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December 2, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Office of the Speaker  
H-232, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

I trust you agree that a fair and properly functioning Ethics process – one utterly free from political interference – is essential to public confidence in this House.

That is why I was chagrined to learn that you issued a press release last week announcing that you “have been assured” that the Ethics Committee’s investigation of Rep. Charles Rangel will be concluded by January 3, 2009. As a former member of the Ethics Committee, you are no doubt acutely aware that House rules expressly prohibit Members and staff of the Ethics Committee from discussing any aspect of an ongoing ethics investigation with individuals outside the committee.

With all due respect, Madame Speaker, I am equally troubled by your public explanation yesterday that the Rangel investigation timeline disclosed in your original press release came not from the Ethics Committee, but from within your own office.

By failing to identify the source of the “assurance” you referenced, your original press release clearly suggested you had been advised by someone with actual knowledge of the status of the Rangel investigation. Indeed, no responsible news organization would have printed your announcement had they understood it reflected nothing more than speculation – or perhaps wishful thinking – by your own staff.

Coming so close on the heels of new and serious allegations against Rep. Rangel, creating a public expectation that the Ethics Committee would soon conclude its inquiry could be viewed as an attempt to fend off growing – and legitimate – demands that Rep. Rangel step aside as Chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means while the Ethics Committee conducts its probe into his conduct.

Otherwise, the only other plausible purpose for your press release would be to put public pressure on the Ethics Committee to wrap up its work regarding Rep. Rangel before the House approves new committee chairmen for the 111th Congress during the first week of January.

Without question, members of the Ethics Committee must have complete freedom to take their important inquiry wherever the evidence leads – without anyone in the House attempting to impose arbitrary deadlines. Only then can the public can have confidence in the investigators' findings.

Madame Speaker, it is imperative that you address immediately the very real questions this incident raises about whether your office has sought to improperly influence the conduct, scope, timing or any other aspect of an ongoing House ethics investigation.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Carter", written in a cursive style.

John Carter  
Member of Congress