

110TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 2544

To establish an Independent Ethics Commission within the House of Representatives composed of former Federal judges.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 24, 2007

Mr. SESTAK introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on House Administration, and in addition to the Committee on Rules, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

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## A BILL

To establish an Independent Ethics Commission within the House of Representatives composed of former Federal judges.

1        *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4        This Act may be cited as the “Independent Ethics  
5 Commission Act of 2007”.

6 **SEC. 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF INDEPENDENT ETHICS COM-**  
7 **MISSION.**

8        (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established an inde-  
9 pendent ethics commission within the House of Represent-

1 atives to be known as the Independent Ethics Committee  
2 (in this Act referred to as the “Commission”).

3 (b) MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF OFFICE.—(1) The  
4 Commission shall consist of 9 commissioners, 4 appointed  
5 by the Speaker and 4 by the minority leader of the House,  
6 and one selected by the affirmative vote of two-thirds of  
7 the 8 appointed commissioners for a term of 5 years. No  
8 commissioner may serve for more than 5 years.

9 (2) Commissioners shall be appointed for terms of 5  
10 years, except that of the commissioners first appointed,  
11 2 appointed by the Speaker and 2 by the minority leader  
12 shall be for 3-year terms and 2 appointed by the Speaker  
13 and 2 by the minority leader shall be for 4-year terms  
14 as designated by the Speaker and the minority leader at  
15 the time of appointment.

16 (c) QUALIFICATIONS.—Only former Federal judges  
17 shall be eligible for appointment to the Commission.

18 (1) DISQUALIFICATIONS FOR APPOINTMENTS.—

19 (A) LOBBYING.—No individual who has  
20 been a lobbyist registered under the Lobbying  
21 Disclosure Act of 1995 or engages in, or is oth-  
22 erwise employed in, lobbying of the Congress or  
23 who is an agent of a foreign principal registered  
24 under the Foreign Agents Registration Act  
25 within the 4-year period immediately preceding

1 appointment shall be eligible for appointment  
2 to, or service on, the Commission.

3 (B) INCOMPATIBLE OFFICE.—No member  
4 of the Commission appointed under subsection  
5 (b) may be a Member of the House of Rep-  
6 resentatives or Senator.

7 (2) VACANCIES.—A vacancy on the Commission  
8 shall be filled in the manner in which the original  
9 appointment was made.

10 (d) COMPENSATION.—Members shall each be entitled  
11 to receive the daily equivalent of the maximum annual rate  
12 of basic pay in effect for Level III of the Executive Sched-  
13 ule for each day (including travel time) during which they  
14 are engaged in the actual performance of duties vested in  
15 the Commission.

16 (e) QUORUM.—A majority of the members of the  
17 Commission shall constitute a quorum.

18 (f) MEETINGS.—The Commission shall meet at the  
19 call a majority of its members.

20 **SEC. 3. DUTIES OF COMMISSION.**

21 (a) DUTIES.—The Commission is authorized—

22 (1) to receive, monitor, and oversee financial  
23 disclosure and other reports filed by Members of the  
24 House and officers and employees of the House  
25 under the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, and

1 reports filed by registered lobbyists under the Lob-  
2 bying Disclosure Act of 1995;

3 (2) to investigate any alleged violation, by a  
4 Member, officer, or employee of the House of Rep-  
5 resentatives, of any rule or other standard of con-  
6 duct applicable to the conduct of such Member, offi-  
7 cer, or employee under House rules in the perform-  
8 ance of his duties or the discharge of his responsibil-  
9 ities;

10 (3) to present a case of probable ethics viola-  
11 tions to the Committee on Standards of Official  
12 Conduct of the House of Representatives;

13 (4) to make recommendations to the Committee  
14 on Standards of Official Conduct of the House of  
15 Representatives that it report to the appropriate  
16 Federal or State authorities any substantial evidence  
17 of a violation by a Member, officer, or employee of  
18 the House of Representatives of any law applicable  
19 to the performance of his duties or the discharge of  
20 his responsibilities, which may have been disclosed in  
21 an investigation by the Office;

