

JC Watts column
Stephens Media Group
04/06 – The Law

What's wrong with these pictures?

Circa 1996 – The Clinton campaign accepts campaign contributions from Chinese citizens in clear violation of federal campaign finance laws. Vice President Al Gore appears at a campaign fundraiser at a Buddhist temple in California, raising \$45,000. Temple officials admit to destroying donor records to avoid embarrassing the temple. A hue and cry is heard across the fruited plain. Clinton supporters refer to it as a Vast Right Wing Conspiracy. The Clinton team says, in essence, "let's change the rules." Media and other do-gooders call for campaign finance reform.

Circa 2006 – Super lobbyist Jack Abramoff parlays his relationship with House Majority Leader Tom Delay into super paydays for himself, at the expense of a handful Indian tribes. While overbilling for services may be the second oldest profession known to mankind, how he divvied up and laundered the proceeds, in addition to the gifts lavished upon some members of Congress and staff, is at issue here.

Abramoff did wrong. He broke the law, and he was caught. He now faces serious prison time. Still, DC-based Chicken Littles see the sky falling upon them, and "lobbying reform" is the new buzz phrase on the lips of media and political leaders in need of an image overhaul.

Circa today – Hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants – perhaps millions of them -- take to the streets in major cities across the country to make their case for why they should be permitted to cross our borders and climb our fences without going through the system that has served this country and those seeking the opportunity it affords for over 200 years now.

Some estimate the number of illegally-entered immigrants in this country to be 12 million strong. If you can read this page, you know that by definition, "illegal" means "against the law." Now, calls for "immigration reform" are heard on every newscast, and many of our national leaders are logging record amounts of face time on CNN, C-Span and their local news outlets.

So what is wrong with these scenarios?

In each and every case, there was a law or rule in place governing the actions of the offending parties.

It may sound over simplified, but if the Clinton campaign had simply not solicited and accepted funds from foreign sources, there would have been no scandal. Somehow they got away with it, but some of those who trafficked the dollars into the campaign coffers weren't as fortunate.

Jack Abramoff broke many laws. He and his associates accepted lobbying fees from various clients, and then hid those fees in other non-lobbying entities, thus concealing the totality of his involvement to the public and to those from whom he solicited assistance.

He and his associates allegedly paid for trips, meals and other gifts for a small number of Members and some key Congressional staff, beyond what is legally and ethically permissible.

In all cases pertaining to Abramoff's lobbying activities; there are laws and ethical guidelines on the books. Abramoff broke those laws and disregarded the ethics rules. He was caught, and will pay for his misdeeds for a good long while.

Nevertheless, the talk of the town today is lobbying reform. All of this hoopla about reform reminds me of the fellow who says "ready, shoot, aim." To quote a favorite former president, "read my lips." We have lobbying reform in the form of current law. If any of my former colleagues were to sell out for a \$50 meal, then God help us all.

Finally, we are a nation of immigrants. And we're better for it. However, it's illegal to come across the border without a green card and stay.

God bless the millions who have legally crossed our borders, gone through the system, and become productive members of our society. These are the people who have contributed to making America great, and will continue to do so. History is replete with this reality.

Clearly, we need to find some way to deal with 12 million illegal immigrants who are here. We're kidding ourselves to believe that law enforcement can do that. We either need to put them on the path of citizenship or send them home. Asking them to come forward so we can send them home is laughable. But declaring "ya'll come" with no strings attached is not the answer. No economy can sustain that.

We often like to make a lot of noise to give the impression that we're doing something. I call it "hurry up and look busy." We have laws that serve us well. Let's enforce them.