

April 27, 2005 - Remarks on Ethics Rules Reversal

Amending the Rules of the House of Representatives to Reinstate Certain Provisions of the Rules Relating to Procedures of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct to the Form in Which Those Provisions Existed at the Close of the 108th Congress

Mr. Speaker, this bill represents a true victory for the American people and provides some hope for the integrity of this body, which has been so badly tarnished by the actions of this majority that can one day be restored.

As a child, my parents taught me that integrity means doing what is right when no one is looking.

Well, 4 months ago when they thought no one was looking, the Republican majority of this House passed a rules package that gutted the House ethics standards and effectively neutered the House ethics committee, a committee that genuinely worked well and that had not had a complaint for years.

The changes were made in an obvious attempt to protect one man from further prosecution or investigation by the ethics committee. Four months later, after the world has been awakened to the unethical brand of sweep-it-under-the-rug politics, the Speaker has finally relented to public pressure and agreed to reinstate the ethics rules that have governed the House for years, rules that should have been governing the House during the 109th Congress from the very start.

You know, it is easy to do the right thing when the whole world is watching, and today the whole world is watching. And it appears that the majority, with their back against the wall, may finally do the right thing. It appears as though they will heed the call of the minority and the call of America to reinstate the ethics committee.

It appears they may heed the overwhelming call to return to the rules of the 108th Congress. And not just a section from part A, or a smidgeon of part B; but all of them.

Even now, at this low point, there is concern that the rules changes the majority proposes today will not include measures to ensure that the staff of the Ethics Committee remain nonpartisan. That, Mr. Speaker, would be a tragedy. And it is crucial that they maintain a professional and nonpartisan staff if the ethics committee will retain any credibility moving forward.

But even in defeat, it seems the majority has no shame. I will say that whatever the outcome today, they do not deserve a pat on the back for this apparent about-face.

And as I said earlier, we should always remember, it is easier to make the right decision when the world is watching. But what defines our character is what we do when no one is watching.

We saw clearly what this majority is all about. We have been witness to it for the past 4 months, and every day we discover new abuses of the rules by the Republican leadership and new abuses of the democratic process here in the House. Example: what happened in the report from the Judiciary Committee.

All of us owe the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. *Mollohan*) a debt of gratitude for his resoluteness and steadfastness on this issue and for having the courage to fight against this clear attempt by the majority to subvert the democratic process and destroy the principles of ethics and integrity in the House.

Let us hope that America will not soon forget what the majority did and the Herculean effort it has required to convince them to reverse course.