

Universities get free pass on new House ethics rules

Can bankroll lawmakers' trips

By Fredrika Schouten
USA TODAY

Top 5 sponsors

The top five sponsors of congressional travel, by value, since 2000:

Harvard University	\$333,439
George Washington University	\$68,626
California State University	\$27,303
University of Qatar	\$26,235
University of California	\$20,084

Source: USA TODAY analysis of travel data compiled by PoliticalMoneyLine

The grants, known as earmarks, are often anonymously inserted into spending bills by lawmakers. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* tallied more than \$2 billion in earmarks to universities in 2003, the most recent count available.

David Williams of Citizens Against Government Waste said universities, like corporations, "want as much money as possible, and (travel) is one way of greasing the skids."

In January, the new House Democratic majority instituted travel rules that took effect this month. A Senate bill that leaves open the door to university-funded travel is not yet law.

Brendan Daly, spokesman for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said lawmakers wanted the exemption so they can deliver commencement speeches. The exemption, however, al-

lows for any travel funded by higher education.

Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., an earmark critic, said many of the new ethics rules make little sense. "I can do a \$2 million earmark to a New York univer-

sity and then they can give me money through their friends to my campaign, but they can't buy me a \$20 dinner," he said, referring to a new ban on lobbyist-paid meals.

Recent travel included an overnight stay by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., in November at a villa in Florence, Italy, owned by New York University. NYU did not pay for Kennedy's air travel, but it provided about \$1,500 in car-service fees.

Kennedy, who heads the Senate's education panel, spoke

at an event marking the 40th anniversary of the Florence flood. NYU spokesman John Beckman said Kennedy's trip was unrelated to the university's lobbying, which hit nearly \$1 million in the past two years.

Seven lawmakers traveled to Seoul in November with a legislative exchange program at George Washington University. Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner, R-

Wis., took his wife. The price: \$7,700. Sensenbrenner, taking his sixth Asian exchange trip since 2000, values the "exchange of ideas," said his aide, Raj Bharwani.

Harvard University has spent the most on travel, nearly \$334,000, since 2000. Harvard's Kevin Casey said travel is "divorced" from lobbying.

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