

FEINGOLD: A topic we touched on in our meeting in my office July was the issue of judges going to judicial education conferences, sometimes fancy resorts, which are put on by ideologically oriented groups and paid for by private corporations sometimes that even have cases pending before the judges in attendance. And when we spoke, of course, you had been nominated for the associate justice position and our conversation concerned your personal interest in attending such events. As I remember, your answer was that you said you'd rather spend your free time with your family, which I thought was a pretty good answer. But now you've been nominated for chief justice, and one of your duties is to head a judicial conference which, among other things, sets the ethics policies for the federal judiciary. And this is one area where I think Chief Justice Rehnquist might have taken a different course.

FEINGOLD: He took a number of steps to essentially leave this ethical question up to the personal decision of individual judges and appointed a judge to head the Committee on Codes of Conduct who had been prominently featured in a 20/20 expose of these junkets. Not surprisingly, the committee weakened the judicial ethics rules on this question of privately financed trips. Chief Justice Rehnquist strongly opposed congressional efforts to put a halt to these judicial junkets that I believe sometimes reflect poorly on the independence and impartiality of the judiciary. So I'd like to know, Judge Roberts, if confirmed, whether you will use your power as chief justice to set a high ethical tone for the federal judiciary by putting in place new codes of conduct that would prohibit judges from participating in privately funded, quote, judicial education, unquote, that lets special interests essentially lobby federal judges.

ROBERTS: Well, I don't think special interests should be allowed to lobby federal judges. Stated that way, I think the answer is clear. I don't know enough about how these things operate. As I said, I've not been on one of them. I don't know how the funding is set up. I don't know what the situation is. If confirmed, I'm certainly happy to examine it. I know that there is a conflict of interest or ethical standard review group, I think, within the judicial conference. I believe they addressed that question and issued an opinion on it recently. But, again, I'm just, sort of, recollecting something I read. I would say more generally, though, and this doesn't -- maybe it's off topic, in which case feel free to cut me off -- but I do think it's important for judges and justices to get out, particularly get out of Washington a little bit. I've always enjoyed going to the law schools, participating in the moot courts or, you know, functions where you get to visit with the law students. I've done that a few times -- not a lot, a few times. I wouldn't call that by any stretch of the imagination a junket. But I do think it's important for the justices to get out around the country and

particularly visit the law schools. That's probably not the same sort of thing you're talking about.

FEINGOLD: Fair enough.