

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON RULES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 2006

HONORABLE MICKEY EDWARDS
MEMBER OF CONGRESS, 1976-1992

MR. CHAIRMAN, MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME TO JOIN YOU THIS MORNING.

YOU FACE A DIFFICULT BALANCING ACT.

A FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACY DEPENDS ON PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE INTEGRITY OF THOSE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY WHO HAVE BEEN SELECTED TO EXERCISE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP.

THE BRITISH SCHOLAR BERNARD CRICK ONCE OBSERVED THAT POLITICS IS THE WAY A FREE PEOPLE GOVERN THEMSELVES. POLITICS, AND PARTICULARLY AMERICAN POLITICS, IS AN HONORABLE, AND EVEN A NOBLE, CALLING. IN A SYSTEM OF SEPARATED POWERS SUCH AS OURS, IT IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT THAT THE PUBLIC RETAIN CONFIDENCE IN THE CONGRESS, THE BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT PROPERLY KNOWN AS THE PEOPLES' BRANCH AND, CONSTITUTIONALLY, THE MOST IMPORTANT BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT.

AT THE MOMENT, THE ACTIONS OF A VERY FEW PEOPLE HAVE CAUSED THAT CONFIDENCE TO BE SHAKEN. YOU

HAVE PROPERLY DETERMINED THAT IT IS YOUR DUTY TO REPAIR ANY FAILINGS IN THE RULES AND PROCEDURES OF THE HOUSE THAT MAY LEAD TO AN INSUFFICIENT ABILITY TO PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF THIS WONDERFUL INSTITUTION . . . AND TO PROVIDE THE PUBLIC REASSURANCE A DEMOCRACY REQUIRES.

AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, IT IS IMPORTANT . . . VITALLY IMPORTANT . . . NOT TO REACT TO THE MISCONDUCT OF A FEW IN WAYS THAT INADVERTENTLY DO HARM TO THE MEMBERS OF THIS HOUSE AND TO THE INSTITUTION ITSELF.

BECAUSE I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE AND THE HONOR OF SITTING WHERE YOU SIT, OF KNOWING WHAT YOUR DAYS AND YOUR WEEKS ARE LIKE . . . THE TRAVEL BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND YOUR HOME DISTRICTS, THE TRAVEL WITHIN YOUR DISTRICTS, THE COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND STAFF MEETINGS AND CONSTITUENT MEETINGS, THE SPEECHES TO PREPARE FOR, THE DEAR COLLEAGUES TO READ, THE BILLS TO UNDERSTAND, I KNOW HOW EASY IT IS TO BECOME OVERWHELMED TO THE POINT THAT ONE SIMPLY LOSES THE ABILITY TO STEP BACK AND THINK, TO REFLECT, TO REMEMBER THE UNDERLYING VALUES AND PRINCIPLES THAT BROUGHT YOU TO THIS PLACE.

CAUGHT UP IN THIS WHIRLWIND, IT IS EASY TO BECOME INSULAR AND ISOLATED. GOVERNMENT BECOMES REDUCED FROM THREE BRANCHES TO TWO PARTIES AND EVEN FOR THOSE SO INCLINED, THERE IS PRECIOUS LITTLE TIME TO GET TO KNOW SOMEBODY ACROSS THE AISLE OTHER THAN AS SOMEBODY WHO

STANDS IN THE WAY OF YOU HOLDING A CHAIRMANSHIP OR SHAPING THE POLITICAL AGENDA.

THESE ARE PROBLEMS THAT SERIOUSLY HARM THE ABILITY OF OUR REPRESENTATIVES TO SERVE THE PUBLIC GOOD THOUGHTFULLY AND WELL.

FORTUNATELY, THERE HAS EXISTED, BACK TO MY OWN TIME IN CONGRESS, MEANS FOR MEMBERS OF THIS BODY TO GET AWAY, TO BE ABLE TO GET BETTER UNDERSTANDINGS OF IMPORTANT ISSUES IN A WAY THAT INCLUDES NOT ONLY KNOWLEDGE BUT REFLECTION, AND THAT ALLOWS MEMBERS TO GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER AS PEOPLE WITH WHOM ONE CAN TALK AND REASON AND SEEK FOR AREAS OF COMMON GROUND.

FOR EXAMPLE, I WAS FORTUNATE TO BE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN AN ASPEN INSTITUTE PROGRAM ON U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS. IN THAT PROGRAM, I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK TO EXPERTS AND SCHOLARS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD, NOT IN A HEARING ROOM, BUT IN ONGOING DISCUSSIONS AROUND A TABLE, OVER LUNCH, DURING COFFEE BREAKS, AT BREAKFAST. AND TIME TO THINK ABOUT WHAT I WAS LEARNING.

