

House Amends Its Gift Rules

March 2003

On January 7, 2003, the House of Representatives passed a resolution that, among other things, amended the House Gift Rules in the area of meals and travel. Generally speaking, Members and staffers may only receive gifts that are less than \$50 in value, with a cumulative limit of \$99.99 from any one source in a calendar year.

The House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct had previously explained that food delivered to members' offices—even if intended for and consumed by staffers—counted against the members' \$50 limit. The new resolution changes this calculation, stating: "The value of perishable food sent to an office shall be allocated among the individual recipients and not to the Member."

In addition, the resolution extended a preexisting exception to the \$50 gift rule that allows members or their staffs to accept an offer of free attendance at a charity event. The original exception did not allow for the provision of transportation or lodging. The resolution now permits Member and staff transportation and lodging to be paid for by a 501(c)(3) organization if the proceeds of the event are for the organization's benefit.

A word of caution, these changes to the House Rules do not apply to Senators or to officers and employees of the Senate.