

STATEMENT OF MELANIE SLOAN
CITIZENS FOR RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICS IN WASHINGTON
HOUSE ETHICS COMMITTEE RULES PRESS CONFERENCE
January 3, 2005

I JOIN MY COLLEAGUES IN THE NON-PROFIT COMMUNITY IN CONDEMNING THE PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE RULES FOR ETHICS COMPLAINTS IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

“ETHICS COMMITTEE” HAS BECOME AN OXYMORON. RATHER THAN EFFECTIVELY POLICING MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS OF OFFICIAL CONDUCT IS NOW A LAUNDROMAT FOR ETHICS VIOLATIONS – A MEMBER WALKS INTO THE COMMITTEE SOILED BY ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT AND WALKS OUT CLEAN AS A WHISTLE BY A COMMITTEE THAT WHITEWASHES EVEN THE MOST EGREGIOUS CONDUCT.

FRANKLY, THE EFFORTS OF THE ETHICS COMMITTEE LAST CONGRESS WERE PATHETIC – THE COMMITTEE FOUND THAT MAJORITY LEADER TOM DELAY TRIED TO BRIBE FORMER CONG. NICK SMITH TO CHANGE HIS VOTE ON THE MEDICARE BILL, THAT MR. DELAY ACTED INAPPROPRIATELY WITH RESPECT TO WESTAR ENERGY COMPANY, AND THAT MR. DELAY INAPPROPRIATELY USED HIS INFLUENCE WITH THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION TO TRACK DOWN MISSING TEXAS LEGISLATORS. AND THE PENALTY FOR ALL OF THESE VIOLATIONS – MERE ADMONISHMENT. SOMETHING SO MINOR THAT MR. DELAY REPEATEDLY SAID THAT THE ETHICS COMMITTEE HAD VINDICATED HIM.

THE COMMITTEE DID, HOWEVER, WARN DELAY THAT HIS PATTERN OF ABUSING THE RULES MIGHT LEAD TO FURTHER COMMITTEE ACTION.

OF COURSE, NONE OF THIS STOPPED DELAY FROM THREATENING ETHICS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN JOEL HEFLEY OR FROM HAVING HIS ATTORNEY SEND A 38 PAGE LETTER TO RULES COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN DAVID DRIER ASKING THAT I BE HELD IN CONTEMPT OF CONGRESS FOR DOING NOTHING MORE THAN EXPRESSING MY FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS. NEXT, DELAY WILL BE BUILDING A JAIL IN THE BASEMENT OF THE CAPITOL TO IMPRISON HIS CRITICS.

AND WHAT DID THE ETHICS COMMITTEE DO ABOUT ALL OF THIS? CRITICIZE CHRIS BELL FOR FILING AN ETHICS COMPLAINT IN THE FIRST PLACE AND WARN OTHER MEMBERS NOT TO FILE COMPLAINTS IN THE FUTURE.

SINCE DELAY SAW THAT HE COULD GET AWAY WITH ALL OF THAT, FIRST HE CONVINCED THE REPUBLICAN CAUCUS TO REPEAL THE RULE PROVIDING THAT MEMBERS WHO ARE INDICTED CANNOT MAINTAIN THEIR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AND, SINCE THAT MIGHT NOT OFFER HIM QUITE ENOUGH PROTECTION, HE IS ALSO SEEKING TO HAVE JOEL HEFLEY REMOVED AS

CHAIRMAN OF THE ETHICS COMMITTEE. LAUGHABLY, HEFLEY IS TO BE REPLACED BY LAMAR SMITH, A FELLOW TEXAN WHO HAS ACTUALLY DONATED MONEY TO DELAY'S DEFENSE FUND.

INSTALLING SMITH AS CHAIRMAN, IN CONJUNCTION WITH NEW RULES ALLOWING THE COMMITTEE TO ACT ON A COMPLAINT ONLY IF THE CHAIRMAN AND RANKING MEMBER AGREE, AND DELETING THE RULE REQUIRING MEMBERS TO BEHAVE IN A MANNER THAT "SHALL REFLECT CREDITABLY ON THE HOUSE" – SOMETHING THESE RULES CERTAINLY DON'T DO -- SHOULD EFFECTIVELY STOP THE COMMITTEE FROM EVER INVESTIGATING DELAY.

IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT AT THE SAME TIME ALL OF THIS IS GOING ON IN WASHINGTON, DOWN IN TEXAS, DELAY IS WORKING TO HAVE TRAVIS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY RONNIE EARLE'S PROSECUTORIAL AUTHORITY CUT BACK TO PREVENT EARLE FROM CONTINUING HIS INVESTIGATION INTO THE CONDUCT OF DELAY'S PAC, TEXANS FOR A REPUBLICAN MAJORITY.

ALL OF THIS IS DESIGNED TO MAKE ONE MAN TRULY ABOVE THE LAW.

FUNNY, THAT ALL OF THIS IS BEING DONE TO WEAKEN THE RULES, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME, THE COMMITTEE IS STRAINING TO INTERPRET EXISTING RULES TO ALLOW AN INVESTIGATION INTO WHETHER CONG. MCDERMOTT VIOLATED STANDARDS OF CONDUCT BY TURNING AN ILLEGALLY TAPED PHONE CONVERSATION OVER TO REPORTERS IN 1997.

COMMITTEE RULES ALLOW INVESTIGATIONS ONLY INTO CONDUCT WITHIN THE PAST THREE CONGRESSES, YET MR. MCDERMOTT'S ACTIONS TOOK PLACE 5 CONGRESSES AGO. HOW FAST DO YOU THINK THE COMMITTEE WOULD SANCTION A MEMBER WHO FILED A COMPLAINT AGAINST MR. DELAY FOR CONDUCT THAT OCCURRED BEYOND THE 3 CONGRESS LIMITATION?

AND IT IS NOT AS IF THE COMMITTEE DOESN'T HAVE PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES TO INVESTIGATE MEMBERS WHO HAVE ENGAGED IN MORE RECENT QUESTIONABLE CONDUCT. THE LIST IS LONG AND GETTING LONGER. FOR EXAMPLE, THE COMMITTEE SHOULD INVESTIGATE

HOW IS THAT CONG. MAXINE WATERS FAMILY MEMBERS HAVE MADE OVER \$1 MILLION IN THE LAST EIGHT YEARS BY DOING BUSINESS WITH COMPANIES, CANDIDATES AND CAUSES THAT MS. WATERS HAS HELPED?

WHY IS IT THAT SEVERAL MEMBERS, INCLUDING JOHN DOOLITTLE AND J.D. HAYWORTH HOSTED EVENTS IN LOBBYIST JACK ABRAMOFF'S LUXURY SKY BOXES WITHOUT REPORTING THE USE OF THE BOXES TO THE FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION?

WHY DID TWO INDIAN TRIBES PAY \$50,000 FOR CONG. BOB NEY AND OTHERS TO ACCOMPANY JACK ABRAMOFF ON A GOLF TRIP TO SCOTLAND?

AND THEN THERE IS THE MATTER OF CONG. RICK RENZI'S USE OF BANNED FINANCES TO FUND A LARGE PORTION OF HIS 2002 RE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND FAILING TO REPORT \$39,000 IN CONTRIBUTIONS AND \$101,000 IN EXPENDITURES.

THE SHADY IF NOT ACTUALLY ILLEGAL CONDUCT OF THESE MEMBERS COULD ALL BE CONVENIENTLY IGNORED IF THE HOUSE ACTUALLY ABOLISHES THE RULE THAT MEMBERS BEHAVE IN A MANNER THAT SHALL REFLECT CREDITABLY ON THE HOUSE.

IRONICALLY, MANY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS RAN FOR ELECTION ON PLATFORMS OF PUBLIC MORALITY. THE OLD ADAGE THAT WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE GOOSE IS GOOD FOR THE GANDER SHOULD APPLY: JUST AS CONGRESS WANTS THE PUBLIC HELD TO HIGH MORAL STANDARDS, MEMBERS SHOULD BE HELD TO EQUALLY HIGH STANDARDS.

THE PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE ETHICS RULES, HOWEVER, ALLOW MEMBERS TO ENGAGE IN EVER SLEAZIER CONDUCT WITHOUT FEAR OF REPERCUSSION.

LET'S PUT AN END TO THE FARCE THAT CONGRESS CARES ABOUT THE ETHICS OF ITS MEMBERS BY DISBANDING THE ETHICS COMMITTEE ALTOGETHER. CONGRESS SHOULD BE HONEST WITH THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND ADMIT THAT IT WILL NOT POLICE ITSELF. IT IS THE LEAST IT CAN DO.

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