

Dreier, Republicans Hatch Scheme to Further Eliminate Debate, Democracy From House Floor in 109th Congress

Washington, DC. - Following is a statement from Rep. Louise Slaughter (NY-28), Ranking Member, House Rules Committee, in response to an article from today's *Congress Daily PM*

, which detailed Rules Committee Chair David Dreier's plan to, "...to work more closely with other committees to identify and resolve controversies before they take legislation to the House floor."

"The English translation for Mr. Dreier's plan is simple: Eliminate democracy, debate and dissent from the House of Representatives. This is a dangerous precedent to set in the opening days of the new Congress.

This plan is even more shameful considering that just three weeks ago the Republican Leadership eviscerated the House' ethical standards. First they sanction corruption, now they are moving the decision making process to the Rules Committee and away from the House floor where it belongs.

The Dreier/DeLay plan also looks to expand Leadership control to the committee level - extending the long arm of the Majority Leader so that pending legislation may not even be discussed at the committee level without Leadership approval. This is a clear attempt to ensure that all of the standing committees are wholly owned and operated by the Republican Leadership.

Proceedings on the House floor have already been reduced to little more than a well-choreographed stage production. This plan by the Republican leadership will create an effective government by secret committee for the House Republicans in the Rules Committee, the most partisan and tightly controlled committee in Congress.

Government by secret committee cannot be allowed to stand in the people's House.

I call upon the House Republican leadership to open up the legislative process to the sunshine; Let Members of Congress do the work they were elected to do. Don't strong arm us or hold us back from debating the business of the people we serve."

Congress Daily PM (01/25/05)

Rules Panel Eyes More Active Role In Shaping Legislation

by **Richard E. Cohen**

House Rules Committee Republicans plan to work more closely with other committees to identify and resolve controversies before they take legislation to the House floor. " [Rules] Chairman Dreier wants Rules members to do a lot more interacting with House committees and their chairmen, and feeding of information to him so that we can serve as an early warning system" for GOP leaders, said committee staff director Billy Pitts. Dreier plans to discuss these changes in greater detail Wednesday at a closed-door retreat of committee Republicans at the Library of Congress. Speaker Hastert plans to attend the session to give his formal blessing to the Rules Committee's expanded role. Now that Hastert has appointed five of the committee's nine GOP members in the past few months -- the first new members he has named to the panel since becoming speaker in 1999 -- Dreier has sought to take advantage of the opportunity by referring to Rules as "the speaker's committee";

Dreier received a vote of confidence from Hastert when the opening-day rules package exempted the Rules chairman from the three-term limit for House chairmen. Dreier also played an instrumental role in crafting other parts of that package, including giving permanent status to the Homeland Security Committee and revising House rules to assure "continuity"; following a catastrophic attack. Dreier remains part of Hastert's leadership group that meets weekly, and the two of them have had several private discussions since the November election as part of the planning for this year's demanding schedule, aides said.

The new arrangement, which will bear close scrutiny as it evolves, has the potential to disrupt various relationships and power structures within the House. As envisioned by Dreier, each Rules Committee Republican will be assigned one or more House committees on which they will serve as Dreier's -- and to some extent, Hastert's -- "eyes and ears," especially as legislation is moving to the House floor. "We want to be ahead of the curve, so that the

committee serves as a bellwether for the speaker and the leadership," Pitts said, including the prospect for floor amendments. In recent years, Hastert's aides increasingly have managed conflicts on legislation on an *ad hoc* basis in the final days and hours before House action. The four Republicans who left the Rules Committee at the start of this Congress to join other House committees voiced varying degrees of dissatisfaction with their limited role in responding to directives from Hastert's office. The new committee members are all second- or third-termers in the House who may view their assignment as an opportunity to become leadership lieutenants in building contacts with rank-and-file members.

At Wednesday's retreat, Dreier will likely unveil other Rules Committee plans, including the selection of new chairmen for its two subcommittees. Pitts said one likely topic this year will be the House's "ossified" jurisdictional lines, which have not been thoroughly reviewed since Republicans took control in 1995. Dreier also has voiced interest in examining congressional budget procedures.