

## United States Senate

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS  
HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 220  
SECOND AND CONSTITUTION AVENUE, NE  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6425

July 25, 2008

Dear Colleague:

The Select Committee on Ethics is issuing this reminder to Senate Members and staff on the application of the Senate Gifts Rule to the **national political conventions**.

**What has changed?** Under the new rule, a Member may *not* participate in an event honoring that Member if it is paid for directly by a lobbyist or private entity that retains or employs a lobbyist. This includes events where a specific Member or Members are identified by name or title, and events honoring a group composed solely of Members. This does not include an event where a Member is a featured speaker. In addition, Members and staff may *not* accept gifts of any value (including free attendance at an event) from registered lobbyists, agents of a foreign principal, or private entities that retain or employ them, *except* as permitted by one of the specific exceptions to the Gifts Rule.

**What has not changed?** The new ethics law has not changed the Gifts Rule exceptions that most commonly apply at the conventions, which are as follows:

- 1) The rule permits **national party and convention committees, state and local party organizations, campaign committees, and the host city's official host committee** to provide transportation, food, lodging, refreshments, entertainment, and other benefits in the host city, in connection with attendance at the convention. The rule also allows acceptance of local transportation, food, refreshments, or entertainment in connection with any fundraising event sponsored by a political organization.
- 2) The rule permits acceptance of a gift paid for by any unit of **federal, state, or local government**, including items paid for by the cities of Denver or Minneapolis-St. Paul.
- 3) An invitation to a **reception** may be accepted, including food or refreshment of nominal value (offered other than as part of a meal).
- 4) The rule permits free attendance at a **charity event** at the invitation of the event sponsor, including the acceptance of local transportation, food, refreshments, or entertainment that are a part of the event.
- 5) The rule permits free attendance at a **widely-attended event** at the invitation of the event sponsor. According to the *Senate Ethics Manual*, at p. 44 (2003 ed.), this large-group exception applies to events associated with attendance at the conventions where at least 25 non-congressional attendees are invited to the event. Senate invitees may attend and accept local transportation, food, refreshments, or entertainment that are part of the event.

- 6) Additionally, accepting a **T-shirt or baseball cap** of reasonable value is permitted by the rule, and accepting **non-food items that have a value of \$10 or less, in the aggregate**, is also permitted.

Unless specifically permitted by the rule as discussed above, all other gifts (other than from a relative or personal friend) must comply with the Gifts Rule's per gift limit of less than \$50 and the \$100 annual limit, as well as the restrictions on gifts from registered lobbyists, agents of a foreign principal, or private entities that retain or employ them.

Please contact the Committee at (202) 224-2981 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Barbara Boxer  
Chairman



Mark Pryor, Member



Ken Salazar, Member



John Cornyn  
Vice Chairman



Pat Roberts, Member



Johnny Isakson, Member