22 (5) to provide information and informal guid-  
23 ance to Members, officers and employees of the  
24 House of Representatives regarding any rules and  
25 other standards of conduct applicable to such indi-

1       viduals in their official capacities, and develop and  
2       carry out periodic educational briefings for Mem-  
3       bers, officers, and employees of the House of Rep-  
4       resentatives on those laws, rules, regulations, or  
5       other standards; and

6               (6) to give consideration to the request of any  
7       Member, officer, or employee of the House of Rep-  
8       resentatives for a formal advisory opinion or other  
9       formal ruling, subject to the review of the Com-  
10      mittee on Standards of Official Conduct of the  
11      House of Representatives, as applicable, with respect  
12      to the general propriety of any current or proposed  
13      conduct of such Member, officer, or employee and,  
14      with appropriate deletions to assure the privacy of  
15      the individual concerned, to publish such opinion for  
16      the guidance of other Members, officers, and em-  
17      ployees of the House of Representatives.

18 **SEC. 4. POWERS OF COMMISSION.**

19       (a) **HEARINGS AND EVIDENCE.**—The Commission  
20      may for the purpose of carrying out this Act—

21               (1) hold such hearings and sit and act at such  
22      times and places, take such testimony, receive such  
23      evidence, administer such oaths; and

24               (2) subject to subsection (b), require, by sub-  
25      poena or otherwise, the attendance and testimony of

1 such witnesses and the production of such books,  
2 records, correspondence, memoranda, papers, and  
3 documents, as the Commission may determine advis-  
4 able.

5 (b) SUBPOENAS.—A subpoena may be issued only  
6 with a majority of the Commission.

7 (c) OBTAINING INFORMATION.—Upon request of the  
8 Commission, the head of any agency or instrumentality  
9 of the Government shall furnish information deemed nec-  
10 essary by the Commission to enable it to carry out its du-  
11 ties.

12 (d) REFERRALS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF JUS-  
13 TICE.—Whenever the Commission has reason to believe  
14 that a violation of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995  
15 may have occurred, that matter may be referred to the  
16 Department of Justice for it to investigate.

17 (e) GENERAL AUDITS.—The Commission shall have  
18 the authority to conduct general audits of filings under  
19 the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

20 **SEC. 5. INVESTIGATIONS AND INTERACTION WITH THE**  
21 **HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS OF OFFI-**  
22 **CIAL CONDUCT.**

23 (a) NOTIFICATION.—Whenever the Commission de-  
24 termines that there are sufficient grounds to conduct an  
25 investigation—

1           (1) the Commission shall notify the Committee  
2 on Standards of Official Conduct of this determina-  
3 tion;

4           (2) the applicable committee may overrule the  
5 determination of the Commission if, within 10 legis-  
6 lative days—

7           (A) the committee by an affirmative, roll-  
8 call vote of two-thirds of the full committee  
9 votes to overrule the determination of the Com-  
10 mission;

11           (B) the committee issues a public report  
12 detailing its reasoning for overruling the Com-  
13 mission;

14           (C) the vote of each member of the com-  
15 mittee on such roll-call vote is included in the  
16 report;

17           (D) dissenting members are allowed to  
18 issue their own report detailing their reasons  
19 for disagreeing with the majority vote; and

20           (E) if the committee votes to overrule the  
21 determination of the Commission pursuant to  
22 subparagraph (B), the Commission may publish  
23 and make available to the general public a re-  
24 port detailing the reasons that the Commission

1           concluded there were sufficient grounds to con-  
2           duct an investigation.

3           (b) CONDUCTING INVESTIGATIONS.—(1) If the Com-  
4 mission determines that there are sufficient grounds to  
5 conduct an investigation and his determination is not over-  
6 ruled under subsection (a)(5), the Commission shall con-  
7 duct an investigation to determine if probable cause exists  
8 that a violation occurred.

