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House Majority Leader DeLay Is Attempting to Chill Public Complaints About His Unethical Behavior

Statement of Public Citizen President Joan Claybrook

Public Citizen today calls upon House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) to stop his new effort to intimidate members of Congress and the public from scrutinizing his ethical lapses. Awash in charges of possible ethics violations, DeLay is now attempting to mute public criticism by filing a “contempt of Congress” complaint against a congressman and a citizen’s group who helped open the ethics investigations, which so far have led to three admonitions against DeLay by the House ethics committee. More complaints are still pending before that committee, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Federal Election Commission, and there is a related, ongoing investigation by an Austin, Texas, grand jury.

Known as “the Hammer” for his aggressive bullying of members of Congress who disagree with him, DeLay this morning has taken a whack not only at Rep. Chris Bell (D-Texas), who filed the original ethics complaint against DeLay, and the House ethics committee that recently admonished DeLay for his disregard of ethics rules, but also at a citizens’ group – Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) – for helping pursue the ethics charges. Apparently, the Hammer has decided that he now needs to intimidate citizens’ groups as well as Congress in order to stay in power.

Proudly, Public Citizen is also mentioned in DeLay’s counter-complaint as helping encourage investigations into the House leader’s financial wheelings and dealings, though we are not explicitly targeted for retribution by DeLay.

More than 15 months ago, Public Citizen filed complaints against DeLay with the House ethics committee and the DOJ regarding very questionable campaign contributions from Westar Energy Corp. and policy favors DeLay and other senior Republican members of the House tried to give Westar. The DOJ complaint is still pending. Now, due to the House ethics committee investigation, we know that Westar and DeLay were involved in additional questionable contacts at a golf outing event billed as a fundraiser, which was not included in Public Citizen’s original complaint.

Mr. DeLay's new legal tactic is an attempt to chill the free speech rights of citizens who are seeking to persuade Congress, based on credible evidence, to carefully investigate the House leader's behavior, which included: accepting campaign contributions to his PAC from a corporation and then attempting to insert provisions uniquely favorable to that corporation into pending legislation; creating a political organization accused of funneling corporate money into Texas state elections where corporate money is prohibited; and diverting FAA resources from protecting the skies to tracking down Texas Democratic legislators in a partisan spat over DeLay's favored redistricting legislation.

Public Citizen again calls upon Mr. DeLay to recognize the damage he has wrought on the integrity of Congress and step down from his leadership post. We also call upon Mr. DeLay to quit trying to intimidate those who would dare question his behavior.

We will not be intimidated.

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