

Slaughter Unveils "Honest Leadership, Open Government" Reform Package to Protect Public Trust

Slaughter to Serve as Spokesperson on Ethics and Reform in the House

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today delivered the following speech before the entire Democratic Caucus. Rep. Slaughter was one of four key-note speakers at the event, along with Senator Harry Reid, Representative Nancy Pelosi, and Senator Barack Obama.

The text of Rep. Slaughter's speech as delivered can be found below:

I am obliged to tell you my name is Louise Slaughter -- I represent upstate New York, and I'm the ranking member on the Rules Committee -- because I'm not so well-known here.

But I am certainly honored to be standing here with these wonderful Democrat as we say today that we're taking our stand to end the Republican culture of corruption here in Washington.

And like Senator Reid, I know a little something about corruption. In the late '70s, I chaired the Public Safety Committee in the Monroe County Legislature in New York. And while it may not be well-known everywhere, both Buffalo and Rochester were notorious mob cities, and we were trying to clean up the mob.

And I was taught by the district attorney and the police chief and the sheriff to take a mirror on the stick every morning before I left the garage and look under the car to make sure there were no bombs there.

Well, I didn't flinch from any of that then, and I'm sure not going to flinch from any of this now, because I believe our democracy is at stake.

And in addition to that, they don't call me "Slaughter" for nothing.

Now, every American has the right to expect and believe that the people they sent to Washington are honest and upright. They don't seem to require much intellect, but at least they should expect that.

But today we're suffering the consequences of what may be the worst corruption in the nation's history. As everybody has mentioned before, we all know about the majority leader. We know about the man who left the White House in handcuffs. We know about the Republican congressman who pled guilty, and there are many more coming. Every day we pick up the paper and yet there is even more.

What we're up against isn't just the shameful work of individuals like these. It's a much broader problem. It's a problem that is rooted in the Republican establishment that has held power in this nation's capital for far too long.

Sadly, their legacy has been the fundamental degradation of our democratic institutions and the abandonment of core principles.

They have ensured that the word "corruption" is synonymous with Congress in the minds of the American people, and the people pay a heavy price.

Over the last five years, the number of special interest lobbyists -- and I know you hear a lot of numbers on this, but we're really trying to track this down.

I believe that when Clinton left office there were 9,500. There are more than 34,000 today. And, in fact, that's 63 lobbyists for each member of Congress.

Now along with the corporations they represent and the numerous Republican legislators that they court, they are now writing the bills that hurt every man, woman and child in this country.

They have infiltrated every aspect of the government. Their money and donations shape the opinions of corrupt lawmakers in a way that public opinion no longer does.

And under Republican guidance, America has truly been put up for sale to the highest bidders.

For example, in 2001, our nation's energy policy was written in closed sessions by representatives of major corporations. And you know where that has ended.

They only thought about enriching themselves. They weren't concerned about American people.

And during the Iraq war, most egregiously, our security has been sacrificed as well as the safety of our troops repeatedly by the lawmakers who handed out defense contracts to their friends, instead of to those most qualified.

And we saw that most recently in the article in the New York Times that 80 percent of the Marines could have been saved with the proper armor. More than \$9 billion in Iraq reconstruction funds has disappeared into the black hole of no-bid contracts, created by the lobbyists and corrupt politicians.

And no matter how hard the Democrats have tried to set up a Truman commission to find out where that money is, we simply couldn't get it by them.

Today, seniors, you all know, are struggling -- many of them people you're related to, I'm sure -- to understand the confusing Medicare prescription drug bill that certainly we knew at the time was not written for the men and women of the country who need help but it was written for the benefit of the insurance and drug companies who don't.

And I firmly believe in my soul that this bill was intended to kill Medicare.

From tax policy to public television and radio programming to the laws that regulate the safety of our drinking water, nothing has proved too precious to avoid being sold for a price.

Republicans have given us a government too corrupt to sustain itself any longer, too undemocratic to even pretend to be a democracy. And having created the greatest corruption scandal the Congress has ever known, and having displayed the audacity to talk of exporting democracy abroad while killing it here in Washington, they are now content to try to save themselves by proposing a Band-Aid reform package, shifting the blame to lobbyists like Jack Abramoff, their buddy, who has become the public face of a congressional crisis.

But Mr. Abramoff and his associates are just the symptom. The real disease is here in the Capitol, with the party of power in Washington. And as we all know, it began with the notorious K Street Project.

How little we knew, when they all stood on the steps of the Capitol in 1995 waving the Constitution in one hand and the Contract in the other, exactly what it was they had in mind.

But it is self-evident now that the same Republican members of Congress who put America up for sale have neither the ability nor the credibility to lead us in a new direction. And they shouldn't even try.

But the Democrat Party can. And today, we are demanding the restoration of democracy itself to our government.

From the first day of this Congress, when Republicans gutted the House ethics process, my fellow Democrats and I have made ethics a top priority because we know an ethical Congress is the foundation upon which good legislation is built.

And the Rules Committee will soon release a report called "America For Sale," that will have the most comprehensive account to date of the ways in which the needs of our citizens are being sold out in exchange simply for gifts and favors and donations and trips somewhere.

And as a result of this focus, the honest leadership pact that we present to you today represents a fundamentally different approach to government, one in which bills will be written for the people and not for the lobbyists or their clients.

We will expose the deepest roots of the culture of corruption that has so pervasively strangled the Senate and House, and give the American people a government that they can at last respect, because it will be a government that respects them.

And my friends, together Americans can do better because America is better. We're going to take the country back, and we throw the gauntlet down today.