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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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November 10, 2011

The Honorable Darrell E. Issa
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to request that the Committee hold a hearing with former lobbyist and convicted felon Jack Abramoff, who was recently released from prison after completing a three-and-a-half year sentence.

Over the past several years, the Oversight Committee has worked in a bipartisan manner to investigate the illegal activities of Mr. Abramoff and his associates, as well as the implications of his actions on the transparent and effective operation of our government. Our predecessors, Reps. Tom Davis and Henry A. Waxman, worked together across successive Congresses to investigate Mr. Abramoff's abuses, and I hope we can do the same.

For example, during the 109th Congress, when Rep. Davis was Chairman and Rep. Waxman was Ranking Member, the Committee issued a bipartisan staff report in 2006 on the lobbying contacts between Mr. Abramoff and White House officials. The report found that, according to billing records and e-mails provided by Mr. Abramoff's former firm, Greenberg Traurig, "Abramoff and his Greenberg associates had 485 lobbying contacts with White House officials between January 2001 and March 2004." The report described some of the results of these lobbying efforts, as well as instances in which the Abramoff team billed clients for meals with White House officials or offered tickets to sporting events or concerts to White House officials.¹

After the report was released, White House officials disavowed its findings. For example, White House spokesperson Dana Perino stated: "The billing records that are the basis

¹ House Committee on Government Reform, *Staff Report on Jack Abramoff*, 109th Cong. (Sept. 29, 2006) (online at <http://oversight-archive.waxman.house.gov/abramoff/docs/abramoff.pdf>).

for this report are widely viewed as fraudulent. ... There is no reason why they should suddenly be viewed as credible.”²

When Rep. Waxman became Chairman and Rep. Davis became Ranking Member in the 110th Congress, they issued a second bipartisan report in 2008, which concluded:

The testimony and documents obtained by the Committee following the September 2006 Committee staff report confirm that Mr. Abramoff had access to the White House. Further, the record before the Committee contradicts White House claims that with respect to his White House contacts, Mr. Abramoff got “nothing out of it.” Not only did Mr. Abramoff achieve some positive results from his White House lobbying, but White House officials sought out the views of Mr. Abramoff and his colleagues on matters of official business.³

The report also found that three former White House officials refused in whole or in part to answer the Committee’s questions on Fifth Amendment grounds.⁴

On January 3, 2006, Mr. Abramoff pleaded guilty to conspiracy, fraud, and tax evasion. His plea agreement stated that, in addition to encouraging his clients to pay inflated fees, Mr. Abramoff and his associates provided a stream of things of value to public officials in exchange for a series of official acts and influence. These things of value included paying for meals, travel, tickets for entertainment and sporting events, and providing campaign contributions.⁵

Now, after serving a three-and-a-half-year sentence, Mr. Abramoff has been released from prison and is conducting press interviews about the scope of his corruption. For example, in an interview with *60 Minutes*, Mr. Abramoff stated:

I think people are under the impression that the corruption only involves somebody handing over a check and getting a favor. And that’s not the case. The corruption, the bribery, call it, because ultimately that’s what it is, that’s what the whole system is.⁶

² *White House Disputes Clout of Abramoff*, Chicago Tribune (Sept. 30, 2006) (online at http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2006-09-30/news/0609300099_1_jack-abramoff-white-house-rove).

³ House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, *Report on Jack Abramoff’s Contacts with White House Officials*, 110th Cong. (June 11, 2008) (online at <http://oversight-archive.waxman.house.gov/documents/20080609101725.pdf>).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Plea Agreement, *U.S. v. Jack A. Abramoff*, Case No. 06-001 (D.D.C. Jan. 3, 2006).

⁶ “Jack Abramoff: The Lobbyist’s Playbook,” *60 Minutes*, CBS News (Nov. 6, 2011) (online at http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18560_162-57319075/jack-abramoff-the-lobbyists-playbook/#ixzz1d1v3LLyV).

Mr. Abramoff claims that he is coming forward now because he is “ashamed” of his actions and “now I’m trying to do something, in recompense.” Although I do not necessarily credit his rationale, I do believe it would be worthwhile to obtain Mr. Abramoff’s testimony in order to complete our examination into the extent of his influence over White House and Executive Branch officials. In addition, Mr. Abramoff could shed light on whether existing rules governing contacts between lobbyists and the Executive Branch and Congress are adequate to protect the interests of the public, and to determine whether additional reforms may be necessary. According to Mr. Abramoff:

The reform efforts continually are these faux-reform efforts where they’ll change, they’ll tweak the system. ... [T]he system hasn’t been cleaned up at all.⁷

As you know, during the Committee’s previous investigations, we did not obtain testimony from Mr. Abramoff. As explained in the Committee’s previous reports, the Department of Justice requested that the Committee defer its efforts to obtain testimony from Mr. Abramoff while the Department continued its criminal investigations, and the Committee responsibly agreed to that request. Now that these investigations have concluded, there is no longer any impediment to Mr. Abramoff appearing before the Committee.

For all of the reasons above, I request that you schedule a hearing to allow the Oversight Committee—which has done more to investigate these abuses than any Committee in Congress—to hear directly from Mr. Abramoff about the scope of his abuses and whether additional reforms are necessary to ensure that a public corruption scandal like this never occurs again.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,


Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member

⁷ *Id.*