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October 11, 2006

Representative Dennis Hastert
Speaker of the House
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert:

Our organizations believe that regardless of which party controls the House in the next Congress, it is essential to fundamentally overhaul the process for enforcing the House ethics rules.

The performance of the House Ethics Committee in this Congress has been a complete failure and the House ethics enforcement process today has no credibility with the American people.

The Ethics Committee to this day has never publicly announced or undertaken a full investigation into lobbyist Jack Abramoff's various scandalous activities in connection with a number of House members.

The House Ethics Committee did not even function in 2005. And with the House now gone for the 2006 elections, the Ethics Committee still has no public record of having taken any actions against any Representative or congressional staff member in connection with the worst corruption scandals in the House in thirty years.

At the core of the problems with the current House ethics enforcement system is the absence of any independent entity to play a central role in the enforcement process.

The refusal last week by the House Ethics Committee, which consists of an equal number of Republicans and Democrats, to appoint an outside counsel to assist the Committee in the Foley matter is indefensible and only serves to compound the public credibility problems of the Committee.

There is no way to explain or justify why an independent outside counsel was retained by the House Ethics Committee for the ethics investigations of former Democratic Speaker Jim Wright and former Republican Speaker Newt Gingrich, but has now been rejected for an ethics investigation that involves you and other House leaders.

In refusing to appoint an outside counsel for the investigation of the Foley matter, the House Ethics Committee has failed the American people and their interests in high ethical standards of conduct for their elected Representatives.

The establishment of an independent ethics enforcement entity is embodied in bills introduced in this Congress by Representatives Marty Meehan (D-MA) and Christopher Shays (R-CT) to create an independent Office of Public Integrity in Congress (H.R. 4799), and by Representatives Mike Castle (R-DE) and Jim Leach (R-IA) to create an independent Ethics Commission in Congress (H.R. 4920).

House members were denied the opportunity to even consider this vitally important concept earlier this year when the House Rules Committee blocked an effort by Representatives Meehan and Shays to offer their proposal as a floor amendment to lobbying and ethics legislation.

Our organizations call on you to make a public commitment now to lead an effort to overhaul and reform the failed House ethics enforcement process next year, regardless of which party controls the House in the next Congress. We also call on you to publicly announce now your support for the creation of an independent ethics enforcement entity to play a central role in a new House ethics enforcement process.

Our organizations are sending similar letters today to House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL), House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD), House Majority Leader John Boehner (R-OH) and House Majority Whip Roy Blunt (R-MO).

We would appreciate receiving a timely response to the requests in our letter.

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