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ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

Thomas A. Rust
Staff Director and Chief Counsel

Joanne White
Administrative Staff Director

Clifford C. Stoddard, Jr.
Counsel to the Chairman

Daniel J. Taylor
Counsel to the Ranking Member

1015 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6328
Telephone: (202) 225-7103
Facsimile: (202) 225-7392

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STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN AND RANKING MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE ON ETHICS REGARDING THE MATTER OF ALLEGATIONS RELATED TO OFFICIALLY-CONNECTED TRAVEL TO AZERBAIJAN

Pursuant to House Rule XI, clauses 3(b)(8)(A) and 3(r), and Committee Rules 17A(b)(1)(B), 17A(c)(1), and 17A(k)(1), the Committee has voted to extend its review of the matters regarding Representative Jim Bridenstine, Representative Yvette Clarke, Representative Danny Davis, Representative Rubén Hinojosa, Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, Representative Leonard Lance, Representative Michelle Lujan Grisham, Representative Gregory Meeks, and Representative Ted Poe, which were transmitted to the Committee by the Office of Congressional Ethics on May 8, 2015.

The Committee notes that the mere fact of a referral or an extension, and the mandatory disclosure of such an extension and the name of the subject of the matter, does not itself indicate that any violation has occurred, or reflect any judgment on behalf of the Committee. In light of the extraordinary circumstances here, the Committee has determined it is appropriate to provide additional information.

In these matters, a newspaper obtained materials transmitted by OCE to the Committee. The newspaper then published a story about aspects of the materials and related allegations. Other news outlets then reported on the newspaper story, apparently without having access to the materials transmitted by OCE to the Committee.

Although the Committee is required to make public the materials transmitted to it by OCE in certain circumstances, the Committee did not authorize the public release of those materials. Such an unauthorized release may have violated House Rules and other standards of conduct. Moreover, the unauthorized disclosure of the materials has directly impacted the Committee's investigation, which began well before OCE transmitted the materials to the Committee.

Materials transmitted to the Committee by OCE are not intended to be the resolution of a matter. Instead, they are intended to support OCE's recommendation to the Committee about whether allegations in a particular matter should be investigated further or should be dismissed. An OCE referral is expressly precluded from containing any conclusions regarding the validity of the allegations upon which it is based or the guilt or innocence of the individual who is the subject of a review. In addition, the Committee is required to review a referral from OCE without prejudice or presumptions as to the merit of the allegations.

The Committee's investigation and the materials sent to the Committee by OCE involve privately-sponsored, officially-connected travel to Azerbaijan. Each of the nine Members sought the Committee's review and determination whether they could accept the invitation. In each case, the Committee reviewed the materials submitted by the Member and sponsor and approved the Member to accept the travel before the trip began. Subsequently, questions arose about whether the trips complied with the requirements for such travel.

The Committee's review of these matters is ongoing. Every Member has fully cooperated with the Committee's review. In order to comply with Committee Rule 7 regarding confidentiality, out of fairness to all respondents, and to assure the integrity of its work, the Committee will refrain from making further public statements on this matter at this time. The Committee's next public statement with regard to the Azerbaijan Trips will occur on or before Thursday, August 6, 2015.

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