

Chairman Charles W. Dent

Committee on Ethics

Testimony before the Committee on House Administration

February 11, 2015

Good afternoon Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Brady, and members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting Ranking Member Sánchez and me to discuss the Committee's efforts during the past congress and what we foresee as the challenges the Committee faces in the 114th Congress. While we cannot provide details for the Committee's work, most of which is confidential by House Rule, we will be as frank as we can.

While I'm the new Chairman, this is my 7th year serving on the Ethics Committee. During my tenure on the Committee I have come to deeply appreciate the seriousness that my colleagues, Republicans and Democrats, bring to our responsibilities. The work of the Committee is important and vital to the House and each of its Members and employees and to the American public.

The Committee's work and financial needs are divided into three main functions. These are advice and education, financial disclosure review, and investigation and adjudication. Advice and education, and financial disclosure review are primarily customer service efforts and are necessary and important to insure that Members and staff do not run afoul of the ethics rules, laws, and regulations that regulate their conduct. Our staff works hard every day to answer questions and provide guidance on a wide range of issues that could land a Member or staffer in trouble if not for the guidance they request and receive. In addition to the guidance and advice provided on a daily basis, our advice and education staff provide training to staff and Members either through regularly scheduled training sessions or upon request. Our financial disclosure staff review all of the annual financial disclosure statements as well as the more recently required periodic transaction reports that Members and certain staff are required to file monthly. Our investigation and adjudication work is qualitatively different. In addition to accuracy and

promptness, we strive for integrity, discretion, fairness in process, and a complete understanding of the facts.

I have worked with the current staff for several years and am very proud of the work they have performed for the House. They understand the seriousness of the jobs they are asked to do and do so in a strictly non-partisan way. Each Member or employee who contacts the Committee for guidance or advice can feel secure in knowing they are getting unbiased and professional advice. Our investigative staff provides the same professional and non-partisan efforts to insure each allegation is thoroughly and fairly investigated and a just conclusion and recommendation is reached.

I began my tenure as chairman following the same requirements of my predecessor: that timeliness continues to be a top priority in all of the Committee's work. When a Member or employee comes to the Committee for advice or approval, or when a Member's or an employee's conduct has come under review, those Members or staff deserve the Committee's impartial consideration and deserve it as expeditiously and confidentially as possible.

It is clear that our workload has been increasing in all three areas of the Committee's work, as the Ranking Member will describe in her comments. In our investigative matters, the Committee has continued to be very active.

In the 113th Congress, the Committee began or continued 89 investigative matters. While the creation of the Office of Congressional Ethics several years ago has added to the Committee's workload, it's important to note that the Committee is very active in undertaking investigations on its own initiative.

In the last Congress, OCE referred 22 matters to the Committee, 16 with a recommendation that the Committee review the matter further, and 6 with a recommendation that the Committee dismiss the matter. So, only about a quarter of the Committee's investigative matters were related to an OCE referral. That is consistent with the 112th Congress, when the Committee considered 96 investigative matters, and received a total of 23 referrals from OCE, of which 13 recommended further review and 10 recommended dismissal.

Some investigations can take years to be completed. This is, in part, because of their complexity, but also the number of documents the Committee must review and analyze. In the

last Congress, the Committee's investigative staff reviewed more than 430,000 pages of documents. One matter alone required the review of more than 220,000 pages of documents.

With the proper number of attorneys and the right training and experience, we hope to continue to improve the investigative process and decrease the amount of time it takes to complete each investigation.

With your Committee's help our Committee has begun a project to greatly improve its correspondence management system which is the backbone of the advice and guidance we provide to members and staff. The new system will replace a system that is over 20 years old.

Our budget for the 114th Congress will provide the resources necessary to continue the progress we've made over the last several years in providing timely advice and completing investigations in a much shorter timeframe.

Thank you for this time, and I look forward to your questions.