

Alliance for a Better Minnesota Fact Check:

Norm Coleman – “Ethics”

Script	Background
<p><i>Have you ever stayed in a hotel room that cost \$500?</i></p> <p><i>Have you ever eaten a dinner that cost \$100?</i></p> <p><i>U.S Senator Norm Coleman has.</i></p>	<p>Coleman Attended Hormel Foods Board Retreat at Pebble Beach; Stayed in \$545 Per Night Hotel Room. In September 2005, Coleman accepted a trip to Pebble Beach, CA, to speak at a Hormel Foods Corporation board retreat. Records show Coleman stayed in a \$545 room for one night and ate at a banquet for 35 that featured steak and prawns, canapés, hors d’oeuvres and \$1,200 worth of wine. The disclosure form estimated the meal cost \$245.65 (the total cost divided by 35 people), but Coleman’s office said he probably had little more than a \$105 plate of steak and prawns. Disclosure forms normally don’t contain such details and aren’t required to. “They’re probably not normal accommodations. I didn’t get to pick the room or not pick the room,” Coleman said. [<i>Secretary of the Senate Travel Records; Minneapolis Star Tribune, 1/21/06</i>]</p>
<p><i>During his first 3 years in office, he took more privately-funded trips than any other US Senator, except for one.</i></p>	<p>2006: Coleman Ranked 2nd In Senate For Privately Financed Trips. In January 2006, the <i>Star Tribune</i> reported “Since coming to Capitol Hill, he ranked second in the number of private trips he has accepted, trailing only Sen. Joe Biden, D-Del., who has accepted 50 over that span.” [<i>Minneapolis Star Tribune, 1/21/06</i>]</p> <p>Coleman Opposed Ban On Privately-Funded Travel To Limit Lobbyists’ Access: Many members of Congress called for a ban on private trips as part of an effort to crack down on lobbyists’ access. Coleman opposed a ban, telling constituents such trips were valuable to his work and hold down costs for taxpayers. [<i>Minneapolis Star Tribune, 1/21/06; Coleman Release, 1/19/06</i>]</p>
<p><i>Last year’s watered down ethics bill doesn’t go far enough.</i></p> <p><i>Powerful Washington lobbyists still have a grip on our democracy.</i></p> <p><i>Tell Norm Coleman to get serious about ethics reform in Washington.</i></p>	<p><u>New Ethics Bill Contains Loopholes, Lacks Teeth:</u></p> <p>Questionable Enforcement. Government watchdogs and ethics lawyers question how the new rules will be enforced. Without an effective organization and infrastructure for managing the flow of new disclosures provided by the law, the legislation won’t mean much. [<i>Washington Post, 8/7/07</i>]</p> <p>Lacks Accountability and Meaningful Enforcement Provisions. The new law lacks strong enforcement provisions to ensure that Washington politicians and lobbyists are held accountable and playing by the rules. While the new law requires additional lobbying reports to be posted and maintained online, the enforcement process has been weakened without a system to manage disclosure information. [<i>Washington Post, 8/7/07; New York Times, 1/3/08</i>]</p>

Watered Down Legislation. The *Washington Post* reported that after a Republican-led blocking of the bill, the Senate watered down several provisions that led to weaker rules on the reporting threshold for bundled contributions and the disclosure of “pet project” earmarks. [*Washington Post*, 8/7/07]

Lobbyists Gift Ban not Strong Enough. The new law still allows industry lobbyists to exploit a loophole in legislation and throw lavish parties for elected officials. [*New York Times*, 1/3/08]

Ethics Panel Lacks Legal Power – Politicians End Up Policing Themselves. The proposed six-member ethics panel charged with reviewing accusations against lawmakers has little legal power to effectively investigate members of Congress, who essentially end up policing themselves. According to the *New York Times*, the panel would have no subpoena power, and while it could dismiss accusations, credible charges would be referred to the existing Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, thus leaving final adjudication where it is now, in the hands of members of Congress policing themselves. [*New York Times*, 1/3/08]

Top Commission Officials Took Trips Paid for by Industry Representatives and Lobbyists. According to one published report last year, top officials at the Consumer Product Safety Commission repeatedly took costly trips at industry expense which were questioned by ethics experts. In one instance, the agency’s own ethics official traveled with the commission chairman as a guest of a regulated industry. Internal reviews also showed nine out of nearly 30 industry-financed trips were sponsored by industries with issues before the commission. [*Washington Post*, 11/6/07]