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Decade of House Ethics Inaction

Since 1997, the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, also known as the Ethics Committee, has taken official action on only five complaints, listed below in chronological order. One of the actions, recommending the expulsion from Congress of former Rep. James Traficant, came after Traficant was convicted in federal court of bribery and fraud. The remaining actions were far milder, involving reprimands, a fine and the issuing of a report that recommended no action. The Ethics Committee can issue a range of sanctions based on an investigation, ranging from the mildest, a “report” that lays out the investigation, to a “letter of reproof” or reprimand, to a censure, to a recommended fine or a recommended expulsion.

Start Date: April, 2002 **Lawmaker:** Traficant, James A. (D-OH)
Accusation: Bribery and fraud allegations that led to federal conviction
Result: Expelled from Congress July 2002

Start Date: September, 1999 **Lawmaker:** Hilliard, Earl (D-AL)
Accusation: Made illegal loans with campaign funds
Result: Letter of reproof June 2001

Start Date: March, 1998 **Lawmaker:** Shuster, Bud (R-PA)
Accusation: Former chief of staff violated "revolving door" statute
Result: Letter of reproof October 2000

Start Date: December, 1997 **Lawmaker:** Kim, Jay (R-CA)
Accusation: Accepted illegal gifts/payments from Korean business
Result: Report issued October 1998, no action recommended

Start Date: September, 1994 **Lawmaker:** Gingrich, Newt (R-GA)
Accusation: Used political money to pay for a satellite college class
Result: Letter of reproof; fined \$300,000 January 1997

What follows is a list of allegations according to press accounts. There is no evidence that the Ethics Committee initiated an investigation into any of the cases, with the exceptions, as noted below, of Reps. James Moran (D-VA) and Corrine Brown (D-FL), who had investigations launched and then dropped.

Start Date: January, 2004 **Lawmaker:** Tauzin, Billy (R-LA)
Accusation: Sought job with clients benefiting from bill he worked to pass
Result: No reported investigation

State Date: November, 2003 **Lawmaker:** Conyers, John Jr. (D-MI)
Accusation: Congressional staff worked for political campaigns in office
Result: No reported investigation

Start Date: November, 2003 **Lawmaker:** Smith, Nick (R-MI)
Accusation: Was offered bribe by other members of Congress to vote for Medicare bill
Result: No reported investigation

Start Date: February, 2003 **Lawmaker:** Oxley, Mike (R-OH)
Accusation: Forcing lobby shops to hire Republican lobbyists
Result: No reported investigation

Start Date: July, 2002 **Lawmaker:** Kanjorski, Paul (D-PA)
Accusation: Steering \$9 million in contracts to family businesses
Result: No reported investigation

Start Date: July, 2002 **Lawmaker:** Moran, James P. Jr. (D-VA)
Accusation: Accepted loan from MBNA, then supported bankruptcy bill
Result: No reported investigation

Start Date: April, 2002 **Lawmaker:** Murtha, John (D-PA)
Accusation: Using government money and workers for campaign
Result: No reported investigation

Start Date: July, 2001 **Lawmaker:** Condit, Gary (D-CA)
Accusation: Extramarital affair with office intern Chandra Levy
Result: No reported investigation

Start Date: April, 2001 **Lawmaker:** DeLay, Tom (R-TX)
Accusation: Offered meetings with Bush administration for cash
Result: No reported investigation

Start Date: December, 2000 **Lawmaker:** Moran, James P. Jr. (D-VA)

Accusation: Accepted \$25,000 loan from lobbyist, then supported drug patent extension benefiting lobbyist's client.

Result: Considered accusation, chose not to investigate

Start Date: September, 2000 **Lawmaker:** Pombo, Richard (R-CA)

Accusation: Allowed lobbyist to write pesticide bill word-for-word

Result: No reported investigation

Start Date: June, 1999 **Lawmaker:** Brown, Corrine (D-FL)

Accusation: Helped businessman in legal trouble; daughter received car from same businessman

Result: Investigation halted for lack of evidence September 2000

Start Date: May, 1999 **Lawmaker:** DeLay, Tom (R-TX)

Accusation: Ex-aide created war chest to aid House Republicans

Result: No reported investigation

Sources of allegations, listed in order as they appear above:

Rep. James A. Traficant – “Traficant convicted of corruption charges, says he won't resign.” Paul Singer, The Associated Press, 11 April 2002; see also “Rep. James Traficant indicted on racketeering, other charges.” M.R. Kropko, The Associated Press, 4 May 2001.

