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FOURTH QUARTER 2015 REPORT

October 2015 – December 2015

I. INTRODUCTION

The Office of Congressional Ethics (“OCE”) is an independent, non-partisan entity charged with reviewing allegations of misconduct involving Members, Officers and staff of the House and, when appropriate, referring matters to the House Committee on Ethics. In all but one set of circumstances, the report and findings of the OCE Board included in a referral to the Committee on Ethics eventually must be publicly released.

The mission of the OCE and its Board is to assist the United States House of Representatives in upholding high standards of ethical conduct for its Members, Officers and staff and, in so doing, to serve the American people.

The following is a report of the OCE’s work in the fourth quarter of the 114th Congress.

II. CITIZEN COMMUNICATIONS

Any member of the public may bring a matter of suspected misconduct involving a Member, Officer or staff of the House to the attention of the OCE. Approximately 4,900 private citizens contacted the OCE during the fourth quarter of 2015. These contacts were of two types: (1) requests for information about the OCE and its procedures; and, (2) allegations of misconduct. Staff or any Board member may also submit information regarding an alleged violation for consideration by the Board. The OCE requests all submissions of information be made in writing.

III. OCE PROCESS

The OCE’s investigations have two stages: (1) a preliminary review, which must be completed in 30 days and (2) a second-phase review, which must be completed in 45 days, with the option of a 14-day extension. Two Board members (one appointed by the Speaker of the House and one appointed by the Minority Leader) may authorize a preliminary review if all available information provides a *reasonable basis* to believe that a violation may have occurred.

Three Board members may authorize a second-phase review if all available information provides *probable cause* to believe a violation may have occurred.

A decision to undertake a preliminary review or second-phase review should not be misconstrued. Historically, the majority of reviews have resulted in termination or dismissal of the matter.

At the end of a second-phase review, the Board must recommend to the Committee on Ethics either that the matter warrants further review by the Committee on Ethics or that the Committee on Ethics should dismiss the matter. The standard of proof generally required under OCE Rules

to refer a matter to the Committee on Ethics for further review is *substantial reason* to believe a violation may have occurred. A recommendation for further review does not constitute a determination that a violation occurred. Similarly, a recommendation for dismissal does not constitute a determination that a violation did not occur, but only that the information available to OCE does not provide a substantial reason to believe a violation occurred or, in some cases, that the conduct at issue falls outside of OCE’s jurisdiction.

The OCE is not authorized to sanction Members, officers or employees of the House or to recommend any sanctions. The Committee on Ethics has the exclusive authority to determine if a violation has occurred and, if so, what sanction may be in order. When it makes its recommendation, the OCE Board may also transmit to the Committee on Ethics findings that include, among other things, findings of fact and citations to laws, rules or regulations that may have been violated. A chart depicting the OCE’s review process is available on the OCE website at <http://oce.house.gov>.

IV. BOARD ACTIONS

The following is a statistical summary of the Board’s actions in the fourth quarter of 2015.

Date \ Type of Action	Commence Preliminary Review	Vote to Terminate Matter	Commence Phase II Review	Commence Phase II Review Extension	Transmit Referral for Review	Transmit Referral for Dismissal
October 13	0	0	0	1	0	0
October 24	3	0	0	0	0	0
October 30	0	0	0	0	1	0
November 22	0	1 ¹	0	0	0	0
November 23	0	0	2	0	0	0
Total for Quarter	3	1	2	1	1²	0
Total for 114th Congress	23	5	18	8	11	4

¹ This review terminated of its own accord without a vote of the Board.

² The OCE Board considered and voted to refer to the Committee on Ethics one matter in the fourth quarter, which was transmitted in the first quarter of 2016. This case will be accounted for in the first quarter 2016 report.

V. SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC RELEASE OF OCE REPORTS AND FINDINGS

The OCE has transmitted 11 matters to the Committee on Ethics for further review in the 114th Congress. The OCE's report and findings in all matters must be made public according to the schedule contained in House Resolution 895 of the 110th Congress, as amended.

A chart depicting this schedule for public disclosure of OCE reports is available on the OCE website at <http://oce.house.gov/process.html>. The following is a summary of the various matters that the OCE has referred to the Committee on Ethics that are pending release.

Review No.	Status	Release Date
15-6530	The OCE transmitted a referral for further review to the Committee on Ethics on January 6, 2016	By February 20, the Committee on Ethics must release the OCE referral or make a public announcement that: (1) the Chair and Ranking of the Committee are taking an additional 45 days to consider the matter or (2) the Committee has voted to empanel an investigative subcommittee.