

Testimony of Susan W. Brooks
Chairwoman, House Committee on Ethics
before the
Committee on House Administration
February 15, 2017

Good afternoon, Chairman Harper, Ranking Member Brady, and the members of the Committee. Thank you for providing Ranking Member Deutch and me an opportunity to speak with you today about the ongoing work of the Ethics Committee. With your indulgences, we will do our best to answer your questions, although, as you may know, much of the work of the Committee is confidential.

The House has tasked the Ethics Committee with interpreting, advising, and enforcing the rules of conduct that pertain to House Members, officers, and employees. The Committee undertakes that task through its three main offices: Advice and Education, Financial Disclosures, and Investigations.

The Ethics Committee is solely unique amongst House Committees in that the Members of the Committee are evenly divided between both parties. As equally unique, the staff of the Committee is non-partisan. It is the only Committee in the House where there is neither a republican nor democratic staff. As a member of the Committee for the past four years, I have grown to admire and appreciate the non-partisanship and integrity of the staff of the Committee as they work to administer the functions of the Committee.

Oftentimes, any publicity about the Committee's work surfaces only when allegations of misconduct by a Member or staffer have aired. What is not often publicized is just how much work the Committee performs to help ensure Members and staff abide by the rules – and how many Members and their staff actively seek out the Committee's advice to ensure their conduct is above reproach.

In the 114th Congress, the Committee responded to nearly 55,000 informal telephone calls, emails, and in-person meetings from Members and their staff

seeking guidance on the Ethics rules. This number increased by nearly 15,000 from the previous Congress.

The Committee also provided nearly 900 written advisory opinions regarding proposed conduct, almost triple the number provided in the previous Congress.

It approved 3,900 requests for privately sponsored travel; received nearly 16,000 Financial Disclosure Statements and amendments; and received and reviewed 3,000 Periodic Transaction Reports.

These numbers are very encouraging to me. I believe it illustrates the majority of House Members do want to abide by the rules and do want to serve their constituents with the highest regard to ethical rules. I also believe it shows how much the work of the Committee continues to increase each Congress.

When I came to Congress, I wanted to do everything in my power to help restore the public's trust in this great institution. The Ethics Committee has a tremendous role to play in accomplishing that goal. As Chairwoman, I truly believe one of the values of the Ethics Committee lies in its ability to continuously seek new avenues to ensure the House community is educated regarding the laws, rules and regulations that govern its conduct.

Ranking Member Deutch and I share a commitment to making the Committee more accessible to Members and their staffs through more direct communications such as periodic "tips" about common questions the Committee is asked, a mobile-friendly website, and simply educating Members on the services the Committee offers. My hope is that by doing so, the Committee will have less need to utilize its third function: Investigations.

Just as Members and staff can trust and rely on the fact that the members of our staff who serve in the Committee's Advice and Education office will conduct themselves in a professional, non-partisan manner, they can also trust and rely on the fact that the members of our staff who serve in the Committee's Investigations office will conduct themselves in the same manner. My colleagues on the Committee, and the staff that serve the Committee solemnly undertake review of allegations regarding misconduct by Members or their staff. It is a serious responsibility, and I'm proud to say in my four years of service on the

Committee, I have always witnessed them conducting themselves in such a manner.

In the 114th Congress, the Committee dealt with 78 investigative matters – only 14 were carried over from the 113th Congress. Through a commitment to resolving matters quickly, the Committee was able to cut in half the number of investigations that carried over from the previous Congress. I share that commitment and will continue to ensure that allegations are investigated and resolved in a timely manner. One other fact I'd like to highlight regarding investigations – of the 64 matters initiated by the Committee less than 1/3 were referrals from OCE and the Committee began more than two-thirds of the matters as a result of Committee-initiated investigations.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I look forward to your questions.