

## March 15, 2005 - Rules Committee Democrats Call For...

Rules Committee Democrats Call For Action on Ethics Committee Changes

Ranking Member, Rep. Louise M. Slaughter Critical of Rampant Conflict of Interest

Washington, DC - Led by Ranking Member, Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Democratic members of the House Committee on Rules today called on Republican Chairman David Dreier to hold a hearing on H. Res. 131, a bipartisan proposal to restore the ethics complaint process to the one that existed before the Republican leadership unilaterally changed it at the beginning of the 109th Congress.

"The House Ethics process is broken and its time to fix it," said Rep. Slaughter. She added "The Rules Committee must take this issue up and show once and for all that we are committed to the integrity and honor of this House."

Although H. Res. 131 would typically be referred to the Subcommittee on Rules & the Organization of the House, which is chaired by Rep. Hastings of Washington, the Democratic Members of the Committee have requested a full committee hearing instead, given the obvious conflict-of-interest it would create for Rep. Hastings, whom the Republican leadership recently made chairman of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct (Ethics Committee).

"Given that Chairman Dreier and two of our Republican Rules Committee colleagues, Reps. Sessions and Cole, have each contributed \$5,000 to Majority Leader Tom DeLay's legal defense fund, I believe that calling this hearing would demonstrate that the Majority is not putting the narrow interests of a political leader above the best interests of the House," said Rep. Slaughter.

Rep. Slaughter, Ranking Member of the Rules Committee, the committee with jurisdiction over the procedures of the Ethics Committee, has been a vocal opponent of the Republican leadership's continued efforts to destroy the House Ethics process.

"What we have witnessed in the 109th Congress is nothing short of amazing as the Republican leadership has changed the Ethics process, attempted to change their own Conference rules, removed insubordinate Republicans from the Ethics committee and even fired bi-partisan Ethics Committee staffers they saw as too energetic in their enforcement of the Rules of this House," said Rep. Slaughter. She continued, "If the Republican Majority was as enthusiastic about their golf game as they have been about protecting Tom DeLay, they'd be beating Tiger Woods."

#### A SCANDAL OF DRAMATIC PROPORTIONS:

Hundreds of media reports have documented the Republican leadership's push to alter the ethics rules to protect Majority Leader Tom DeLay from scrutiny for his actions over the past several years. In the wake of two unanimous Ethics Committee actions concluding that Majority Leader DeLay acted improperly on three separate occasions in the 108th Congress and a Texas grand jury indictment against two of the Majority Leader's top aides, the Republican leadership has undertaken a systematic effort to shield Mr. DeLay from being held responsible for his behavior.

Other than the changes in the 109th rules package, the Republican leadership jammed a rule through the Republican Conference that would have allowed Majority Leader DeLay to keep his leadership post even if he were indicted of a crime by a grand jury. Even more shocking was Republican leadership's proposal to eliminate the long-standing "general rule of conduct" in House Rules that requires Members to conduct themselves "in a manner which shall reflect creditably on the House of Representatives." Thankfully, the rank-and-file Members of the Republican Conference appear to have some sense of shame and eventually killed these ideas after public outcry.

The Republican leadership did not seem to be deterred by this setback dealt by their Republican colleagues, nor were they satisfied with the passage of the ethics rules on the first day of the 109th Congress. Since that time, they have purged the Ethics Committee of those Republican Members who dared act in the best interests of the House, rather than the Majority Leader. In what has been called the "Wednesday Afternoon Massacre," Speaker Hastert removed Chairman Hefley and two other Republican Ethics Committee Members (Reps. LaTourrette and Hulshof) for their actions in the 108th Congress. Within weeks of this move, the new chairman of the committee, Rules Committee member Rep. Hastings of Washington, fired two long-time Ethics Committee bi-partisan professional staffers, presumably for enforcing the House ethics rules too energetically.

A LETTER TO CHAIRMAN DREIER: