

March 27, 2017

The Honorable Susan W. Brooks
Chairwoman
House Committee on Ethics
1015 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ted Deutch
Ranking Member
House Committee on Ethics
1015 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Brooks and Ranking Member Deutch,

On Wednesday March 22, 2017, the House Committee on Ethics held a public meeting to consider organizational matters relating to the start of the 115th Congress.¹ The public portion of this organizational meeting lasted for approximately five minutes and consisted of a discussion of a minor rules change regarding financial disclosures before the Committee moved into an executive session.

Issue One noted the absence of any discussion of the Office of Congressional Ethics by the Committee during this meeting. At the start of the 115th Congress in January of this year, House Republicans approved, then subsequently reversed a rule that would have significantly weakened the independent Office of Congressional Ethics by placing it under the oversight of the House Ethics Committee. Following the reversal of this decision, incoming House Ethics Committee Chairwoman Susan Brooks (R-IN) announced “that her panel would review bipartisan changes to the OCE’s mission in the coming months, culminating in a proposal to be delivered before the House’s August recess.”²

Issue One strongly urges the Committee to announce the schedule of these open hearings regarding the Office of Congressional Ethics, as there are significant ethics issues that deserve the attention of the Committee.

Proposed Ethics Reforms for Consideration

Issue One also urges the House Ethics Committee to undertake a review of current ethics rules. We urge the Committee to actively review and consider proposing the changes that I outlined in the [Ethics Package of Reforms for the 115th Congress](#), which were endorsed by a

¹ “Notice of Public Meeting,” U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ethics, March 17, 2017, available at: <https://ethics.house.gov/press-release/notice-of-public-meeting-1>.

² Sean Sullivan and Mike DeBonis, “House Republicans Back off Gutting Ethics Watchdog After Backlash From Trump,” *The Washington Post*, January 3, 2017, available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/gop-to-start-on-ambitious-conservative-agenda-as-congress-convenes-today/2017/01/03/6117cbe2-d1a1-11e6-945a-76f69a399dd5_story.html.

coalition of groups.³ The proposed reforms address six critical issues of ethics in government and are summarized below:

- *Travel*
 - Close the nonprofit loophole for lobbying entities; and require full online disclosure of official and related travel.
- *Conflicts of Interest*
 - Require House and Senate Ethics Committees to issue updated guidance and clarifications regarding actions that implicate conflicts of interest; and require online disclosure of job negotiations when there are two-way communications on employment prospects.
- *Campaign Activities While Congress is Meeting*
 - Prohibit Members of Congress from actively engaging in political fundraising and soliciting between 9am and 6pm on any day in which their house of Congress is meeting as well as congressional staff from engaging in any congressional campaign activity while Congress is in session and the staffer is not on leave/vacation. Additionally, create cooling-off periods between a Member's acceptance of a contribution from a lobbyist or their client and participating in a lobbying contact with that lobbyist or client.
- *Revolving Door*
 - Lengthen the existing two-year revolving door limitations for Members of Congress and extend the House revolving door restrictions to senior staff to prohibit lobbying contacts with the entire House rather than just their own office.
- *Enforcement*
 - Give the Office of Congressional Ethics subpoena power and clarify that the Committee on Ethics may not halt a review by the independent Office of Congressional Ethics unless it has already empaneled an investigative subcommittee to review the same allegations. Additionally, require random annual audits of official Member accounts.

³ "House and Senate Leaders Urged to Strengthen Congressional Ethics Rules for 115th Congress," The Campaign Legal Center, November 21, 2016, available at: <http://www.campaignlegalcenter.org/news/press-releases/house-and-senate-leaders-urged-strengthen-congressional-ethics-rules-115th>.

- *Gifts*
 - Require disclosure of donors to any nonprofit organization established, maintained, controlled by or named after a Member of Congress and eliminate gift rules loopholes for public universities.

Conclusion

The House Ethics Committee plays a critical role in guiding ethical behavior of members of Congress. Open Committee hearings, strengthening House ethics rules and addressing rules regarding using public office for private gain are imperative components of restoring public trust in Congress.

We look forward to hearing from you regarding the Committee's efforts to address these important matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M McGehee', written in a cursive style.

Meredith McGehee
Chief of Policy, Programs and Strategy

cc: House Ethics Committee Members
attachment: Ethics Package of Reforms for the 115th Congress