

## The International Program – Italy



September 20, 2006

**Guests:** Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Officials

The visiting Italian officials were participating in the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program entitled "U.S. Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Systems." The meeting was arranged by the Institute of International Education, Professional Exchanges Division.

A briefing was requested with a Judicial Watch representative to discuss the organization's role in promoting transparency in U.S. governmental, legal, and judicial systems.

Tom Fitton, president of Judicial Watch, met with the distinguished international visitors and provided them with a brief overview of Judicial Watch's profile: a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, funded by the private donations of the American people, whose expertise lies in the skillful use of the Freedom of Information Act and other state sunshine laws to hold government and judicial officials accountable to the people who elected them to public office.

Mr. Fitton informed the guests that although JW has been successful in bringing corruption to light in many high-profile cases, it can take years to bring accountability and resolution in a court of law. Judicial Watch's lawsuit against the [U.S. Department of Commerce](#) was cited as one such example—an investigation which began in 1994 and is only now nearing final resolution. The lawsuit arose as a result of Judicial Watch's FOIA investigation into the Commerce Department's

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taxpayer funded trade missions during the Clinton Administration, which led to the discovery of the DNC's scheme to sell seats on trade missions in exchange for campaign cash—a flagrant violation of federal campaign finance law.

Mr. Fitton also discussed some of the educational aspects of Judicial Watch's mission. For example, throughout the FOIA process, as documents are received and reviewed by JW investigative and legal staff, they are made available to the public on its Internet site. He emphasized the fact that the real value of JW's work lies in its ability to educate the public by exposing misconduct and thereby holding government and judicial officials accountable in the court of public opinion.

The visiting officials agreed that an organization like Judicial Watch would be of great value in Italy. The officials stated that although Italy has certain transparency laws that allow its citizens to obtain information from the government, there are many restrictions. The work JW does, as one of the officials commented, is a valuable check on government corruption simply because what objection could a government agency have to a record request if it is doing its job.

Also discussed was the current politically charged topic of immigration reform. The Italian law enforcement officials stated that illegal immigration is a major problem in Italy today.

Mr. Fitton spoke briefly about Judicial Watch's lawsuit against the [Los Angeles Police Department](#) for violation of federal immigration laws and its efforts to hold local government officials accountable for the illegal use of taxpayer funds in the construction of [day labor sites](#) for illegal immigrant laborers. As a result of the failure of Congress to bring about immigration reform on the federal level, JW's legal tactics are being duplicated around the country by citizen groups in order to stem the tide of illegal immigration into their communities. The Italian officials expressed incredulity over the circumvention of established federal law by local law enforcement agencies, such as in Los Angeles and other "safe-haven" communities.

At the close of the briefing, Mr. Fitton commended the visiting law enforcement officials for their courage and bravery in their battle against organized crime and corruption in Italy—and for their commitment to the rule of law.