

Castle Outlines Work Still to Be Done on Ethics & Lobbying Reform in Congress, Questions Implementation of Member & Staff Ethics Training -- March 2, 2007

Newark, DE -- Addressing a "Politics & the Media" Class at the University of Delaware, Delaware Congressman Mike Castle today called on Congress to immediately begin mandatory ethics training for Members and staff, and to quickly return its attention back to the overall issue of lobbying reform to address work that hasn't been finished.

In January, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a package of Rules Changes with regards to ethics and lobbying reform during the "first 100 Hours" that included many Castle authored provisions such as the banning of gifts, meals and trips paid for by lobbyists, pre-approval of private travel, barring lawmakers from traveling on corporate jets, and requiring ethics training for Members and staff. The ethics training was set to begin yesterday, and Castle has questioned appropriate Leadership members why this has not happened.

"Now that two months has passed since our initial debate, I am pleased the Democrats are finally turning back to focus on one of the most critical issues affecting how Congress runs -- ethics and lobbying reform. While in my opinion we did not go far enough in enacting strict transparency and accountability provisions, I am hopeful we can still build on what has been passed to date. We must always remember that this is the people's House and that everyone conducting business in this institution must be doing so ethically and with as much openness as possible. Therefore, as the House prepares to tackle this issue once again in the coming weeks, I plan to play a central role in ensuring this happens," Castle said.

Castle's priority list of reforms, which build upon reforms already enacted, include:

- Create an independent outside investigations commission, comprised of former Members and judges, with subpoena power to investigate ethics violations
- Require mandatory licensure and training of lobbyists;
- Hold lobbyists, in addition to Members and staff, liable for violating the gift ban;
- Maintain separation between personal, campaign and official funds and activities;
- Bar lobbying by spouses and immediate family members;
- Extend the cooling off period for Members and Staff before they can lobby from 1-2 years;
- Hire professional and permanent staff for the ethics committee

Castle also sent a letter to the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct yesterday, questioning why mandatory ethics training for Members and staff has not yet been scheduled. The letter is copied below.

March 1, 2007

The Honorable Stephanie Tubbs Jones

Chairwoman

Committee on Standards of Official Conduct

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Doc Hastings

Ranking Member

Committee on Standards of Official Conduct

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Tubbs Jones and Ranking Member Hastings:

In recent years the Committee on Standards and Official Conduct has failed to exercise duties of oversight, investigations and punishment for members and staff of this body accused of ethics violations. I hope that we in Congress, as well as the American people, can have their faith restored in this Committee in the 110th Congress.

The Rules Package for the 110th Congress adopted by the House early this year correctly required the Committee to offer annual ethics training to members, delegates, the resident commissioner, officers and employees of the House. With the March 1st requirement for this training upon us, I am writing to learn how the Committee plans to implement this training and in what ways the Members and staff of the House will be held accountable for their participation. One way to achieve this is through an online, searchable database that our constituents may access at any time.

Ethics training is a critical piece in educating people on the rules and laws that we have written and adopted to govern the House of Representatives. The 110th Congress is well underway and we are operating under many of the adopted changes to House rules, yet there has not been formal review of these new rules.

I encourage you to appeal to all of Members and staff within the House of Representatives and urge their attendance for learning how the Code of Official Conduct and related House Rules differ from previous law and practice. We cannot underestimate how critical it is to repair a system that has failed and to restore the confidence of the American people in the ethical oversight of this body. I look forward to hearing your plans for implementing this important training.

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