

United States Senate

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS
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New Guidance Under the Gifts Rule

Items of Little Intrinsic Value

The Senate Gifts Rule, Rule 35.1(c) (23), has an exception for items of little intrinsic value. What items are included in this exception?

1. The items specifically listed in the exception -- namely a baseball cap, T-shirts or greeting card -- that have a reasonable value (even if worth more than \$10);
2. Non-food items that have a value of \$10, or less, in the aggregate; and
3. Food items, flowers, and perishables that have a value of \$10, or less, in the aggregate, and are brought, sent or delivered to the Senate office and are not taken as part of a meal.

Food or Refreshments of a Nominal Value Offered Other than as Part of a Meal

The Senate Gifts Rule, Rule 35.1(c) (22), also has an exception for food or refreshments of a nominal value offered which are not part of a meal. This exception to the Gifts Rule allows a Member or employee to accept food and refreshments of nominal value, such as hors d'oeuvres and drinks at a reception (as opposed to a sit-down meal) or a "continental-style" breakfast at a briefing.

This exception also includes food and drink of nominal value at an organized event, media interview, or other appearance where such items are customarily provided to speakers, panelists, and participants. This would, for example, allow a Member to accept a cup of coffee while appearing on a Sunday television news program -- otherwise forbidden since the television networks employ lobbyists.