

**Washington, D.C.** - Today, with public confidence in Congress shaken by recent scandals and after years of watching House good governance rules bent and broken, four leading House Democrats unveiled a reform package.

The new package would put Congressional travel off limits to lobbyists, strengthen fiscal responsibility, curb abuses of power, prevent the use of earmarks to buy votes, end the 2 day Congressional work week, prohibit legislation from being voted on without members having time to familiarize themselves with it, and prevent legislative items from being slipped into conference reports between the House and Senate without a full public vote by the conference committee.

David Obey (D-WI), Ranking Member of the Appropriations Committee, Barney Frank (D-MA), Ranking Member of the Financial Services Committee, David Price (D-NC), Member of the Appropriations Committee, and Tom Allen (D-ME), Member of the Energy and Commerce Committee unveiled the proposal at a panel discussion at the Center for American Progress. They were joined in the panel discussion by Norman Ornstein, Resident Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and author of the forthcoming book "Broken Branch", and Scott Lilly, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress.

"These reforms are meant to restore checks and balances to the legislative process and to make it harder for lobbyists to put their fingers on the legislative scales," said Obey.

"This is not simply about parliamentary procedures in the House. Representative democracy is being thwarted by current Republican practice. In particular, they are using their control to allow Republican members to mislead constituents by concealing or misrepresenting their position on important issues," said Frank.

"There has been a deterioration of both process and performance in Congress over the last several years – changes that have made Congress less accountable to the American people and the American people less confident in Congress," said Price. "We must restore the integrity of the House by curbing abuses of power and ensuring that policies are enacted in the light of day, with time for full and open debate."

"As with the adage that absolute power corrupts absolutely, the centralization of authority in the House of Representatives has come at a disastrous cost for democracy, decency and the public interest," said Allen. "The public has awoken to the folly of current leaders' practice of passing bills only with a majority of the majority. The result is votes held open for hours to allow for vote buying; huge bills, with nefarious special interest riders attached, rushed to the floor after midnight so Members and the public can't read them; budget rules routinely waived to permit deficit-adding tax cuts. It's time to put the people's voice back into the People's House."

Read an interview with Congressman Price [here](#).

Below is an explanation of the bill.

## AMENDING THE RULES OF THE HOUSE TO PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF THE INSTITUTION

### LIMITING INFLUENCE BY LOBBYISTS

1. No member or staff of the House of Representatives may accept travel or lodging or reimbursement for such expenses if he or she has not obtained from the sponsor, and filed with the Clerk of the House, the following declarations:

- a. that no lobbyists have been invited to travel, lodge or attend meetings with the Member or staff,
- b. that the sponsor does not conduct lobbying activities as defined in section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code,
- c. that the sponsor neither employs a registered lobbyist nor contracts for such services nor is it affiliated with such an entity, and

d. that the trip was not financed by a corporation unless through contributions deductible under the Internal Revenue Code and the source of all such contributions are disclosed in the declaration.

2. Any former Member of the House who wishes to exercise the right to be present on the Floor of the House when the House is in session must sign a declaration stating that the House is not debating or voting on an issue on which the former member has a financial interest and that the former member will not advocate in any way in behalf of or in opposition to any matter before the House while present on the floor.

#### FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

3. A reconciliation measure shall not be in order if it would increase the size of the budget deficit compared to the CBO baseline for the coming or subsequent fiscal years. This rule may be waived only with the consent of the majority and minority leaders and if the House agrees to consider the rule by a 2/3 vote of the House.

4. Close the loophole in current rules under which Budget Act points of order do not apply to unreported legislation. Under present rules, amendments to an unreported measure are subject to Budget Act restrictions but the underlying bill is not.

#### CURBING ABUSES OF POWER

5. No recorded vote in the House of Representatives or the committee of the Whole House can last longer than 20 minutes without the consent of either both Floor managers or of both Leaders.

6. Amend the House Ethics Code to make it an offense for a Member to condition funding for earmarks requested by another Member on how the requesting Member votes on legislation.

7. Amend the House Ethics Code to make it an offense for any Member to advocate an earmark unless that Member discloses whether he or she either has a financial interest in the entity or exercises any control over it, such as appointing members of the organization's board.

8. If a rule makes in order text that is different from what the committee of jurisdiction has reported, the rule must provide the chairman or ranking minority member, if requested, a preferential amendment – neither divisible nor amendable unless adopted and all necessary points of order waived - to restore the bill (in whole or in part) to its original form.

9. A rule may waive points of order against a measure but only if the rule also waives the same points of order for an amendment if requested by the minority leader or designee.

#### ENDING TWO-DAY WORK WEEKS

10. Before the House can adjourn at the end of a session, the House must have conducted 20 or more weeks with at least one recorded vote or quorum call on at least four of the five calendar work days.

#### KNOWING WHAT THE HOUSE IS VOTING ON

11. Except for measures on the suspension calendar, the House cannot consider legislation unless printed copies of such legislation have been available to all members of the House for a period of 24 hours. This rule can be waived only if two-thirds of the House votes to consider such a waiver.

#### FULL AND OPEN DEBATE IN CONFERENCE

12. It shall not be in order for the House to agree to go to conference on a general appropriation

bill unless the Senate expresses its differences with the House in the form of numbered amendments.

13. It shall not be in order to consider a conference report unless there has been a formal open meeting of the conference at which all provisions on which the two bodies disagree are open to discussion and the resolution of the differences between the two bodies is approved by a recorded vote of a majority of House appointed conferees. The requirement that the discussion and votes stipulated in this rule must be held in open session may be waived for purposes of national security, but such votes and discussions are required in the executive session of the conference. This rule cannot be waived by majority vote but can be waived by unanimous consent.

14. It shall not be in order to consider any conference report that is materially different from what was agreed to by a majority of House conferees in an open session of the conference and was not part of the final package on which a favorable vote was cast by a majority of House Conferees. This rule cannot be waived by majority vote but can be waived by unanimous consent.

**# # #**