

**Washington, D.C.** - U.S. Rep. David Price (NC-04) today said House Republicans are missing the point on restoring the integrity of Congress. The North Carolina Democrat said the bill the House passed today has no chance of ending the rampant abuse of power in Congress because it fails to address the real problem in the recent corruption scandals: unscrupulous activity by some members of Congress and a culture that nurtures it.

"This isn't simply a problem with lobbyists," Price said. "After all, lobbyists have no power or authority to slip special favors into legislation without a willing accomplice in Congress. We had a proposal to tackle this problem, and the Republicans outright refused to consider it."

Price called attention to a much more robust and comprehensive bill that the House Democrats proposed, which would curb abuses in earmark funding, permanently ban travel with lobbyists, and require more transparency and open debate on the business before the House. In a closed-door session last week, the Republican-led Rules Committee rejected the Democratic alternative bill, along with a slew of other amendments from Democrats and Republicans alike. After the Republican refusal to permit a number of bipartisan amendments to strengthen the legislation, the House passed the bill by a vote of 217-213, with reformers from both parties voting against the measure.

Recognizing that the House Republican leadership had little interest in reigning in its own abuses of authority, which have contributed to a culture of corruption in the House, Price and three of his colleagues stepped forward late last year with a reform bill of their own. Price, along with Reps. David Obey (WI-07), Barney Frank (MA-04), and Tom Allen (ME-01) – the so-called "Gang of Four" – released a 14-point plan to limit not only the influence of lobbyists, but also the ability of the House Republican leadership to abuse its authority in running the House. Many of the "Gang of Four" reforms were subsequently incorporated into the Democratic Caucus' lobbying reform bill, which was blocked from consideration by House Republicans last week.

"The House leadership had a real chance to enact real reform, not for the sake of an aggrieved minority, not for the sake of election-year politics, but for the sake of the integrity of our institution," Price said. "What we got instead was a cynical effort to sweep this issue under the rug before the fall elections. The majority party has simply resigned lobbying reform to the dustbin of empty rhetoric and hollow solutions."

In a January column for the New York Times, congressional scholars Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann of the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution, respectively, wrote that after observing 36 years of Washington politics, "we have never seen the culture so sick or the legislative process so dysfunctional." Orstein and Mann point to the abuses of power that Price has sought to eliminate with his ethics bill and draw a clear connection between a breakdown in the democratic process and corruption in the Republican Congress.

"If you can play fast and loose with the rules of the game in lawmaking, it becomes easier to consider playing fast and loose with everything else, including relations with lobbyists, acceptance of favors, the use of official resources and the discharge of governmental power," write Orstein and Mann.

A chorus of editorial boards and commentators across the country have denounced the Republican approach to lobbying reform as a "sham" and "diluted snake oil" (Washington Post), a "Bill to Nowhere" (New York Times), and "watered down" (Raleigh News and Observer).

Price said given the importance of restoring the public's confidence in the legislative branch, he and many of his colleagues will continue to press for meaningful reform, despite the majority party's efforts to dispense with the issue.

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The following are remarks for the Congressional Record, submitted by Congressman Price during the floor debate on lobbying reform last Thursday, April 27, 2006:

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join my colleagues in making a point that seems to be lost on the leadership of this House: this is not simply a "lobbyist problem" we are facing. Ensuring that lawmakers comply with existing ethics rules and enhancing lobbyist disclosure requirements are important goals, and even on this measure, the so-called "Lobbying Accountability and Transparency Act" falls embarrassingly short.

What started as a limited but seemingly earnest attempt at reform has been progressively

hollowed out over the past several weeks in--you guessed it--closed-door meetings with lobbyists. The result is not surprising. Reporting requirements for lobbyist-hosted fundraisers? Gone. No more bargain rates on corporate jets? Gone. A study to examine lobbyist employment contracts? Gone.

But again, this is not simply a lobbyist problem. House Democrats have tried in earnest to offer a plan for reform that takes a hard look in the mirror and examines what Congress must do to clean up its own house.

My colleagues Dave Obey, Barney Frank, Tom Allen and I have introduced a fourteen-point plan that would address not only individual abuses, but also the abuses of the legislative process. Our proposal would end the practice of keeping votes held open long enough to twist recalcitrant arms into compliance. It would prevent legislation from being slipped into conference reports without conference approval. It would require House-Senate conferences to actually meet and vote. And it would give Members of Congress at least a full day to examine the contents of any legislation we are voting on.

We have testified before the Rules Committee in favor of this comprehensive approach. During Rules Committee markup of this bill and again during the hearing on the rule last night, numerous amendments were offered and defeated--mostly on party-line votes--that would have implemented these reforms. The Democratic Substitute, which was also denied a fair hearing last night, recognized the need to take a comprehensive approach to lobbying and ethics reform. At each step in the process, our attempts at genuine, bipartisan reform were turned away.

So what did we get instead? It's no surprise: a bill that could serve as a case study in everything that is broken in our legislative process--of everything we should be reforming. We get a so-called "Lobbying Accountability and Transparency Act" that offers neither accountability nor real transparency. We get a minority party--and many Members of the majority--completely shut out of the process once again, their amendments denied, their advice and concerns unheeded. We get a restrictive rule that makes in order just nine out of the 74 amendments offered--and only one sponsored by a Democrat without a Republican cosponsor--and allows for only one hour of debate on what should be one of the most significant bills we consider all year.

This leadership had a real chance to enact real reform, not for the sake of an aggrieved minority, not for the sake of election-year politics, but for the sake of our institution, for its

integrity and its capacity to govern. Instead, they seem to think they can convince the American people that they're cleaning up our House, when all they're doing is sweeping our problems under the rug.

Well Mr. Speaker, the American people will not be so easily fooled. And I assure you that those of us in this body who want real, comprehensive reform will not rest until we have successfully enacted such a measure. But this is not such a measure. I urge my colleagues to oppose this legislation.

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