

It is clearly the responsibility of the House to examine promptly and thoroughly allegations of abuses by Members, officers, and employees of the House not only to ensure that the established standards are honored, but, also, to disprove unfounded allegations. Both functions are important if the House is to have and maintain the respect of the American people. And this it must have if it is to fulfill its important constitutional responsibilities.

The publicity attendant upon the recent exclusion proceedings in the House of Representatives illustrates the problem which we face. Some have said—and probably more have thought—that this body is rampant with corruption and that politics is synonymous with wrongdoing. Certainly, this is not true. And yet, by a hesitancy to act or a reluctance to deal with this question, we may encourage public distrust. I believe this, in part, can be traced to an historical neglect of procedural safeguards, rather than simply to apathy on the part of the membership.

The crisis in public confidence with which we are faced must be met head-on by the establishment of a permanent investigative body to resolve allegations of misconduct. If a Committee on Standards and Conduct should be approved and recommended by the Committee on Rules, the Committee could begin to develop a clear body of standards of conduct for the House and procedures to assure that such criteria would be consistently and equitably applied, and that such regulations would be subject to periodic review and updating.

The Constitution assigns an important role to each branch of our Federal Government. Only if each branch of the Government fulfills its assigned responsibilities well will the system stay in balance. The Judicial Branch, by its very nature, can abide no deviation in ethics. The Executive Branch, by its corporate-type structure and power pyramids has the machinery for dealing with violations. The Legislative Branch is unique in the independent status of each of its elected Members. It is from this relative independence of each Member that the Congress draws much of its strength. Further, it is this independence of each Member that makes the problem of ethics so sensitive and difficult to deal with. However, if the Legislative Branch—the people's branch—fails, fails in any way, the balance in our system of representative government is upset, and our way of life is diminished by just that much.

If the Congress is to function responsively, as an efficient and effective instrument of Government, it must have the support and respect of the people of this Nation. Respect is earned, and we can have that respect only if we merit it. The problem of ethics is a difficult and a personal one, but it is more important than any one Member. And it is, I submit, urgent. I strongly recommend the prompt establishment of an appropriate Committee on Ethics so the House can get on with its job. Finding the best solutions to the problems facing the nation is a big enough task that it will take the best of all of us—unhampered by the difficulties of operating under a cloud of public distrust or by the necessity of dealing with problems of unresolved allegations of misconduct.

I do not pose as an expert on how this problem can be solved. The members of your Committee have had long experience in dealing with problems relating to House Organization. Further, I recognize the difficult problems which could arise by a false step in this sensitive area. I know that you cannot legislate goodness or expect perfection. For this reason, I am reluctant to set forth a firm recommendation. Rather, I would merely express the hope, in closing, that this Committee will act to show the people of this Nation that the House of Representatives recognizes the need for standards of conduct and that we are working to deal with this problem.

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STATEMENT OF HON. SAM M. GIBBONS, U.S. REPRESENTATIVE, 6TH DISTRICT OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA, BEFORE THE HOUSE RULES COMMITTEE

Mr. Chairman, since this Committee has been holding hearings on legislation to establish an Ethics Committee for the House of Representatives, I have heard many witnesses present impressive testimony highlighting the need to establish such a committee. Although I do not wish to present a detailed statement which, in some respects, would duplicate previous testimony, I do want to express my support for the establishment of a strong, independent Ethics Committee.

During the past few months, public attention has been focused on the question of unethical behavior by Members of Congress. We all know that the misconduct of any Member reflects discredit on all Members and undermines the public trust in the integrity of our government.