I WAS ABLE TO LEARN ALONGSIDE PEOPLE I MIGHT NOT HAVE OTHERWISE COME TO KNOW. THOSE WHO REMEMBER ME AS A MEMBER OF CONGRESS KNOW THAT I WAS ALWAYS CONSIDERED FAIRLY CONSERVATIVE. WHEN I WAS ELECTED TO THE REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP, AS CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE REPUBLICAN POLICY COMMITTEE, IT WAS SEEN AS A VICTORY FOR CONSERVATIVES. I WAS THE

RANKING REPUBLICAN MEMBER OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FOREIGN OPERATIONS AND MY CHAIRMAN WAS SOMEBODY WHO HAD NEVER HAD A CONSERVATIVE THOUGHT IN HIS LIFE AND WITH WHOM I NEVER AGREED ABOUT ANYTHING, DAVID OBEY. BUT AT THESE PROGRAMS I CAME TO KNOW DAVID AS A PERSON, TO KNOW HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN, TO LISTEN TO THEM PERFORM -- THEY ARE ACTUALLY QUITE TALENTED MUSICIANS. I DID NOT BECOME A LIBERAL AND DAVE DID NOT BECOME A CONSERVATIVE, BUT WE DEVELOPED AN ABILITY TO TALK TO EACH OTHER, AND TO LISTEN TO EACH OTHER, AND TO ACTUALLY HEAR EACH OTHER, BECAUSE WE CAME TO KNOW EACH OTHER AS HUMAN BEINGS BOTH INTERESTED IN THE WELFARE OF THIS COUNTRY AND ITS CITIZENS.

ON THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF A LEADERSHIP PROGRAM I NOW RUN SIT PEOPLE LIKE SAM NUNN AND GARY HART AND DICK LUGAR AND AL SIMPSON, PEOPLE FROM THE OTHER BODY I WOULD NEVER HAVE KNOWN SO WELL HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THOSE SEMINARS.

SOME WOULD ARGUE THAT IF SUCH PROGRAMS ARE INDEED BENEFICIAL -- AND HUNDREDS OF MEMBERS OF CONGRESS HAVE FOUND THEM TO BE SO -- THEY SHOULD BE PAID FOR OUT OF THE PUBLIC TREASURY, BY THE TAXPAYERS, BY YOUR CONSTITUENTS. BUT THE FACT IS, TAXPAYERS -- YOUR CONSTITUENTS -- ARE NOT LIKELY TO PREFER TO HAVE THEIR TAX DOLLARS SPENT IN THIS WAY, AND THE RESULT WILL BE THAT THESE SEMINARS WILL NOT HAPPEN AND THE BENEFITS THAT MIGHT BE GAINED FROM THIS ADDITIONAL KNOWLEDGE, TIME FOR REFLECTION,

AND OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS PARTY LINES WILL BE LOST.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS THIS: BY BEING ABLE TO TRAVEL IN SUCH COMPANY, I BECAME A BETTER MEMBER OF CONGRESS . . . BETTER INFORMED, MORE THOUGHTFUL, BETTER ABLE TO WORK EFFECTIVELY ACROSS THE AISLE.

THOSE EVENTS I ATTENDED WERE NOT PAID FOR BY LOBBYISTS AND THERE WERE NO LOBBYISTS PRESENT. THE ANSWER TO THIS PROBLEM IS NOT COMPLICATED. SIMPLY PROHIBIT MEMBERS OF CONGRESS FROM HAVING GIFTS OR TRAVELING TO EVENTS PAID FOR BY PEOPLE WHO ARE TRYING TO INFLUENCE THEIR VOTES, AND PROHIBIT PEOPLE WHO ARE TRYING TO INFLUENCE THEIR VOTES FROM TRAVELING WITH THEM. REQUIRE THE ETHICS COMMITTEE TO APPROVE THESE PROGRAMS IN ADVANCE AND REQUIRE MEMBERS TO PUBLICLY REPORT THEIR PARTICIPATION..

THAT WILL SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF PUBLIC CONFIDENCE AND THIS HOUSE'S PROTECTION OF ITS OWN INTEGRITY. THERE IS NO NEED TO PROHIBIT PRIVATELY PAID TRAVEL TO SUCH EVENTS NOR FOR A MORATORIUM ON PRIVATELY PAID TRAVEL TO THESE PROGRAMS. SIMPLY SEPARATE TRAVEL FROM LOBBYING UNDER THE EXISTING STRUCTURES OF THE HOUSE.

THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME TO SHARE THESE THOUGHTS WITH YOU.

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