

Campaign Legal Center - Common Cause - CREW  
Democracy 21 - League of Women Voters - Public Citizen - U.S. PIRG

December 21, 2010

House Speaker-designee John Boehner  
H-204, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker-designee Boehner:

Our organizations are writing to strongly urge you to support, without any weakening changes, the gift, travel and other ethics rules adopted by the House in 2007 in response to the Jack Abramoff scandals.

We are pleased to see that, according to *Roll Call* (December 16, 2010), Representative Greg Walden (R-Ore.) said on December 16 that "he doesn't 'anticipate any change' to the Office of Congressional Ethics in the 112th Congress, as members of the House GOP transition team concluded it will not issue recommendations about the future of the fledgling office."

As you know, our organizations strongly support the OCE, a critically important ethics reform from the last Congress and believe it is essential that the OCE continue in the next Congress with its authority, powers and funding fully intact.

We also strongly urge you to oppose any efforts to weaken or backtrack on any of the existing ethics rules and standards of conduct that have been adopted to protect the integrity of the House and the interests of the American people. We further urge you to seek ways to strengthen the existing ethics rules and standards in order to ensure that members of the House are held to the high ethical standards that citizens expect from the federal officeholders who exercise great power over their daily lives.

The organizations include the Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, CREW, Democracy 21, the League of Women Voters, Public Citizen and U.S. PIRG.

The ethics rules adopted in 2007 included new restrictions on lobbyists and lobbying organizations paying for trips, gifts, meals and entertainment for Members, and ended the practice of Members paying cut-rate amounts to use corporate planes for their travel.

These rules also established pre-approval requirements for trips financed by persons other than lobbyists and lobbying organizations and timely disclosure of these trips after they occur. This is an area where the rules and oversight apparently need to be strengthened, in the wake of the Caribbean trip that was the subject of a House Ethics Committee investigation based on the recommendation of the Office of Congressional Ethics.

Another important rule adopted in 2007 prohibited House members from participating in events held at the presidential nominating conventions to "honor Members" and financed by lobbyists or by private entities that retain or employ a lobbyist.

This rule was adopted to stop the abuses that had occurred at national conventions where lavish parties paid for by lobbyists and lobbying organizations were, in essence, parties thrown by House members and financed by influence-seekers.

In December 2007, the House Ethics Committee issued a guidance to House members that opened gaping loopholes in this rule. In a letter sent on December 18, 2007 to the Ethics Committee, reform groups stated:

The Committee's guidance, issued on December 11, 2007, provides a clear roadmap for Members and lobbyists on how to circumvent and ignore the new rule at the party conventions next year. The door is opened wide by the Committee for lobbyists and lobbying organizations to continue their past practices at conventions of sponsoring and paying for lavish parties to "honor" Members - abusive practices that led to the adoption of the new rule.

With the presidential nominating conventions coming in 2012, we urge you to provide the leadership necessary to overturn this unjustifiable guidance and restore the "convention parties" rule to its original meaning.

In conclusion, we urge you to take all steps necessary to preserve and, where necessary, strengthen the House ethics rules and standards of conduct that exist to protect the interests of the American people in an honest and ethical House of Representatives.

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