

April 13, 2006

Speaker Dennis Hastert
Office of the Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Dreier, Chairman
Committee on Rules
U.S. House of Representatives
H-312 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert and Chairman Dreier,

On March 24, 2006, our organizations wrote to all Members of the House to express our strong opposition to H.R. 4975, which fails to effectively address the lobbying, ethics and corruption scandals in Congress.

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

This legislation has been considered and reported by a number of House Committees without making the necessary changes to strengthen the bill and effectively address the existing problems. We therefore continue to strongly oppose the legislation as failing to provide real and effective reform of the lobbying laws and congressional ethics rules.

We believe that when this legislation is considered on the House floor, the House Rules Committee must give Members the opportunity to vote on critical amendments that go to the heart of the lobbying, ethics and corruption scandals facing the House.

There are a number of ethics and lobbying issues on which Members must have the opportunity to work their will, through voting on amendments and having a majority of House members decide the results.

For example, the House Ethics Committee and the process for enforcing House ethics rules are in complete shambles and have no public credibility. The Ethics Committee has been inoperative for almost all of this Congress and shows no signs of addressing numerous matters that have been and are before the Committee.

Representatives Christopher Shays (R-CT) and Marty Meehan (D-MA) have proposed an amendment to H.R. 4975 to establish an independent Office of Public Integrity to work with the Ethics Committee and assist in enforcing the ethics rules.

It is essential that members of the House be given the opportunity to vote on this uniquely important amendment.

In addition to voting on the Office of Public Integrity, Members must be given the opportunity for floor votes on a number of other important amendments, including the following:

- An amendment to require permanent, not temporary, restrictions on privately-financed travel for Members;
- An amendment to require that Members pay fair market value, or charter costs, for planes made available by corporations and others to Members for travel;
- An amendment to eliminate major loopholes in the provision to require lobbyists to disclose the ways in which they provide campaign funds and financial benefits to assist Members;
- An amendment to require disclosure of the huge sums being secretly spent by professional lobbying firms on campaigns to stimulate lobbying of Congress by the public, including multimillion dollar advertising campaigns; and
- An amendment to curb the revolving door of Members leaving Congress and lobbying their former colleagues to influence congressional decisions.

There are reports that consideration is being given to bringing up this legislation, or portions of it, on the suspension calendar. There is no conceivable justification for placing these controversial issues on the suspension calendar, which, as you know, is reserved for non-controversial proposals.

The issues involved in H.R. 4975, and in the amendments cited above, deal directly with the integrity and public credibility of the Members and the House as an institution. The issues deal with the way our democracy is functioning, and a fair and democratic process must be used to consider them.

We strongly urge you to provide Members with the opportunity to vote up-or-down on the amendments we have outlined and on similar appropriate amendments.

If Members are barred from voting on these amendments by a rule that does not allow such votes, or by placing portions of the bill on the suspension calendar, we will strongly urge Members to vote against the rule and/or to vote against any of these issues placed on the suspension calendar.

We will also strongly urge Members to vote against H.R. 4975 if it reaches the House floor and is not strengthened through successful floor amendments to effectively address the lobbying, ethics and corruption issues in Congress.

Campaign Legal Center
Common Cause
Democracy 21

League of Women Voters
Public Citizen
U.S. PIRG