

**STATEMENT OF**  
**WILLIAM C. DAROFF**  
**VICE PRESIDENT FOR PUBLIC POLICY**  
**AND**  
**DIRECTOR OF THE WASHINGTON OFFICE**  
**UNITED JEWISH COMMUNITIES**  
**BEFORE THE**  
**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**COMMITTEE ON RULES**  
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Chairman Dreier, Ranking Member Slaughter, Members of the Rules Committee. Thank you for inviting me to speak this morning and thank you for convening this very important hearing on lobbying reform and proposals to limit privately funded Congressional travel. I am William Daroff, Vice President for Public Policy and Director of the Washington Office of United Jewish Communities (UJC) and I am accompanied by Jeffrey Coleman, Deputy Director for Policy and Government Affairs for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

United Jewish Communities is the national organization that represents and serves 155 Jewish federations and 400 independent Jewish communities in more than 800 cities and towns across North America. UJC is the national planning, coordinating and fundraising organization for one of America's largest and most effective networks of social service providers. Our federations, which are the central address of local Jewish community, provide a wide range of services through thousands of affiliated agencies serving more than one million clients each year who are vulnerable and in need of assistance: families, the elderly, new immigrants, and the sick or disabled. We provide assistance here at home, in Israel, and in more than 60 countries around the world.

The focus of my testimony is on the legislative proposals to ban or limit privately funded Congressional travel. UJC believes that providing a variety of educational experiences for Members of Congress is paramount, allowing you to be fully informed on the diversity of matters that come before you. Some of these issues, whether political instability in the Middle East, devastation on the Gulf Coast, a state-of-the-art nuclear facility and its corresponding security, or a quality continuum of care serving our nation's elderly, are best experienced in person and outside of the Beltway. Given the global responsibilities of the United States, it is now more vital than ever for Members of Congress to be as well informed about the rest of the world as possible. We believe there is no substitute for seeing conditions firsthand and meeting foreign leaders and citizens in person, something that a staff memo or Capitol Hill hearing cannot possibly convey. Also important is the opportunity for our country to hear from you in a venue other than C-SPAN, perhaps at a national meeting of one of our organizations.

Denying these travel opportunities would have a profoundly negative impact on American policy-making and on the public interest. Few Members are able to participate in official Congressional delegation trips (CODELs) and we have no expectation that funding for CODELs will expand given the budget pressures this country faces for the foreseeable future. Without the chance to participate in bona fide educational trips, there is little question that Congress' understanding of crucial foreign and domestic policy issues will suffer.

Additionally, UJC is concerned about a moratorium on travel that some have proposed. Our world is ever changing and events are taking place in our global community that our elected officials should have the opportunity to be on the ground experiencing and observing. International examples include the recent Palestinian elections and the takeover of that government by Hamas, and the upcoming Israeli elections. To be candid, we are concerned that once Congress goes down the road of a moratorium, it would be hard for Members to ever lift a moratorium. There will be people up here on the Hill and out there in the media who will argue that since Members and staff have refrained from travel for the past number of months, the moratorium should be made permanent. We think this would be unwise.

Why is UJC so interested in the travel issue? In addition to trips sponsored by Jewish federations and local community relations councils, nationally and locally we partner closely with other Jewish organizations like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the American Jewish Committee, which respectively through the American Israel Education Foundation and Project Interchange, have planned and sponsored trips for hundreds of Members of Congress and staff to Israel, other parts of the Middle East, Germany, Eastern Europe and the republics of the Former Soviet Union, and many other countries around the world, in addition to a variety of trips for Members and staff right here at home.

Some of the reported abuse serving as the backdrop for Congressional reform has focused on travel where lobbyists have paid for trips of little apparent educational value, but rather revolved around exclusive golf and beach resorts and lavish meals. It is these types of excursions that Congress is (and should be) concerned about. They fuel the perception that Members are using these trips as a pretext for all-expense paid junkets while the "work" that he or she does is merely cover for the real purpose of the trip: to have a good time. Taxpayers are properly outraged when contributors to these trips get breaks, including access and favorable legislation that average citizens could not possibly receive. In fact, these types of trips are probably prohibited under current rules and that they have taken place is a failure in enforcement of the rules. We understand and agree with the public backlash to these so-called junkets, but think that banning all privately funded trips is absolutely the wrong solution to this problem.

