

CASTLE SAYS ETHICS COMMISSION MAY LACK AUTHORITY -- DECEMBER 19, 2007

Washington, D.C. -- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle called the House Ethics Task Force proposal to create an independent Office of Congressional Ethics a step in the right direction, but expressed concerns that it places potential limits on its effectiveness.

"For far too long, the Ethics Committee within the U.S. House of Representatives has failed to adequately monitor Members of Congress," Rep. Castle said. "I am pleased that an outside Office of Congressional Ethics is one step closer to being established, but I believe the power granted to the Commission could fall short of making a difference.

"In early 2007, I introduced a bill to establish an ethics commission that would have the power to subpoena witnesses and allow outside groups to file complaints. I will continue to urge the Speaker and my colleagues to include these additional provisions to strengthen the commission and ensure greater government accountability."

The Office of Congressional Ethics would be implemented through a resolution amending House rules. It is expected that this resolution will be considered on the House floor early next year. This independent office will consist of six board members who may conduct preliminary investigations into ethics violations and make recommendations to the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct. Current members of Congress and lobbyists are prohibited from serving on the ethics commission.

Rep. Castle authored H.R. 97 to establish a stronger Independent Investigations Commission, among other important lobbying and ethics reforms. He has submitted this proposal to Rules Committee during consideration of the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act and the Lobbying Transparency Act. During development of the current proposal, he also presented the merits of the Commission to the House Ethics Task Force.

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