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THE AGENDA • ETHICS

ETHICS

President Obama led efforts to reform government both in the Illinois State Senate and in the United States Senate. He brings this commitment to making government work for the people, not the special interests, to the White House. President Obama will ensure Washington works for the people, not the special interests.

Shine the Light on Washington Lobbying

- **Centralize Ethics and Lobbying Information for Voters:** President Obama and Vice President Biden will create a centralized Internet database of lobbying reports, ethics records, and campaign finance filings in a searchable, sortable and downloadable format.
- **Require Independent Monitoring of Lobbying Laws and Ethics Rules:** Obama and Biden will use the power of the presidency to fight for an independent watchdog agency to oversee the investigation of congressional ethics violations so that the public can be assured that ethics complaints will be investigated.
- **End the Practice of Writing Legislation Behind Closed Doors:** President Obama will restore the American people's trust in their government by making government more open and transparent. Obama will work to reform congressional rules to require all legislative sessions, including committee mark-ups and conference committees, to be conducted in public. By making these practices public, the American people will be able to hold their leaders accountable for wasteful spending and lawmakers won't be able to slip favors for lobbyists into bills at the last minute.

Shine the Light on Federal Contracts, Tax Breaks and Earmarks

- **Create a Public "Contracts and Influence" Database:** President Obama will create a "contracts and influence" database that will disclose how much federal contractors spend on lobbying, and what contracts they are getting and how well they complete them.
- **Expose Special Interest Tax Breaks to Public Scrutiny:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will ensure that any tax breaks for corporate recipients -- or tax earmarks -- are also publicly available on the Internet in an easily searchable format.
- **End Abuse of No-Bid Contracts:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will end abuse of no-bid contracts by requiring that nearly all contract orders over \$25,000 be competitively awarded.
- **Sunlight Before Signing:** Too often bills are rushed through Congress and to the president before the public has the opportunity to review them. President Obama will not sign any non-emergency bill without giving the American public an opportunity to review and comment on the White House website for five days.
- **Shine Light on Earmarks and Pork Barrel Spending:** Obama's Transparency and Integrity in Earmarks Act will shed light on all earmarks by disclosing the name of the legislator who asked for each earmark, along with a written justification, 72 hours before they can be approved by the full Senate.

Bring Americans Back into their Government

- **Hold 21st Century Fireside Chats:** Obama will bring democracy and policy directly to the people by requiring his Cabinet officials to hold periodic national broadband townhall meetings to discuss issues before their agencies.
- **Make White House Communications Public:** Obama will amend executive orders to ensure that communications about regulatory policymaking between persons outside government and all White House staff are disclosed to the public.
- **Conduct Regulatory Agency Business in Public:** Obama will require his appointees who lead the executive branch departments and rulemaking agencies to conduct the significant business of the agency in public, so that any citizen can see these debates in person or watch them on the internet.
- **Release Presidential Records:** Obama and Biden will nullify attempts to make the timely release of presidential records more difficult.

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SEARCH

Free the Executive Branch from Special Interest Influence

- **Close the Revolving Door on Former and Future Employers:** No political appointees in the Obama-Biden administration will be permitted to work on regulations or contracts directly and substantially related to their prior employer for two years. And no political appointee will be able to lobby the executive branch after leaving government service during the remainder of the administration.
- **Free Career Officials from the Influence of Politics:** Obama will issue an executive order asking all new hires at the agencies to sign a form affirming that no political appointee offered them the job solely on the basis of political affiliation or contribution.
- **Reform the Political Appointee Process:** FEMA Director Michael Brown was not qualified to head the agency, and the result was a disaster for the people of the Gulf Coast. But in the Obama-Biden administration, every official will have to rise to the standard of proven excellence in the agency's mission.
- **Enforce Executive Branch Ethics:** The Obama-Biden administration will give the Office of Governmental Ethics strong enforcement authority with the ability to make binding regulations, and it will work with inspectors general in all the federal agencies to enforce ethics rules, minimize waste and ensure federal officials are not using their offices for personal gain. The OGE will also be the clearinghouse of all public records relevant to ethics in the Executive Branch and place this information on its website. Finally, the OGE will promulgate rules and procedures to record all oral and in-person "lobbying contacts" between registered lobbyists and political appointees and make those records available to the public in a searchable computerized database.

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Spend Taxpayer Money Wisely

- **Performance Team and Chief Performance Officer:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will create a focused team within the White House that will work with agency leaders and the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to improve results and outcomes for federal government programs while eliminating waste and inefficiency. This unit, a SWAT team, will be composed of top-performing and highly-trained government professionals and be headed by a new Chief Performance Officer (CPO) who will report directly to the president. The CPO will work with federal agencies to set tough performance targets and hold managers responsible for progress. The president will meet regularly with cabinet officers to review the progress their agencies are making toward meeting performance improvement targets.
- **Streamline Government Procurement:** Barack Obama will implement the GAO's recommendations to reduce erroneous federal payments, reduce procurement costs with purchase cards, and implement better management of surplus federal property. These initiatives will save \$4.5 billion a year.
- **Protect Whistleblowers:** Often the best source of information about waste, fraud, and abuse in government is an existing government employee committed to public integrity and willing to speak out. Such acts of courage and patriotism, which can sometimes save lives and often save taxpayer dollars, should be encouraged rather than stifled. We need to empower federal employees as watchdogs of wrongdoing and partners in performance. Barack Obama will strengthen whistleblower laws to protect federal workers who expose waste, fraud, and abuse of authority in government. Obama will ensure that federal agencies expedite the process for reviewing whistleblower claims and whistleblowers have full access to courts and due process.
- **Line-by-Line Review of Spending:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will conduct an exhaustive line-by-line review of the federal budget, work to eliminate government programs that are not performing, and demand that new initiatives be selected on the basis of their merits -- not through a political process that rewards lobbyists and campaign donors.
- **Slash Earmarks:** Earmarks grew from \$7.8 billion in 1994 to \$29 billion in 2006. Barack Obama is committed to returning earmarks to less than \$7.8 billion a year, the level they were at before 1994.
- **Shed Sunlight on Corporate Tax Loopholes:** The tax code is riddled with corporate loopholes and preferential regulations that benefit a handful of companies at the expense of the rest of the business community as well as ordinary families. Some large companies have managed to secure tax breaks or hide their profits in overseas tax havens to avoid paying any American corporate taxes at all. Obama and Biden will require any tax bill considered by Congress to include a Corporate Tax Impact Statement that would disclose which industries or specific companies would be expected to benefit from the new tax breaks.

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