Let me contrast this type of inappropriate travel with some of the trips to Israel with which we have been involved, using the American Israel Education Foundation (AIEF) trips as an example. Trip organizers are careful to scrupulously follow all Congressional rules related to the recruiting, organizing, planning and financing of these trips. These

are very busy and intense trips with little downtime or relaxation opportunities. Members and staff, through briefings and experiential visits, learn about some of the most critical foreign policy and security issues of the day. They witness first-hand the threats of terrorism, proliferation, and political and religious extremism and learn how the United States and Israel work together in meeting these challenges.

Hundreds of Members of Congress and staff have participated in AIEF and similarly-sponsored trips to Israel and have had the chance to engage in in-depth discussions with Israel's top governmental and military leadership; hear multiple perspectives on important issues of the day; meet with Palestinian leaders to hear their views; witness joint U.S.-Israeli defense projects; and visit key strategic sites. Given the centrality of the Middle East to U.S. national security interests, this type of unique educational experience helps ensure that American policymakers are well informed when making these crucial foreign policy decisions.

Sponsoring organizations have an obligation to make clear that they will fully abide by the established rules and provide the Members' offices and relevant committees with all pertinent information related to the trip. AIEF already does this. In its invitation letters for their trips, AIEF fully and accurately describes what the purpose of the foundation is and its affiliation with AIPAC, a 501(c)(4) organization. This letter also describes the purpose of the trip, the key policy issues that will be covered, and the kind of briefings and meetings that will take place. This invitation letter also directly informs Members that the trip will be in full conformity with applicable Congressional rules.

Prior to departure, Members are provided with a detailed itinerary of the planned on-the-ground program. AIEF also provides both an oral briefing and written materials that describe what the foundation will and will not pay for per House rules. For example, the foundation reminds Members that it will cover expenses only directly related to the official program of the trip and will not cover any personal expenses or those related to recreational activities. AIEF even notifies Members that they themselves will need to pay the nominal daily health club fees at some of the hotels. Approximately three weeks after the trip, the foundation provides the necessary cost information to each Congressional participant to facilitate completion of their required disclosure forms.

To give you an idea of the educational nature of trips to Israel and to distinguish them from some of the less rigorous trips that have been highlighted in recent months, here is what a typical day's program might look like:

- 8:00 am        Breakfast briefing on Israeli political scene by leading journalist
- 9:30 am        Visit Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and Museum
- 12:00 pm      Visit Immigrant Absorption Center and meet with recent immigrants from Ethiopia and Russia

- 2:00 pm Briefing on Palestinian affairs by U.S. Consul General at American Consulate
- 3:00 pm Depart for Ramallah with U.S. Consul General. Meet with officials from the Palestinian Authority
- 6:30 pm Meet with Israeli Prime Minister and top advisers in Jerusalem
- 8:00 pm Dinner Meeting with Members of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the Israeli Knesset
- 11:00 pm Day concludes

In terms of these kinds of trips to Israel, Members are able to immediately translate their educational experience into being better-informed and more critical policy-makers. At a time when some of the greatest dangers facing our country -- proliferation, terrorism and the spread of religious and political extremism -- emanate from the Middle East, Congress and the public interest are better served by having the chance to participate in such trips.

As an example of domestic travel, our Chicago affiliate the Jewish United Fund/Federation of Metropolitan Chicago brought ten Illinois delegation staff members to Chicago for two days this past summer to visit social service agencies supported by the federation and federal programs. This was an intensive fact-finding trip, approved by the House and Senate Ethics Committees, and included ten site visits in less than two days. On this mission, Congressional staff were able to see directly how Medicaid funding is helping low-income patients at Mount Sinai Health System, tour an adult day care program designed to give family care givers relief, and talk to residents of a joint federation/federally funded Naturally Occurring Retirement Community program. Congressional staff found it immensely helpful in understanding the linkages between their work on Capitol Hill and model services paid for by a combination of public funds and private philanthropy at the local level.

