

United States Senate

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

December 31, 2008

Dear Colleague:

The Select Committee on Ethics has received inquiries regarding attendance at events held in connection with the Presidential Inauguration in January 2009. Thus, the Committee is issuing this guidance to Senate Members and staff on the application of the Senate Gifts Rule to inaugural-related events.

The Gifts Rule exceptions that most commonly apply to events held in connection with the Presidential Inaugural are as follows:

- 1) The rule permits free attendance at a **widely-attended event** at the invitation of the event sponsor. Under this large-group exception, a Member or staffer may accept an offer of free attendance from the Presidential Inaugural Committee or another private organization for an event sponsored by the entity if at least 25 persons from outside Congress are expected to attend, the event is open to members from throughout a given industry or profession, or to a range of persons interested in an issue, and the Member or staffer determines that attendance is appropriately connected with his or her official duties or position. Free attendance permits the acceptance of local transportation, food, refreshments, or entertainment that are part of the event.
- 2) An invitation to a **reception** may be accepted, including food or refreshment of nominal value (offered other than as part of a meal).
- 3) 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.
- 4) The rule permits acceptance of a gift paid for by any unit of **federal, state, or local government**. Thus, Senate Members and staff may accept tickets to inaugural-related events from federal, state, or local government entities.
- 5) The rule permits free attendance at a **fundraising event** sponsored by a political organization. It also permits free attendance at a non-fundraising event, but only if the invitation is from the sponsoring political organization.
- 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, any other gifts to Members and staff (other than from a relative or personal friend) must comply with the Gifts Rule's per gift limit of less than \$50 and \$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



John Cornyn
Vice Chairman