



# Getting the Government America Deserves: How Ethics Reform Can Make a Difference

*Richard W Painter*

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In order to be effective, federal ethics law must address sources of systematic corruption rather than simply address motives that individual government employees might have to betray the public trust (such as personal financial holdings or family relationships). *Getting the Government America Deserves* articulates a general approach to combating systemic corruption as well as some specific proposals for doing so. Federal ethics law is relatively unknown in legal academia and elsewhere outside of Washington, D.C., but it is binding on over one million federal employees. Lobbyists, federal contractors, lawyers and others who interact with the federal government are also deeply interested in federal ethics law and represent a surprisingly large market for a little-studied area of the law.

*Getting the Government America Deserves* analyzes government ethics law from the perspective of an academic critic and that of a lawyer who was the chief White House ethics lawyer for two and a half years. Richard Painter argues that the existing ethics regime is in need of substantial reform since federal ethics laws fail to curtail conduct that undermines the integrity of government, such as political activity by federal employees and their interaction with lobbyists and interest groups. He also contends that in some other areas, such as personal financial conflicts of interest, there is too much complexity in regulatory and reporting requirements, and rules need to be simplified. Painter's solution includes strengthening the enforcement of ethics rules, reforming the lobbying industry, and changing a system of campaign finance that impedes meaningful government ethics reform.

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