



Written Statement of John H. Graham IV, CAE  
President and CEO, American Society of Association Executives (“ASAE”)  
“Lobbying Reform: Accountability through Transparency”  
House Committee on Rules  
March 9, 2006

Chairman Dreier, Rep. Slaughter, and Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the important issue of lobbying reform.

I am John Graham, president and CEO of the American Society of Association Executives (“ASAE”), a 501(c)(6) tax exempt organization founded in 1920 and representing roughly 23,000 members who staff trade, professional and philanthropic organizations in the U.S. and in 50 countries worldwide. Among the member benefits provided by ASAE to its members are education and skills training; credentialing; access to industry research; access to industry partners who supply services to associations; and advocacy on issues that impact or threaten to impact the success of the association and nonprofit community. In short, our members represent nearly every trade, profession, or philanthropic cause one might imagine.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to dialogue with you on the issue of lobbying reform, because at its heart, lobbying is a constitutional right, and an honorable and fundamental principle of American democracy. We have all read the recent headlines about abuse of existing rules governing the act of lobbying, and hence, we fully comprehend and support the need to reexamine these rules to ensure public accountability and trust in the political process.

Nevertheless, we ask that in its examination of various reform proposals, Congress not lose sight of the obligation to preserve legislators’ access to firsthand information about the impact of legislation, regulations, and other public policy on various trades, professions and philanthropic causes across the country.

One such proposal in particular – a ban on privately funded congressional travel – poses a serious threat to the educational exchange between Congress and associations. ASAE believes a ban on privately funded travel by members of Congress or their staff would severely curtail congressional visits to association meetings or conferences where the primary purpose is education. The companies or individuals who belong to associations may in many cases be on the front lines of an issue, uniquely qualified to share their

perspectives on how legislation might directly impact their trade, profession or charitable cause.

Some House leaders have raised the possibility of a temporary moratorium on privately funded travel to last through the year and afford time for the House to develop a pre-approval system for travel to events such as association conferences outside Washington, DC. ASAE believes the House is on the right track in considering such a pre-screening system. Congress must create a distinction between unnecessary “fact-finding” trips to exotic locales where the agenda is more socially or recreationally driven, and educational trips to an association meeting or conference, where an association might pay for an elected official’s domestic plane or train ticket. ASAE would contend that such conferences provide a setting outside of Washington, DC, where lawmakers can see and hear firsthand how legislation impacts a particular constituency.

However, if a moratorium is enacted, ASAE hopes that the bill’s authors would make clear in the bill language the temporary nature of this solution, and alleviate any concerns in the association community of a one-year moratorium turning into a more extended travel ban. An extended moratorium on privately funded travel would without a doubt be a “lose-lose” outcome for Congress and for the association sector.

Approximately 97 million U.S. and 16 million international members pay dues to a U.S. trade or professional association. The primary reason they belong to associations is for education and training. Nearly all associations (94%) invest in education and training programs for their members and the principal vehicle for delivering that education and training is via meetings and conferences across the U.S. In 2004, 21 million people attended association trade shows, conventions, conferences and seminars and nearly 5 million attended committee and board meetings. These industry events are enhanced by the attendance of members of Congress or congressional staff who can share with attendees the thinking back on Capitol Hill and gather valuable feedback from those attendees that they might not otherwise obtain.

Lastly, I would like to say that we are thankful both chambers of Congress appear to be addressing this issue through a deliberate process. With careful consideration of these various reform proposals, Congress can avoid a rush to judgment that might result in unintended consequences for the legitimate, vital dialogue between elected officials and our community of trade, professional and philanthropic organizations.

We look forward to continuing a discussion with Congress on the travel issue, and ASAE stands ready to answer any questions members of the committee or their staff may have on the subject.

Please contact ASAE’s Senior Vice President for Public Policy Jim Clarke for more information at 202-626-2703 or email him at [jclarke@asaenet.org](mailto:jclarke@asaenet.org).

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