Rep. Earl Hilliard – “House panel launches ethics investigation of Hilliard.” David Pace, The Associated Press, 24 September 1999.

Rep. Bud Shuster – “Aide's Ties Raise Ethical Questions.” William L. Roberts, Journal of Commerce, 31 July 1995.

Rep. Newt Gingrich – “Gingrich college class raises questions; Kennesaw State course linked to PAC.” Charles Walston and Jeanne Cummings, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 2 September 1993; see also “Gingrich's Opponent Files Ethics Complaint Alleging GOP Whip Misused Official Funds.” Glenn R. Simpson, Roll Call, 8 September 1994.

Rep. Jay Kim – “Firm's Funds Misused In Campaign By Rep. Kim; Government: Candidate Received Free Office Space And Supplies, Records Show.” Claire Spiegel and Tracy Wood, Los Angeles Times, 14 July 1993; see also “Rep. Kim Withdrew Funds Even As Firm Foundered; Finances: Candidate Continued To Receive Full Salary And Rent Payments.” Claire Spiegel, Tony Perry, Jeffrey L. Rabin and Tracy Thomas, Los Angeles Times, 15 July 1993.

Rep. Billy Tauzin – “Tauzin Rebuffs Hollywood, Considers Lobbyist Job for Drug Manufacturers.” Bill Walsh and John McQuaid, Newhouse News Service, 23 January 2004. Also “Tauzin Expected To Leave House For Trade Group; Lawmaker Declined Hollywood Job.” Frank Ahrens, The Washington Post, 24 January 2004.

Rep. John Conyers Jr. – “Conyers' staff broke rules for campaign work, aides charge; but others deny that fund-raising was done on government time.” Joel Thurtell, Chris Christoff and Ruby L. Bailey, Detroit Free Press, 21 November 2003.

Rep. Nick Smith – “GOP pulled no punches in struggle for Medicare bill.” Robert Novak, Chicago Sun-Times, 27 November 2003.

Rep. Mike Oxley – “Congressman Urges Republican Lobbyist; Oxley Staff Pressuring Mutual Funds.” Kathleen Day and Jim VandeHei, The Washington Post, 15 February 2003.

Rep. Paul Kanjorski – “Critics: Kanjorski Paved Own Interest; Legislator Denies Favoring Road Project That Would Benefit His Family.” Kenneth P. Vogel, Wilkes-Barre Times Leader, 26 March 2002.

Rep. James P. Moran Jr. – “Credit Firm Gave Moran Favorable Loan; As He Sought Deal, Lawmaker Backed Finance Industry Bill.” Jo Becker and Spencer S. Hsu, The Washington Post, 7 July 2002.

Rep. John Murtha – “Mascara asks for ethics probe of Murtha.” Claude R. Marx, The Associated Press, 6 April 2002.

Rep. Gary Condit – “US congressman calls for sanctions against Condit in missing intern case.” Agence France Presse, 21 July 2001; see also “

Rep. Tom DeLay – “Klayman Trains Sights on DeLay” (regarding Judicial Watch lawsuit and request for investigation of DeLay). Damon Chappie, Roll Call, 9 April 2001.

Rep. James P. Moran Jr. – “Moran Got Loan From Drug Lobbyist; Va. Congressman Co-Sponsored Bill to Help Pharmaceutical Firm.” Jo Becker, The Washington Post, 31 October 2000.

Rep. Richard Pombo – “Ethics Panel Urged To Disclose Pombo Documents” (request from Environmental Working Group). Damon Chappie, Roll Call, 7 September 2000.

Rep. Corrine Brown – “The representative, the millionaire and the luxury car.” Bill Adair and David Dahl, St. Petersburg Times, 3 June 1998.

Rep. Tom DeLay – “Democrats press for investigation of campaign effort by DeLay, others.” Michelle Mittelstadt, The Associated Press, 27 May 1999.