

CREATING A SELECT COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND CONDUCT

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1967

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON RULES,
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:50 a.m., in room H-313, the Capitol, Hon. William M. Colmer (chairman of the committee) presiding.

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come to order.

When the committee adjourned on yesterday, Mr. Bennett was testifying. We had reached Mr. O'Neill. So, Mr. Bennett, we will be glad to hear from you further, and Mr. O'Neill may have some questions he wants to propound to you.

Mr. O'NEILL. Mr. Bennett, I was mailed to my office three or four copies of a newspaper article that referred to you. Do you have a copy? Do you want to explain your thoughts with regard to the last paragraph as to how far you would go if legislation of this type were passed?

Mr. BENNETT. Yes; I think I best state this by repeating what I said yesterday, because it is rather brief on this article.

I would like to call attention to the Washington Star article of February 2, widely circulated by some Members in an effort to show that the Committee on Standards and Conduct should not be reconstituted.

A group of women reporters asked me to appear before them; and they interviewed me. I quickly sensed that they felt this committee was being set up as a "white wash" committee. I felt that such an impression on the press would further unfairly damage the image of Congress with the public. In reply to a question expressing disbelief that any Congressman would be willing to present to the committee any matter at all for investigation, I replied that in a case fully substantiated by competent evidence and reflecting on the Congress, it was my belief that 90 percent or all Members would be willing to do so in a serious case publicly reflecting on Congress.

The article gave the impression that 90 percent of Congress were waiting to present existing charges against other Congressmen. No other article coming from this well attended interview gave such an impression as far as I know.

Further, in answer to a question on how narrow or broad the fields of study of new legislation might be, I replied they could cover "all matters of impropriety" covered by legislation that might be introduced and assigned to the committee for study. The article as printed implied to many readers that the committee would have power to investigate charges under legislation not yet enacted. This is clearly untrue because the proposed bill would not allow any case to be investigated unless it were based on a statute or resolution previously passed by the House; and then only under the additional safeguards set up in the proposed bill before you.

So I didn't say what this newspaper report has given the impression to some people that I did say. As I pointed out, the things that I