



November 14, 2011

Don Fox
Acting Director and General Counsel
Office of Government Ethics
1201 New York Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20005-3917

Re: RIN 3209-aa04 [Proposed Amendments Limiting Gifts from Registered Lobbyists and Lobbying Organizations]

Dear Mr. Fox:

The American Frozen Food Institute (AFFI) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Office of Government Ethics' (OGE) proposed rule [RIN 3209-AA04] that would prohibit executive branch employees from accepting invitations to "widely attended gatherings" (WAG) hosted by trade associations.

AFFI is the national trade association that represents all segments of the frozen food industry, including more than 500 companies located throughout the U.S. and around the world. AFFI fosters industry development and growth through educational programming and conferences; advocates on behalf of its members before legislative and regulatory entities; and provides additional value-added services for its members and for the benefit of the consuming public.

In its proposed rule, OGE justifies preventing federal employees from attending trade association WAGs based on the presumption that "the primary concern of such associations generally is not the education and development of members of a profession or discipline." This statement demonstrates a lack of understanding about the mission of AFFI and other trade associations like ours.

Indeed, OGE's proposal fails to appreciate that one of the most significant benefits companies and their employees gain through their membership in AFFI is the opportunity to share best practices with one another and understand the latest regulatory developments that affect their operations. Education is very much at the core of the services AFFI provides its members.

Across a broad spectrum of topics, including food safety, food science, food standards, improved nutrition and enhanced logistical and environmental performance, AFFI provides its members with a substantial suite of educational programs and services. These programs and services are designed to ensure our members have access to critical information.

In addition, AFFI provides a conduit for our members to share their knowledge and experiences with federal agencies through myriad forums. The exchange of information that occurs through these forums facilitates and enhances the depth and quality of understanding among federal agencies about the frozen food industry. OGE's proposal to prevent federal employees from attending AFFI events, unless provided with an explicit speaking opportunity, would diminish the quality of education AFFI provides its members as well as our industry's federal regulatory partners on topics that ultimately impact how food is produced, labeled, transported, marketed and prepared.

A sample of the learning opportunities jeopardized by OGE's proposal includes:

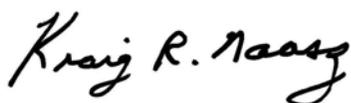
- Prohibiting U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) representatives from attending meetings of AFFI's Fruit and Vegetable Committee held annually at the AFFI Frozen Food Convention (AFFI-CON). These committee meetings provide an opportunity for our members to dialogue with USDA officials on various food safety, commodity quality grading and standardization topics;
- Prohibiting federal food safety officials from attending AFFI-organized food safety workshops, such as those dedicated to examining techniques to control *Listeria monocytogenes* and comply with the *FDA Food Safety Modernization Act*; and
- Preventing federal food safety officials from attending meetings of the "Cook it Safe" Task Force to discuss and develop strategies to better educate the consuming public about the proper preparation of microwavable foods and the prevention of food-borne illness.

Successfully addressing key food policy challenges requires an active and productive dialogue between private industry and government regulators. AFFI has long prided itself on enhancing its members' understanding of, and ability to respond to, the issues most important to our industry through strong consultative relationships with federal agencies.

Severely limiting our ability to cooperate with the agencies we are regulated by, as OGE is proposing, will only make informed and effective policymaking more difficult. As such, AFFI respectfully requests that your office remove trade association widely attended gatherings from the proposed list of events federal agency employees could not attend.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Should you have any comments, or require additional information, please do not hesitate contact me at knaasz@affi.com or (703) 821-0770.

Sincerely,



Kraig R. Naasz
President and CEO