



### **Initiating Questions:**

1. If a person donates money to a lawmaker, can they ask him or her to vote a certain way?
2. What is bribery?
3. What are some ethical dilemmas faced by politicians?

### **Reading Comprehension Questions:**

1. What crimes did Jack Abramoff plead guilty to?

*Lobbyist Jack Abramoff, who pleaded guilty to fraud, tax evasion and conspiracy, is the key witness in an investigation into allegations that members of Congress accepted money and other gifts from Abramoff and his associates in exchange for votes.*

2. Jack Abramoff is seen as a symbol of a larger problem. What problem is that?

*Lobbyist Jack Abramoff, who pleaded guilty to fraud, tax evasion and conspiracy, is the key witness in an investigation into allegations that members of Congress accepted money and other gifts from Abramoff and his associates in exchange for votes.*

*Abramoff, a close friend of powerful Republican Representative Tom Delay of Texas, has become the public face of what some politicians refer to as the "culture of corruption" in Washington.*

3. What effect will the investigation surrounding Abramoff have?

*The investigation threatens to ensnare several U.S. lawmakers and their aides, rattle the Republican and, possibly, Democratic parties, and change the way lobbyists and lawmakers do business in Washington.*

*Democratic challengers to the Republican-led Congress -- every seat in the House is up for election in November -- say the unethical behavior*

*in Washington is a "Republican problem" and that a change is necessary.*

*Republicans counter that politicians from both parties are guilty of lobbying abuses and the problem is the system, not the party.*

#### 4. What is lobbying?

*Lobbying, or seeking to influence the passage or defeat of legislation, is not only legal, it is protected by the Constitution under the first amendment which guarantees the right "to petition the government for a redress of grievances."*

*Writing a letter to a representative, signing a petition and speaking at a town hall forum are examples of lobbying in its most basic form.*

#### 5. Why do people lobby?

*By lobbying, constituents tell lawmakers how proposed legislation or regulations will affect their community or business.*

#### 6. Who do lobbyists represent?

*Lobbyists are often former congressmen or legislative staffers, hired either by an organization to forward its interests or as a consultant for multiple clients.*

*"There are lobbyists that represent almost every person in this country, whether it's the lobbyist for the AARP, or the lobbyists for the Children's Hospital Association, or the lobbyist for the soy bean growers," said Representative Deborah Pryce, a Republican from Ohio.*

#### 7. When will the Senate consider lobbying reform?

*Lobbying reform legislation will come before the Senate this week after two committees voted in favor of bills which would limit the power and reach of lobbyists.*

#### 8. What types of reforms have been proposed?

*The Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee approved a bill that would require lobbyists to provide detailed reports on their*

*activities four times a year and make them available on the Internet. They previously only had to provide reports twice a year.*

*The legislation also requires lobbyists to disclose their campaign contributions and details of any trips they arrange for politicians.*

*There also was a proposal to create an independent office to oversee congressional ethics issues, but it was voted down.*

*The Senate Rules Committee drafted legislation to curtail the widespread use of "earmarks" -- a practice lawmakers use to insert pet projects such as roads or special programs into larger bills.*

*The bill also prohibits lawmakers from accepting gifts from lobbyists and requires that former congressmen wait two years before registering as lobbyists.*

9. What reforms have already been passed?

*So far, the only lobbying reform approved by the House was to ban former members from using the House gym and from walking on the floor of the House chamber.*

**Discussion Activity (more research might be needed):**

1. Have you ever written your congressman, signed a petition or lobbied the government in any way? Write an essay explaining what you did and why.
2. Write an essay explaining why lobbying is sometimes helpful to government.
3. Write an essay explaining why lobbying is sometimes harmful to government.
4. Write your own proposals for lobbying reform.

**Write a 300-500 word essay on any of these topics providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.**