

July 31, 2007 - Slaughter Applauds Passage of Honest Leadership, Open Government Act

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, July 31, 2007

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Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today applauded the passage of the Honest Leadership, Open Government Act of 2007, a legislative package unveiled by Rep. Slaughter, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senator Harry Reid, and Senator Barack Obama on February 1st, 2006.

The bill contains a wide array of provisions (summarized below) to eliminate the corrupt lobbying practices which gained prominence under the Republican-led 109th Congress, as well as to bring new levels of transparency to the work of Congress.

"The 109th Congress was defined by corruption, but this Democratic Congress has been defined by reform," Rep. Slaughter said. "Democrats promised change last year, and we are delivering it with this bill."

"We began the year by tackling corruption here in the halls of Congress, and now we are going after the corrupt K-Street practices which undermined the work of our government."

"The Honest Leadership and Open Government Act shows why this Congress has been about issues and legislation, instead of a constant cycle of corruption and cover-up."

Today's latest ethics legislation follows a host of ethics reforms passed on the first day of the 110th Congress and contained within a new House Rules Package introduced by Rep. Slaughter. Those provisions included:

- Ending the K-Street Project: A prohibition on Members from threatening official retaliation against private firms that hire employees who do not share the Member's partisan political affiliation.

- Gift Ban: A prohibition on Members and employees from accepting gifts from a registered lobbyist, from an agent of a foreign principal, or an entity that employs or retains these lobbyists and agents.

- Travel Restrictions: A prohibition on Members and employees from accepting travel reimbursements from a registered lobbyist, from an agent of a foreign country, or from an entity that employs or retains these lobbyists or agents.

- Travel Disclosure: New language stating that prior to accepting reimbursed travel, Members and employees will be required to obtain a certification from the entity paying for the trip declaring that, except as permitted for universities and one-day travel, lobbyists did not plan, organize, request, arrange, or finance the travel.

- Corporate Jet Ban: A prohibition on Members from using official, personal, or campaign funds to pay for the use of privately owned airplanes.

- Ethics Training: A requirement for the Ethics Committee to offer annual ethics training to Members and appropriate employees. New employees must receive this training within 60 days of beginning work in the House and other employees must certify they take the course each year.

BACKGROUND: The Honest Leadership, Open Government Act of 2007:

Today's legislation addresses a host of lobbyist abuses which were rampant in the 109th Congress, as well as increasing the transparency of Congressional work to historic levels.

- New transparency for lobbyist bundling campaign contributions: For the first time, this legislation requires reporting on lobbyists who "bundle," or collect campaign checks for Members of Congress. Requires the Member's campaign to report if lobbyist bundled more than \$15,000 in campaign contributions semiannually for that Member.

- Historic disclosure of other financial contributions to Members: Increases disclosure of lobbyists' contributions to lawmakers and entities controlled by lawmakers, including contributions to Members' charities, to events or entities honoring members, contributions intended to pay the cost of a meeting or a retreat, and contributions to Presidential library funds.

- Lavish convention parties: Prohibits Members of Congress from attending national political convention parties held in their honor and paid for by lobbyists or their clients.

- Ends K-Street Project: Bans the K-Street Project, which prohibits private entities from hiring and firing based on politics.

- Expands public disclosure of lobbyist activities: Doubles the frequency of the disclosure of Lobbyists' Reports to four times a year. Establishes an online, searchable public database of lobbyist disclosure information. Requires lobbyists to disclose past executive branch and Congressional employment. Prohibits lobbyists from giving gifts and travel in violation of House and Senate rules. Increases criminal and civil penalties for violating the Lobby Disclosure Act to \$200,000 and five years in prison.

- Ending conflicts of interest and strengthening restrictions on post congressional employment: Requires sitting Members to disclose job negotiations for post-Congressional employment and to recuse themselves for purposes of a conflict of interest. It also strengthens the revolving door banning Senators from lobbying their colleagues for two years. Requires Members to prohibit their staff from having any official contact with the Members' lobbyist spouse on behalf of the spouse's client.

- Strengthen Senate Ethics Rules, similar to already enacted House Reforms: Includes a variety of changes to Senate rules, including a ban on gift and travel by lobbyists, full disclosure of earmarks, points of order against out of scope earmarks and limits on secret holds.

- Congressional Pension Accountability: Denies taxpayer-funded pension benefits to Members of Congress convicted of corruption while serving the American people.

- Expands public disclosure of Members' travel and finances: Establishes an online, searchable public database of Member travel and personal financial disclosure forms.

- Disclosure of stealth lobbying: Closes a loophole in current law that permits coalitions -- such as the insurance industry-funded "Harry and Louise" ad campaign that dishonestly targeted Clinton administration health care legislation in 1993-94 - to avoid disclosing their clients.

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