

April 22, 2016

The Honorable Paul D. Ryan
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan:

One year ago, former Representative Porter Goss (R-FL) announced that he was stepping down as Co-Chair of the Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE). Mr. Goss joined the Office in July 2008. His tenure, with his Co-Chair, former Representative David Skaggs (D-CO), who is still serving, was marked by a remarkable commitment to achieving bipartisan consensus. Unlike the House Ethics Committee, the Office has functioned smoothly and has rarely been marked by partisan bickering.

Even though the Office continues to function and fulfill its investigatory responsibilities with respect to alleged violations of House ethics rules, the undersigned groups strongly urge you to move expeditiously to announce a replacement for Mr. Goss. By naming a replacement, you will send a needed signal that you support the Office and that you are committed, as the institutional leader of the House of Representatives, to continuing the Office in the next Congress.

During its eight years, the Office of Congressional Ethics has compiled an admirable record of conducting impartial, professional investigations. Its interpretations of House Rules have been both reasonable and consistent, thereby giving the Office a reputation for fairness and integrity. These achievements were in no way guaranteed when the Office began. The Office could have easily devolved into the kind of partisan bickering that has plagued the Ethics Committee. Or, it could have interpreted House Rules in a manner that runs counter to a common-sense understanding of the Rules' meanings and intent. Thanks to the early leadership of Chairmen Skaggs and Goss, that has not, to date, occurred.

We also must note our continued belief that, in light of OCE's experience, the Office should have subpoena power to ensure full cooperation by witnesses essential to its investigations. We urge you to support that change in the Rules for the 115th Congress.

We are aware that a small number of House Members from both sides of the aisle remain eager to eliminate or weaken the Office. The Office's cardinal virtues—including its dedication to avoiding entanglements in partisan politics and to following the evidence

wherever it leads—apparently intimidate some Members, who would be more comfortable with a closed ethics process that relies only on sitting Members.

Their fear is unfounded. By conducting impartial investigations and reasonably interpreting House Rules, the Office has provided important protection to Members who have been falsely accused of rules violations. Because of the Office's record to date, a finding that exonerates Members is viewed as highly credible by media and public alike. This credibility provides Members the means to demonstrate the allegations were unfounded.

No more time should pass without a new Co-Chair. We strongly urge you to appoint an individual from your party who will continue OCE's commitment to fair and impartial investigations and to avoiding partisan posturing or favoritism.

We would be happy to meet with you to provide suggestions or to further discuss issues or concerns about OCE that you may have.

Sincerely,

Campaign Legal Center
Citizens for Responsibility & Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Common Cause
Demand Progress
Democracy 21
Issue One
Judicial Watch
National Legal and Policy Center
National Taxpayers Union
Norm Ornstein, Resident Scholar, American Enterprise Institute
Project on Government Oversight (POGO)
Public Citizen