

## April 20, 2005 - Slaughter Profiled in today's Roll Call

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Credited with Bringing Ethics Issues to the Forefront

Washington, DC - Today, Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28) was profiled on the front page of Roll Call for her work as Ranking Member of the House Committee on Rules in the 109th Congress. She was credited in the story with taking a lead role in bringing the ethics issues to the forefront of the political debate in America. She was also credited with highlighting the excessive abuses of the Majority in a report she issued earlier this year as well as focusing mainstream media attention on the White House's media manipulation campaign.

"My job on the Rules Committee is to serve as the guardian of the democratic process in the House. That process and the democratic values of everyday Americans are under attack by an out of control Majority. Someone has to step up to the plate and ensure that the business of this House is conducted in an ethical manner, without corruption and without arrogance. I didn't ask for that job, but I humbly accept the responsibility," stated Slaughter this morning.

A full copy of the story, which appeared on the front page of today's Roll Call is included below. Also included is an excerpt highlighting the Roll Call story from today's National Journal's Hotline.

Excerpt from today's National Journal's Hotline:

## Slaughter's House

4 months into being Ranking on the Rules Cmte, Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY) "has found herself at the center of a political firestorm: She's taken on the role of leading minority critic of changes to House ethics rules." Slaughter, on Ethics rules changes: "They took a bipartisan committee that was always dealt with in a bipartisan way and unilaterally destroyed it. It is devastating to me -- there's no question. From the very day they came up with the rules changes it was clear they did it to serve Tom DeLay." Slaughter, on if DeLay "will survive": "I don't know. I don't know" (Billings, Roll Call, 4/20).

Full text of Roll Call feature:

## Slaughter Takes Lead Role in Criticizing Ethics Rules

Roll Call

April 20, 2005

By Erin P. Billings

Just four months into her job as the top Democrat on the Rules Committee, Rep. Louise Slaughter (N.Y.) has found herself at the center of a political firestorm: She's taken on the role of leading minority critic of changes to House ethics rules.

It's a position the 10-term veteran of the House and 16-year member of the Rules panel takes personally - and one she does not take lightly. Slaughter said she has developed a deep affinity for the institution as she has seen her share of

House ethics scandals and even watched her own party lose power because of accusations of wrongdoing.

"I have a deep reverence for government," Slaughter said in a recent interview. "I take very seriously what I'm doing. It pains me to see what's going on in democracy."

The Kentucky native succeeded former Rep. Martin Frost (D-Texas) this Congress as the ranking member on Rules. In that capacity, she became the first woman ever to hold the post.

Slaughter has wasted no time making a name for herself in her new job, spending virtually every day this Congress fighting the Republican rules changes to the ethics process. She's twice asked for bipartisan hearings to review the amendments but has been rebuffed each time. More broadly, she's taken on her party's assignment of challenging the ethics of the majority party.

The GOP swiftly approved a series of changes at the beginning of this cycle, most notably a provision requiring the ethics committee to complete a review of any complaint within 45 days of its filing, and requiring a majority vote to initiate an investigation. The ethics panel has been in gridlock since the rules changes were enacted because Democrats won't agree to organize the committee under those terms.

On Jan. 4, Slaughter's first official day as the ranking member on Rules, she took to the floor to protest the package, charging the majority with pushing through rules to "destroy the ethics process." She added that the move would "reduce this committee to a paper tiger" and strip accountability from government officers.

Her anger over the changes is perhaps even more evident now, but the charges remain the same.

"They took a bipartisan committee that was always dealt with in a bipartisan way and unilaterally destroyed it," she said. "It is devastating to me - there's no question. From the very day they came up with the rules changes it was clear they did it to serve Tom DeLay."

DeLay, the House Majority Leader from Texas, has come under fire in recent months for his lobbyist-funded travel and other activities. When asked whether she believes he will survive, Slaughter said: "I don't know. I don't know."

She did, however, say that Congress is at "a crossroads," given that the country appears politically divided and the public seems to be paying more attention to its government. That comes in the wake of the Terri Schiavo case, in which Congress intervened at the 11th hour to try to have the Florida woman's feeding tube restored.

"I sense that more than ever, people are saying, 'What is going on in this government?'" she said.

Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-Fla.), Slaughter's colleague on Rules, said one would expect her to take a lead, given that the Rules panel has jurisdiction over the ethics changes. But Slaughter is taking it a step further, Hastings added, because she takes her job personally. He called her a "fighter" and someone who is "not going to back off," no matter what the odds.

"She is a person who has served through all the major ethical breaches that took place in this institution," Hastings said. "She understands the dynamics and understands how important it is for the integrity of this institution."

Slaughter acknowledges a personal obligation to take on the role as the leading attack dog on the ethics changes. Not only does her committee have jurisdiction over the rules changes, but the New York Democrat also is a longtime and fervent fighter on issues about which she is passionate.

For example, Slaughter also took a lead on the investigation into Jeff Gannon, who used a fake name and pretended to cover the executive branch while working for a conservative Web site owned by a Texas Republican activist.

In March, Slaughter also unveiled a Congressional report outlining the Republicans' handling of House rules over the past 10 years, attempting to highlight misuse of power by the GOP.

"She is holding the Republicans' feet to the fire," said Rep. Jim McGovern (Mass.), another Rules Democrat.

Republicans, however, say they don't view Slaughter as an effective voice for the Democrats as they ramp up the attacks on the ethics changes. Rather, they say Slaughter is merely toeing the partisan line for the minority, and they don't

believe she's making a dent.

One House Republican leadership aide said Slaughter "has very little vision" beyond voting lockstep with Democratic leadership and against key pieces of legislation. This staffer said Slaughter, in her role, has simply "resorted to turning the ethics process into political sportsmanship."

Slaughter was first named to the Rules Committee in 1989 by Speaker Tom Foley (D-Wash.), an appointment that came on the heels of the resignation of then-Speaker Jim Wright (D-Texas) over ethics charges. Foley himself was beaten for re-election in 1994 amid a Republican wave that was fed in part by Democratic embarrassments, most notably the House Bank scandal.

Slaughter said she watched her party suffer and lose its power because of corruption charges. "I have seen many changes here," she said, adding: "I can't believe this is the same Congress."

Slaughter recalls much more collegial times once she started serving on the committee. Then-Chairman Joe Moakley (D-Mass.) and ranking member Jimmy Quillen (R-Tenn.) would enter the committee room together, and they took many of their actions as a team rather than as representatives of the party faithful.

That's a far cry from today, she said: Democrats often can't offer amendments to key measures are limited in debate and rarely offer substitutes to legislation.

Not long ago, "minority Members on the Rules Committee got amendments - it was a given," she recalled. "I haven't had one in years."

Slaughter admits she is growing ever more frustrated with the GOP's running of the House, from process to policy. But she holds out hope that change could be on the horizon - and she vowed she will not give up because "the ethics of the House should be of concern to every American."

"We are never really defeated here until we quit," she said.