9           (2) As part of an investigation, the Commission  
10 may—

11           (A) administer oaths;

12           (B) issue subpoenas;

13           (C) compel the attendance of witnesses and the  
14 production of papers, books, accounts, documents,  
15 and testimony; and

16           (D) take the deposition of witnesses.

17           (3) If a person disobeys or refuses to comply with  
18 a subpoena, or if a witness refuses to testify to a matter,  
19 he may be held in contempt of Congress.

20           (c) PRESENTATION OF CASE TO HOUSE COMMITTEE  
21 ON STANDARDS OF OFFICIAL CONDUCT.—(1) If the Com-  
22 mission determines, upon conclusion of an investigation,  
23 that probable cause exists that an ethics violation has oc-  
24 curred, the Commission shall notify the Committee on

1 Standards of Official Conduct of the House of Representa-  
2 tives of this determination.

3 (2) The committee may overrule the determination of  
4 the Commission if, within 10 legislative days—

5 (A) the committee by an affirmative, roll-call  
6 vote of two-thirds of the full committee votes to  
7 overrule the determination of the Commission;

8 (B) the committee issues a public report detail-  
9 ing its reasoning for overruling the Commission;

10 (C) the vote of each member of the committee  
11 on such roll-call vote is included in the report; and

12 (D) dissenting members are allowed to issue  
13 their own report detailing their reasons for dis-  
14 agreeing with the majority vote.

15 (3) If the committee votes to overrule the determina-  
16 tion of the Commission pursuant to paragraph (2), the  
17 Commission may publish and make available to the gen-  
18 eral public a report detailing the reasons that he concluded  
19 there were sufficient grounds to present such case to the  
20 committee.

21 (4)(A) If the Commission determines there is prob-  
22 able cause that an ethics violation has occurred and the  
23 Commission's determination is not overruled, the Commis-  
24 sion shall present the case and evidence to the Committee  
25 on Standards of Official Conduct of the House of Rep-

1 representatives to hear and make a determination pursuant  
2 to its rules.

3 (B) The committee shall vote upon whether the indi-  
4 vidual who is the subject of the investigation has violated  
5 any rules or other standards of conduct applicable to that  
6 individual in his official capacity. Such votes shall be a  
7 roll-call vote of the full committee, a quorum being  
8 present. The committee shall issue a public report which  
9 shall include the vote of each member of the committee  
10 on such roll-call vote. Dissenting members may issue their  
11 own report detailing their own reasons for disagreeing  
12 with the majority vote.

13 (d) SANCTIONS.—Whenever the Committee on Stand-  
14 ards of Official Conduct of the House of Representatives  
15 finds that an ethics violation has occurred the Commission  
16 shall recommend appropriate sanctions to the committee  
17 and whether a matter should be referred to the Depart-  
18 ment of Justice for investigation.

19 **SEC. 6. PROCEDURAL RULES.**

20 (a) MAJORITY APPROVAL.—No report or rec-  
21 ommendation relating to the official conduct of a Member,  
22 officer, or employee of the House of Representatives shall  
23 be made by the Commission, and no investigation of such  
24 conduct shall be undertaken by the Commission, unless

1 approved by the affirmative vote of a majority of the mem-  
2 bers of the Commission.

3 (b) INVESTIGATIONS.—Except in the case of an in-  
4 vestigation undertaken by the Commission on its own ini-  
5 tiative, the Commission may undertake an investigation  
6 relating to the official conduct of an individual Member,  
7 officer, or employee of the House of Representatives  
8 only—

9 (1) upon receipt of a complaint, in writing and  
10 under oath, made by or submitted to a Member of  
11 the House of Representatives and transmitted to the  
12 Commission by such Member, or

13 (2) upon receipt of a complaint from the chair-  
14 man of the Committee on Standards of Official Con-  
15 duct of the House of Representatives, in writing and  
16 under oath, made by that committee.

