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House of Representatives

The House met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. MCNERNEY).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
July 31, 2007.

I hereby appoint the Honorable JERRY MCNERNEY to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 25 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate extend beyond 9:50 a.m.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. MURPHY) for 4 minutes.

REGARDING COMPREHENSIVE ETHICS REFORM

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, many members of the freshman class were elected in part because people were tired of the culture of corruption that they saw here in Washington and the total lack of accountability for those that broke the law and betrayed the American trust. People out in America look at Washington and they just don't understand how

Members of Congress over the past several years could be carted off to Federal prisons while their own body, the Congress of the United States, sat by and did virtually nothing to hold these people accountable for their actions.

Today, Congress will pass landmark lobbying reform legislation. Fund-raising will become more transparent, sunlight will be shed on lobbyist influence, the K Street Project will end, and the revolving door for Members of Congress will shut a little bit tighter. But as Congress reduces the influence of people outside the body of Congress, we also need to recommit ourselves to cleaning up our own House by reforming the House ethics process. We will all celebrate our victory today. It will be a critical step to changing how things work in Washington. But we can't stop here. We need to make our ethics process work again by establishing a new citizen ethics panel independent of Congress with the power to initiate and vet ethics enforcement actions. We need this reform not because Members of Congress are corrupt but because they are the victims of simple human nature. It isn't natural to turn against your colleagues, your coworkers and your confidants to file complaints against each other under our current ethics process. Inaction within our current system isn't corruption, it's just human instinct. That's why responsible ethics reform will allow an independent panel to initiate these complaints, guaranteeing that friendships and work relationships don't get in the way of enforcing our ethics rules.

Mr. Speaker, soon after I was elected last November, I went to speak at an elementary school in my hometown of Cheshire. At the end of my talk, a fifth grader stood up and asked me a question. He said, Mr. MURPHY, you sound good now, but how do I know that you're not going to go down to Washington and become like everybody else?

I laughed a little bit when he asked me that question, but it's frankly a good one. And the danger for all of us is that the longer that someone spends here, the more ownership you take over the very system that you once ran against. And even though you may know that the system is broken, sometimes it just seems far too long a bridge to cross in order to fix it. But it has to be fixed. And it may just fall upon the newest Members of this body to do the mending. Because it's not just happenstance that some of the strongest voices for this reform are the freshman class, those who have spent the least amount of time working under this dome. Maybe because we just spent the last 2 years spending 18 hours a day living and breathing the frustrations of people outside the Beltway, even those that aren't old enough to vote, that we see with clear eyes what I think everyone inside the Beltway knows in their heart—that our current ethics process doesn't work and it feeds the perception that politicians spend far too much time and too much effort watching their own backs.

Listen, I know reform isn't easy, especially when it comes to setting up the rules by which we enforce our own code of conduct. This is delicate stuff. And I understand the fear that some Members have of handing over our ethics process to some outside independent body. But we need to rise above these fears, not only because we owe it to ourselves to remove the built-in conflicts of interest that put Members between a rock and a hard place but because the people out there in the Fifth District of Connecticut and every other district in America won't believe in their Congress again until they know that we can police ourselves.

Reform isn't easy. Not the landmark lobbying bill that we will pass today or the needed ethics reforms still to come. But, Mr. Speaker, nothing worthwhile ever is.

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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