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**Statement of
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On
Congressional Efforts to Hobble Ethics Oversight
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As a New Year begins, it is traditional to resolve to better ourselves and the world around us. Unfortunately, the House leadership is taking the exact opposite approach and embracing a set of New Year's resolutions that will gut the House ethics rules. These outrageous proposals will inevitably lead to a further debasement of the institution and an erosion of the public's respect for its elected officials.

Of course, it's not as if the House ethics committee has been an overzealous watchdog. House rules already prohibit outside groups from filing a complaint of an alleged ethics violation by a lawmaker, and Republicans and Democrats alike have been living under an informal "truce" barring members from filing such complaints. But now that the truce is beginning to fray, the House leadership is hoping to snuff out any new signs of life.

It is clear that those supporting these changes have no respect for any standards of ethics or the duty they owe their constituents. One must even ask whether House leaders have any respect for themselves or their colleagues. Does the leadership think members are incapable of living up to a standard that requires them to behave in a way that does not bring discredit to the institution they serve in the name of the public? Are they so unsure of their ability to live up to basic standards of conduct that they must punish the ethics committee chair to ensure that no one will dare try to enforce the rules again?

In pushing these proposals, the House leadership is perhaps banking on the assumption that the American public won't care. Or maybe the leadership is hoping that the public's expectations regarding the ethics of lawmakers are so low that most people will be unfazed by the further collapse of the House's ethical standards. These assumptions are bitterly cynical, shockingly irresponsible and severely damaging to the public's trust in Congress. The House members who support these changes should take no pride in their efforts.

At a time when members of Congress frequently talk about the importance of values, the public has the right to demand their elected representatives lead by example. To do so, the House leadership will have to abandon its egregious efforts to shield members from accountability for their conduct. Instead, it must resolve to trust the better nature of our elected representatives and rebuild an ethics system that, in the words of the very rule they seek to abandon, "reflect creditably on the House."

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