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Proposal for an Office of Public Integrity in Congress

Fact Sheet

It is essential to establish a new means for overseeing and enforcing congressional ethics rules if new, and old, rules are going to be effective in the future. An independent, nonpartisan and professional Office of Public Integrity in Congress should be created to oversee and enforce ethics rules and lobbying laws, just as we have a Public Integrity Section in the Justice Department to enforce laws dealing with public corruption.

The Office would be responsible for many of the tasks currently assigned to the congressional ethics committees, the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate.

The Office's jurisdiction would cover both the House and Senate and should have a professional, nonpartisan staff led by a publicly credible, professionally experienced individual chosen jointly by the Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress. The Director of the Office would have independent responsibility for all decisions made by the Office.

The duties of the Office would include the following:

- Overseeing and reviewing financial disclosure and other reports filed by members of Congress and lobbying reports filed by lobbyists;
- Advising Members and lobbyists on compliance with ethics and lobbying rules;
- Investigating non-frivolous allegations of ethics violations, including complaints filed by Members and outside individuals and groups, and matters investigated on the basis of the Office's own inherent jurisdiction. In any case where the Office determines a complaint is frivolous, the complainant will be barred from filing future complaints and will be liable for costs;
- Presenting cases and evidence of probable ethics violations to the ethics committees for decisions of whether violations have occurred, and recommending sanctions where ethics violations are found by the committees; and
- Referring probable violations of the lobbying laws by lobbyists and lobbying organizations to the Justice Department for appropriate enforcement actions.