

Republicans and Democrats talking about lobbying reform but there's one giant loophole lobbyists can still use

Gloria Borger

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TRANSCRIPT:

BOB SCHIEFFER, anchor (Washington, DC):

In this congressional election year, Republicans and Democrats alike are talking about all kinds of lobbying reform, but they do not want to change everything. Here's Gloria Borger.

Crowd: (In unison) No more corruption!

GLORIA BORGER reporting:

With the Jack Abramoff bribery scandal preoccupying Capitol Hill, reform is all the rage on the campaign trail.

Offscreen Voice: (From political TV ad) What is our congressman doing to fix this mess? He's going skiing in Utah with lobbyists!

BORGER: Yet there's a little-noticed loophole that's been conveniently left off the table because it's too good to give up: members' personal charities. Their tax-exempt foundations created by members of Congress. Their donors: lobbyists. Donations to members' charities are unlimited and undisclosed. That's why they work for everyone. If you're a member, it's a great way to raise money for your favorite cause. It's also a way to get lobbyists to pay for your travel to all of those fancy charity events. And if you're a lobbyist, you're buying quality face time and gratitude for your generosity.

Rick Cohen monitors charitable giving and says members' charities can easily become slush funds.

Mr. RICK COHEN (National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy): A lobbyist or a corporation can make a donation to the charity and the charity can then basically pay for the lodging and travel costs of the member of Congress.

BORGER: One example, the Tom DeLay Foundation for Kids which built a home for foster children in Texas. When DeLay was the powerful majority leader, lobbyists lined up to contribute to his foundation raising millions and more than 1 million alone at a 2003 golf outing at the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Florida. Cost to play golf with DeLay and other key members of Congress? At least \$25,000. Cost of an intimate dinner with DeLay? Up to 250,000. The access? Priceless.

While Senator John McCain points out that not all charitable travel is bad, he wants to screen the charity outings paid for by lobbyists to curb the boondoggles.

Senator JOHN McCAIN (Republican, Arizona): Part of the screening process would be exactly what takes place and how the money is spent.

BORGER: Top lobbyists say donations to members' charities are a key-lobbying strategy and will remain so as long as the charity loophole stays as wide open as a fairway. Gloria Borger, CBS News, Washington.

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