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OP-ED COLUMN

## Rod Blum: Congress' Corruption is Not Just Perception – it is Reality

More than 46 percent of Americans believe Congress is corrupt. Too many lawyers are members of Congress, and when they write the rules, they know the way around them. It's about time Congress lived under the same laws and rules they pass for us.

After Congress passed Obamacare, President Obama exempted four states, 1,231 businesses, 543,812 union workers, and members of Congress. That's just plain wrong, and I pray the Supreme Court strikes down Obamacare. Congress should only have access to the same health care available to all of us.

Congress has failed to pass a budget for three straight years. In the real world, when you don't do your job, your pay is docked. I propose withholding members' paychecks if they fail to pass a budget on time.

Our founding fathers envisioned a citizen Congress, and I support term limits to enforce that vision. And while I would like to abolish Congressional pensions altogether, we most certainly should deny pensions to members convicted of crimes or ethics violations.

Members of Congress are not bound by the same laws against insider stock market trading as Americans who go to jail for doing the same thing. Members get information from lobbyists, know how the laws they write will affect their own assets, and they cash in on that information. I support the Stop Trading on Congressional Knowledge (STOCK) Act which would prohibit members of Congress from trading stocks based on non-public information obtained on the job.

When she was Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi used Air Force jets 43 times, instead of commercial airlines, or jets that Congress owns. Pelosi fleeced taxpayers for \$2,100,744.59 for military flights over two years — including \$101,429.14 for in-flight food and alcohol. I would prohibit members of Congress and their family from using military aircraft, except in national emergency or military-related missions.

Most members of Congress rack up frequent flier miles traveling to and from their home district. Some members use those perks to upgrade from coach to first class. I would require members to use those perks for free flights to save taxpayer money, and ban members from upgrading to first class with perks accumulated on the taxpayers' dollar.

Every member of Congress receives an "office expense" account from which they pay staff salaries, office expenses and perks. Congress voted to increase its own expense account two of the last three

years, while small business in this country struggles to stay afloat. In the real world, when a business is going broke or in debt, the wise businessman cuts back on office expenses. Not Congress.

With the federal government more than \$15 trillion in debt, Obama proposed raising the pay of federal workers by .05 percent. I propose freezing the pay of federal workers as long as the federal debt is higher than 75 percent of GDP. And that should include a freeze on their office expense accounts.

One issue that particularly aggravates me, is the “franking” privilege or taxpayer-paid mail that members receive. I understand the franking privilege is necessary to answer letters from constituents. But I would prohibit members from using that franking privilege to send out veiled campaign commercials for themselves listing what they think are their or their party's “accomplishments” during the latest session.

Considering the current state of the economy, “real” unemployment near 11%, more than 20 million people unemployed or under-employed, and the federal government more than \$15 trillion in debt, I have a little trouble considering anything Congress has done lately as an “accomplishment.”

When it comes to Congress' corruption, perception IS reality.

Editor's note: Rod Blum is a Dubuque businessman who is running for the Republican nomination to Congress from Iowa's new First District.