

July 11, 2006 - The Great Disappearing Act of Republican Ethics Reform

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Great Disappearing Act of Republican Ethics Reform
Another Month, Another Broken Promise

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today responded to the latest in a long string of broken promises by Republicans concerning ethics reform in Congress, and renewed calls for the immediate consideration of long-standing Democratic reform legislation.

"July 4th has come and gone, and once again, the Republican Majority has failed to deliver on its promise to reform the corruption that it brought to Washington," Rep. Slaughter said.

On June 9th, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, M.D., (R-Tenn.) and U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) formally requested that "lobbying reform conferees...complete their final package before the Fourth of July recess." As of today, no final legislation has been produced by the Republican conferees.

"The one bill that was passed by this Republican House was impossibly weak, and yet Republicans can't even manage to get that passed into law."

"Republicans may hope that the American people have forgotten about ethics reform, but Democrats haven't. We have had a real ethics reform bill with real teeth ready for five months. It is time for Congress to get serious on this issue, because the price of waiting is just too steep."

"We need immediate hearings and full consideration of the Democratic alternative to the Republican excuse for reform," Rep. Slaughter said.

BACKGROUND

Since January, Republican leaders have pledged imminent action on ethics reform, but as the condensed chronology below illustrates, they have failed to follow through on their pledges time and again:

- January 9, 2006

"GOP Puts Lobbying Scandal in Bull's-Eye"

By Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar

Los Angeles Times

Dreier, the chairman of the House Rules Committee, flew back to Washington from California after House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) asked him to take on the high-profile assignment.

"We want to deal with this issue and get it behind us as quickly as possible," Dreier told Fox News before heading to the airport.

Although Dreier offered no specifics, he told Fox News that he wanted "bold, strong reform initiatives" with "greater transparency" and would consult with members of both parties.

In a written statement released before he returned to Washington, Dreier noted that "recent developments have made clear the need for the House to take a closer look at the rules regarding members' interactions with lobbyists."

- February 3, 2006

"New GOP Leadership Team Meets to Begin Plotting Course"

Congress Daily

The new House Republican leadership team met for the first time today to begin mapping out the year ahead. "This is certainly a brand new day for Republican leadership," House Speaker Hastert said. "I think what we're trying to do as a leadership team is strengthen our team and refocus our efforts," Majority Leader Boehner said. "Today is the beginning. We've got a long way to go."

...In the short term, Republican leaders hedged this week on introduction of a lobbying and ethics reform package, and Rules Chairman Dreier said it remains unclear if Republicans will introduce a bill next week. However, leaders have said they want to complete the bill by the end of March....

- March 11, 2006

"Push to Tighten Lobbying Rules Loses Strength"

By Sheryl Gay Stolberg

The New York Times

In the House, Representative David Dreier of California, the Republicanas' point man on lobbying legislation, said reaching consensus on what the bill should include had been more difficult than he had expected.

In January, shortly after the lobbyist Jack Abramoff pleaded guilty to corruption charges, Mr. Dreier and Speaker J. Dennis Hastert called for tough restrictions, including a ban on gifts, meals and privately financed travel. They said their aim was to have legislation drafted by February. But the new majority leader, Representative John A. Boehner of Ohio, is not keen on the travel ban, and there is still no legislation.

- June 4, 2006

"Lobbying Reform Slow Despite Scandals"

By Jim Abrams

Associated Press

...Dreier's spokeswoman, Jo Maney, said GOP leaders could appoint negotiators to the House-Senate conference soon after Congress returns from the Memorial Day recess. She said the effort to reach consensus on the bill has been a challenge because some lawmakers are opposed to any changes while others favor revamping the entire system...

- June 9, 2006

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, M.D., (R-Tenn.) and U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) today made the following statement on lobbying reform after meeting this morning with lobbying reform conferees:

"Today, we asked lobbying reform conferees to complete their final package before the Fourth of July recess. Lobbying and ethics reform remains an important priority for Congress. We are confident that the conferees will work hard and deliver a conference report that will build trust with the American people by making our government more transparent and accountable."

- June 16, 2005

"House, Senate ethics bills not tough enough, reform advocates say"

By David Goldstein

Knight-Ridder Newspapers

...The House of Representatives and the Senate passed lobbying reform bills as promised. The Senate's is slightly tougher than the House version, but neither has the brass knuckles that lawmakers said were needed back in January after Jack Abramoff, once a high-flying lobbyist with close ties to the Republican leadership, pleaded guilty to influence-peddling.

A committee of House and Senate members will take up both bills to find a compromise, but reform advocates aren't optimistic that tough new rules will emerge.

"The great disappearing act" is how Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona described the weak ethical guidelines that eventually emerged.

..."This is light-years away from where the country wanted Congress to go," said Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon. "If ever there was a time after the Abramoff scandals to make fundamental changes, this would be it."

Even some Republicans are worried that their party blew it, especially with midterm elections next fall and approval ratings for President Bush and the Republican Congress in the cellar.

"We missed an opportunity," said Republican Rep. Kenny Hulshof of Missouri. "The bill was inadequate. We need to continue to push forward, not just because of what might happen between now and the election, but because it's the right thing to do. We should hold ourselves to a higher standard."

- June 20, 2006

"Lobbying Bill Stuck in Limbo"

By Tory Newmyer

Roll Call

Clear progress on a lobbying reform bill continues to elude House and Senate Republican leaders, with the two chambers stalemated over the fate of a controversial provision targeting the independent political groups known as 527s...

...The latest deadline - outlines in a joint statement earlier this month by House and Senate Republican leaders - has both chambers wrapping work on a conference agreement by the July Fourth recess. Now, even that goal appears

imperiled, with GOP aides predicting little action in the two weeks left of this work period.

- June 21, 2006

"July Fourth Deadline New a Long Shot for Lobbying Measure"

By Susan Davis

Congress Daily

"The House faces long odds of meeting the July Fourth recess deadline requested by House Speaker Hastert and Senate Majority Leader Frist on the long-stalled lobbying and ethics overhaul package, as House-passed language affecting so-called 527 organizations, named for their tax designation, and disagreements over gift rules and earmark overhauls continue to be sticking points between the two chambers."

- July 9, 2006

"Reform bill stalled in Congress"

By Andy Sullivan

Reuters

...Efforts to tighten lobbying rules have stalled in the months since a series of corruption scandals, creating potential trouble for Republicans who vowed to institute tough ethics reform.

With the August recess approaching, and then the campaign season when many lawmakers pay scant attention to policy matters, negotiators have little time to resolve differences between bills in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate and come up with legislation President George W. Bush can sign.

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