

## June 14, 2005 - Ethics Showdown: Here We Go Again

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Rep. Slaughter Demands GOP Ethics Chief Step Aside

Rules Committee Ranking Member Seeks Action in Stalled Committee

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY), Ranking Member of the House Committee on Rules, responded this afternoon to Republican Ethics Committee Chairman Doc Hastings' rejection of tradition by refusing to name a non-partisan committee staff director. His actions have led to a virtual stand still delaying any work in the Committee for the second time in just six months. The Rules Committee has jurisdiction

"Chairman Hastings' refusal to follow tradition and keep the staff of the Ethics Committee non-partisan is just another attempt by the Republican Majority to politicize the committee and subvert the Ethics process of Congress for the benefit of one man," said Rep. Slaughter.

Even more troubling are the ties between Chairman Hastings and notorious Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff reported in last week's Houston Chronicle. According to their reporting, Hastings had an ongoing relationship with Preston Gates, the same law firm that employed Abramoff.

"The Republican Majority will do everything in their power to bend the Ethics Committee into submission. First they changed the rules. Then they fired the staff. Now, their own Chairman is trying to unilaterally replace the non-partisan professional staff with his handpicked team of Republican operatives," continued Rep. Slaughter. "Enough is enough. It is time for Chairman Hastings to step aside. The Ethics Committee deserves more than partisan political power plays."

### BACKGROUND

In the opening days of Congress, Republicans were lambasted for attempting to change their conference rules to protect members of their own leadership (cough...DeLay) should they ever be indicted. Republicans also proposed removing a long standing provision of House Ethics Rules that stipulated members of Congress must conduct themselves, "at all times in a manner that shall reflect creditably on the House". Faced with overwhelming criticism they dropped both of these provisions creating the smoke screen of defeat only to hammer through dramatic changes to Ethics Rules days later. These changes to the rules are what Democrats in Congress fought successfully to overturn in late April after a four month battle with House Republicans. Prior to the reversal Republicans had done the following:

- Created a rule that would dismiss any complaint the evenly split, bi-partisan Ethics Committee deadlocks on. This measure provided an effective 'veto' for the Majority over any ethics complaint filed. The previous (now restored) language placed the item into an automatic investigative subcommittee if agreement could not be reached in the allotted time frame.

- Changed the rules that would eliminate the 45-day deadline for action by the Ethics Committee on any complaint before them. This change enabled the committee to "bury" politically sensitive ethics complaints indefinitely. The previous (now restored) language was created in the interest of providing timely resolutions to ethics complaints before the committee.