections.

Additional Resources:

For additional information about registering to vote, voting with an absentee ballot or other election and voting issues you can visit the California Secretary of State's website or call (916) 653-6814. You can also contact your individual county election offices using the information below:

San Mateo County

40 Tower Road

San Mateo, CA 94402

Phone: (650) 312-5222

Email: registrar@smcare.org

Website: http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?ln_url=www.shapethefuture.org/

Santa Clara County

1555 Berger Drive, Building 2

San Jose, CA 95112

(408) 299-VOTE

E-mail: registrar@rov.sccgov.org

Website: http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?ln_url=www.sccvote.org

Santa Cruz County

701 Ocean Street, Room 210

Santa Cruz, CA 95060-4076

(831) 454-2060

E-Mail: gail.pellerin@co.santa-cruz.ca.us

Website: http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?ln_url=http://www.votescount.com/

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