

After Working to Strengthen Bill, Castle Backs Lobbying Reform Package -- May 3, 2006

Will continue to push to improve package during Conference

Washington, D.C. -- After working to improve "The Lobbying Accountability and Transparency Act" by passing two of his amendments and backing other reform-minded amendments, Delaware Congressman Mike Castle today supported the overall legislation, saying he believes it is a good start and better than the status quo, but hopefully the bill will be made even stronger in Conference.

Before the vote on final passage, Castle backed a Democrat-authored substitute, which included important reforms such as banning all gifts, increasing lobbyist disclosure, revoking retirement benefits for Members convicted of a crime and ending the practice of adding special interests in the middle of the night, but that substitute failed. Specifically, Castle worked to improve the base bill by passing amendments to require ethics training for lobbyists and to ensure lobbyists are held liable for knowingly violating the gift ban.

"Today we took our first step towards enacting real reform for the way lobbyists and Members conduct their business in Congress. I first voted for a substitute bill that contained stronger reforms including banning all gifts, increasing lobbyist disclosure, revoking retirement benefits for Members convicted of a crime and ending the practice of adding special interests in the middle of the night. I was disappointed this legislation failed.

"However, because I believe so passionately that lobbying practices must be more transparent in the nation's capital, I felt it was important to pass this legislation as a start, which was improved by my and other amendments. The House agreed to two of my amendments to require lobbyists to undergo ethics training and to ensure that lobbyists are held liable for violating the gift ban, as Members already are.

"I view this as the beginning of a process that will hopefully produce a more comprehensive reform package. I will personally be pushing to improve this bill. For example, we need an outside, independent Commission on Investigations to review suggested unethical or illegal activities in Congress. This was included in an amendment I offered but, was not allowed to be debated on the Floor. We also need to require Members of Congress to pay the full fare for charter flights. I also hope that the Leadership makes good on their word to ensure that earmark reform applies across the board -- to appropriations, authorization and tax bills. I will push for all of these provisions as the bill moves forward in Conference with the Senate-passed bill, which I believe is much stronger."