

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview. Short Film:
“Jack Abramoff: The Lobbyist’s Playbook” (20–25 Minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Goal

In this fascinating film (14:36), a *60 Minutes* television show segment, students learn how the multibillion-dollar lobbying industry works. The ins and outs of the lobbying/bribery industry are explained by Jack Abramoff, possibly the most famous lobbyist in U.S. history. Abramoff was charged with crimes, spent time in jail, and now speaks out against the practice of lobbying.

NOTE: This film can be easily understood played at 1.25 speed if you want to shave about three minutes off of the run time.

Instructions

1. Play the short film above here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zwhk3UjAAkQ>.
2. Tell students to take notes, and have them discuss in pairs or small groups when the film is finished.
3. Discuss as a class by asking for volunteers for their thoughts, and ask students the questions below.

Film Notes (Potential Questions to Students)

- Abramoff traded gifts for votes in Congress; he made \$20 million per year!
- He got so far into it that he says he became confused at what was right or wrong.
- He believed he was “helping” both the groups he lobbied in favor of and the Congressmen.
- Congress members justified their own bribery by acting as if they were helping others, too.
- Gifts included free meals, rides in private planes, golfing trips, sports tickets.
- Spent over \$1 million per year on sporting event tickets!
- Best way to get a congressional office to “do his bidding” was offering a staff person a new job at triple the salary (from then on, the office/staff did everything Abramoff wanted them to do).
- Abramoff owned 100+ congresspersons out of 435 at his peak.
- At Abramoff’s restaurant, practically all of Congress was eating/drinking for free.
- Abramoff was a specialist at getting obscure language inserted into bills, which benefited certain industries, which got by because members don’t read the bills!
- He says that there were very few members of Congress that did NOT participate in the bribery.
- He points out that the system is flawed (because it’s made of flawed humans susceptible to bribery).
- After his scandal, Congress “reformed” lobbying, but it didn’t do anything, according to Abramoff, because (a) lobbyists just find ways around the new laws, and (b) the people who make the reform laws are part of the system!
- Abramoff says the law should be changed to prevent former members of Congress from writing laws to benefit Company X, then afterward being hired by Company X as a lobbyist or other job (because those jobs are simply payback).

ASK STUDENTS these questions (or substitute your own):

- What other fact not mentioned yet stood out to you in this film?
- What would *you* do to stop the corruption of lobbying/bribery in Washington?
- What would happen to the lobbying/bribery industry if the government never passed any laws that involved legal plunder, but restricted itself to laws that punished violence/theft/fraud, etc.?