### **SUGGESTED APPROACH TO REFORM**

UJC believes that reforms should be targeted at those who are abusing the current system. Rather than eliminating such trips, higher standards should be established for educational trips organized by bona fide 501(c)(3) organizations to ensure that Members are participating in legitimate fact-finding missions. Congress can reform the rules to require increased oversight and disclosure of private trips, both before and after, and pre- and post-review and approval of trips and trip itineraries. More information about costs and the participants in such trips could also be made available to the public. The current bill before the Senate would be a good model for the House to follow.

The legislation you craft should be designed to require more oversight and accountability while still allowing Members to participate in valuable trips. You can clarify the

standards as to what constitutes bona fide educational trips, but we believe the standards incorporated into current rules are appropriate: that such trips should be directly related to a Member or staff member's official duties; should have minimal or incidental recreational and entertainment component; and should be designed not to influence particular pieces of legislation, but to open up new facts, ideas, and experiences for Members related to critical policy issues.

After a trip, a report would be filed with the appropriate body verifying that what had been approved had occurred, or explaining any variance. All trip documentation should be available to the public.

As I have explained to you, we oppose any legislative effort that calls for a complete ban on travel and we also oppose a moratorium on privately funded travel. Some of the other proposals floating in the House are more subtly problematic. Some would ban lobbyists from organizing, paying for, or participating in trips. Speaking as the chief lobbyist for UJC, while I have no problem in not paying personally for a trip for Members of Congress (and that is prohibited under current law), I think it would be valuable to Members for me to participate on a hypothetical trip that UJC sponsored to the Gulf Coast, because of my knowledge of UJC's significant role in Katrina relief. If there is a Congressional staff mission to a home community to learn about our model continuum of care, as the Chicago Federation organized last summer, it is very helpful for the community's Washington representative, who understands the direct linkages between service delivery and policy, to attend.

There also are some proposals that would preclude affiliated organizations from sponsoring Congressional travel, even if the organization does not employ any federally registered lobbyists. While very few organizations within the UJC system are registered as federal lobbyists, all (like the Jewish federations and community relations councils) are legally affiliated with UJC, which does lobby and is registered as a federal lobbyist and all would potentially fall within this provision. Similarly, even if the "affiliated" language were struck, many organizations within the federation system do lobby Congress on a case-by-case basis, even though by statute they are not required to register as a federal lobbyist. In addition, the travel language in these bills can be imprecise and organizations that lobby but are not federally registered lobbyists could be implicated by the trip ban. We oppose efforts to limit sponsorship of private travel by organizations affiliated with nonprofits that lobby.

While it is necessary to prevent abusive lobbying practice, appropriate education and advocacy techniques should not be made illegal. Eliminating privately funded domestic and international travel would deny Members and staff valuable educational and experiential opportunities that they cannot get by staying only in their districts or Washington. A total ban on privately-funded travel, whether permanent or through a moratorium, would be a disservice to Members of Congress, denying them valuable resources to gain greater knowledge and understanding of the range of issues they must address. Foreign travel is essential in an era of globalization. It is critical for Members to personally see developments on the ground in other countries. Insularity and isolation

cannot be an option for the world's only superpower. Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. We urge you to adopt smart lobbying reform by supporting enhanced disclosure and vetting of privately funded Congressional travel.

Thank you for this opportunity to address you, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

William C. Daroff  
Vice President for Public Policy and  
Director of the Washington Office  
United Jewish Communities  
1720 I Street, NW Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20006  
[William.daroff@ujc.org](mailto:William.daroff@ujc.org)  
202/736-5868 (phone)  
202/785-4937 (fax)