

January 4, 2005 - DeLay, Republicans Have New Tactics, Same Old Goal

DeLay, Republicans Have New Tactics, Same Old Goal:
Revised Rules Package Still Designed to Dismantle Ethics Process in the House

Washington, DC. Late yesterday Republicans abandoned certain provisions of their 109th Congress Rules Package under pressure from Democrats and Washington based ethics organizations.

And while to many, an ethics crisis in the House may appear to have been narrowly averted, a close inspection of the changes remaining in the rules package reveals that the revised proposal represents just as serious a threat to the ethics process in the 109th Congress.

"This rules package before the House is designed to ensure that no ethics complaints see the light of day. Period. I can't say it any more plainly than that," stated Congresswoman Slaughter.

She continued, "It is a cynical attempt to ensure that the various ethical rebukes of the Majority Leader by the Ethics Committee this past Congress cannot be repeated ever again. It is a shameful day for this House."

"The tactics of Mr. DeLay and his Republicans may have changed on this, but the goal is the same: to repeal important reforms, hopelessly cripple the Ethics process and end the prospect of any accountability in this House on matters of ethics and integrity. This is wholly unacceptable."

" This package represents a very serious and grave threat to the credibility and integrity of this institution. And sadly, is being forced upon the Congress and the American people for the benefit and protection on one man, Tom DeLay."

"The Republican Party has already gone to extraordinary lengths to cover for and protect Mr. Delay from his long pattern of unethical behavior. Now they are changing standing rules of the House to gut the ethics process, a shameful business for the Majority to be involved in."

The provision, which will effectively destroy the ethics process in the House does the following:

- Creates a rule that would dismiss any complaint the evenly split, bi-partisan Ethics Committee deadlocks on. This measure provides an effective 'veto' for the Majority over any ethics complaint filed. The current language places the item into an automatic investigative subcommittee if agreement cannot be reached in the allotted time frame.

- A change in the rules that would eliminate the 45-day deadline for action by the Ethics Committee on any complaint before them. This change would enable the committee to "bury" politically sensitive ethics complaints indefinitely. This important reform the Republicans want to dismantle was created in the interest of providing timely resolutions to ethics complaints before the committee.

The GOP rules change allows a simple majority to pull the plug on ethics complaints before the Committee has a chance to find out what the facts of the case are. Under the current Ethics process, a validly filed complaint automatically moves forward in the Ethics process unless a bipartisan majority takes action on it within 45 days. This rules change is the equivalent of allowing a judge to throw out a meritorious case before it reaches the discovery process.

One-half of the Committee will now have the power to "bury" complaints such as those recently filed against Majority Leader Tom DeLay. The current Ethics investigation process allows valid cases to move forward even if the Committee does not act. Under the new rule, after 45 days, a complaint only moves forward with a majority vote, which means five members of one party on the Ethics Committee will now have the power to block meritorious complaints against Members of their party.

The change effectively ends the process of accountability for the Ethics Committee by removing any deadline for action, which motivates the committee to find common ground on sensitive complaints before the committee.

The rules package is set to be debated before the full House this afternoon. A vote for adoption will follow.