17 (c) PROHIBITION OF CERTAIN INVESTIGATIONS.—No  
18 investigation shall be undertaken by the Commission of  
19 any alleged violation of a law, rule, regulation, or standard  
20 of conduct not in effect at the time of the alleged violation.

21 (d) DISCLOSURE.—No information or testimony re-  
22 ceived, or the contents of a complaint or the fact of its  
23 filing, shall be publicly disclosed by any member of the  
24 Commission or staff of the Commission unless specifically  
25 authorized in each instance by a vote of the Commission.

1 **SEC. 7. STAFF OF COMMISSION.**

2       The Commission may appoint and fix the compensa-  
3 tion of such staff as the Commission considers necessary  
4 to perform its duties. The Commission shall be appointed  
5 jointly by the Speaker and minority leader and shall be  
6 paid at a rate not to exceed the rate of basic pay payable  
7 for Level III of the Executive Schedule.

8 **SEC. 8. AMENDMENTS TO THE RULES OF THE HOUSE TO**  
9                   **CHANGE THE DUTIES OF THE COMMITTEE ON**  
10                   **STANDARDS OF OFFICIAL CONDUCT.**

11       (a) HOUSE RULES AMENDMENTS.—Clause 3 of rule  
12 XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives is amend-  
13 ed as follows:

14           (1) In paragraph (a), strike subparagraphs (1),  
15       (2), and (3), and redesignate subparagraphs (4),  
16       (5), and (6), as subparagraphs (1), (2), and (3), re-  
17       spectively.

18           (2)(A) Paragraph (b)(1) is amended by striking  
19       “(A)”, by striking “a resolution, report, rec-  
20       ommendation, or” and inserting “an”, and by strik-  
21       ing “, or, except as provided in subparagraph (2),  
22       undertake an investigation”, and by striking subdivi-  
23       sion (B).

24           (B) Paragraph (b) is further amended by strik-  
25       ing subparagraphs (2), (3), (4), and (5) and by re-

1 designating subparagraphs (6) and (7) as subpara-  
2 graphs (2) and (3), respectively.

3 (3) Strike paragraphs (j) (k), (l), (m), (n), (o),  
4 (p), and (q).

5 (b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Section 803 of the  
6 Ethics Reform Act of 1989 (2 U.S.C. 29d) is amended  
7 by striking subsections (c) and (d).

8 **SEC. 9. ACTION ON COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS.**

9 (a) PRINTING OF REPORTS IN CONGRESSIONAL  
10 RECORD.—Upon receipt by the Committee on Standards  
11 of Official Conduct of the House of Representatives of any  
12 report of the Commission, the Speaker of the House of  
13 Representatives shall have the report printed in the Con-  
14 gressional Record.

15 (b) HOUSE CONSIDERATION OF INDEPENDENT ETH-  
16 ICS COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS.—Within 14 cal-  
17 endar days after a report referred to in subsection (a) is  
18 printed in the Congressional Record, that portion of the  
19 report recommending action by the House of Representa-  
20 tives respecting any alleged violation, by a Member, offi-  
21 cer, or employee of the House of Representatives, of any  
22 law, rule, regulation, or other standard of conduct applica-  
23 ble to the conduct of such Member, officer, or employee  
24 in the performance of his duties or the discharge of his  
25 responsibilities shall be introduced (by request) in the

1 House by the Speaker of the House, for himself and the  
2 minority leader of the House in the form of a resolution.  
3 This resolution shall constitute a question of privilege  
4 under rule IX of the Rules of the House of Representa-  
5 tives. Any Member favoring the resolution may call it up  
6 as a question of privilege but only on the third day after  
7 the calendar date upon which such Member announces to  
8 the House his intention to do so.

9 **SEC. 10. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

10 This Act shall take effect upon the date of its enact-  
11 ment, except that sections 3, 4, and 8 shall not take effect  
12 immediately prior to noon January 3, 2009.

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