

Statement by Representative Jo Bonner

Ranking Member, House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct

(as prepared for delivery)

This is a solemn moment for this House and a time where in about an hour, all of the Members will have an opportunity to make a statement with their vote.

As such, and because the rules allow Mr. Rangel 30 minutes to defend himself against the recommendation of the Committee, and the Committee's time will be evenly divided between the Chair and Ranking Member, I want to inform the Body that there will only be three Members on this side of the aisle who will speak.

I say this because there have obviously been a number of other Members who have approached me – even some on the Committee – asking for time.

But out of respect for all, and especially in light of the rare nature of this debate, I intend to recognize on our time only myself, Mr. Hastings, the former chair of the Ethics Committee and our colleague who served for almost 2 years on the Investigative Subcommittee, as well as our colleague Mr. McCaul, who served as the Ranking Member of the Adjudicatory Subcommittee during that phase of this matter.

Naturally, if other members want to have their views inserted into the Record, then I would have no objection. With that, I reserve my time.

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This is a sad but necessary day to complete final action on a matter that, honestly, should have been concluded with a public trial but Mr. Rangel chose to walk out of that hearing and failed to present his case.

Instead, we are left with a vote – an important vote, I would suggest, not only for Mr. Rangel but, equally, a significant vote for the House as an Institution and how we are seen by our employers – the American people.

Watching at home, some are probably looking on with a curiosity of sorts – as we dispense with this unpleasant, yet Constitutionally-mandated responsibility to punish our own when necessary.

In fairness, today's action will also confirm what many of us already know ... that Washington, D.C. truly is disconnected from the real-life challenges and worries that much of the rest of America faces every day...

The angst of a father whose son is standing guard in some dangerous, remote location in Afghanistan;

The concern that comes when a loved one has just been diagnosed with an aggressive, late-stage cancer;

Or the uncertainty of a single mom who was just told that she has been fired... not only must she worry about coming up with money for her kid's Christmas, but she now wonders how she'll make the car note and rent without having a job.

All across America, these are the real-life crises that our constituents are facing every day.

Back here on the House floor, one of our colleagues – admittedly one of the most well-liked and, at one time, influential Members of the House – is dealing with something that to him – and I trust to all of us – is considered a serious matter, worthy of our utmost attention.

As I noted back on July 29 when our colleague, Mr. Green, the chairman of the Investigative Subcommittee, and I presented the case after some two years of fact-finding – there is no debate but that Congressman Charlie Rangel has a compelling life story.

He was a private – as his autobiography says, “left to die on a battlefield in what is now North Korea.”

He earned the Purple Heart and Bronze Star for bravery. He was a fatherless high school dropout who went from pushing a hand truck in the Garden District of New York City to becoming one of the most powerful figures on Capitol Hill.

We all know the story.

But, my friends, Mr. Rangel's life story is not why we are here today. After all, every American has their own unique story to tell.

Regretfully, this is a day that did not have to be.

- If only Mr. Rangel had settled for the lesser sanctions that today he hopes this Body will somehow consider.

During the course of the investigation, he was given multiple opportunities to settle. Instead, he chose to fight on – declaring his innocence – and saying the Committee didn't have a case.

- If only Mr. Rangel had paid his taxes – as we are all required to do.

As chairman of the Ways and Means Committee – he certainly knew something about mandating that Americans pay their taxes.

But the Ethics Committee, on unanimous vote, found by clear and convincing evidence that Mr. Rangel, himself, had failed to pay his taxes for 17 years... violating U.S. – as well as state and local tax laws – on income derived from his beach villa in the Dominican Republic.

My friends, when you go back home this weekend, try explaining to your constituents that it is o.k. for a Member of Congress – the chairman of the tax-writing committee, in fact – to not pay his taxes, we just don't recommend that you do it. See if that message sells in your district; it wouldn't in mine.

- If Mr. Rangel had used the Ethics Committee as it is intended to be used – to give advice and counsel on how we *can* use our names for worthy causes, such as creating a school

for underprivileged minority students to encourage them to consider public service.

There's nothing wrong with the idea... actually, it is rooted in the most noble of American missions... education.

But rather than finding out how he could do this the right way and *legally*, Mr. Rangel instead used both his personal and committee staff – as well as other official resources of his office – to help solicit donations of up to *\$30 million* each for a school and library to insure his legacy... donations from more than 100 of the biggest and wealthiest corporate names in America, many of whom had direct interest before the powerful Ways and Means Committee that he chaired.

The Ethics Committee, on unanimous vote, found by clear and convincing evidence that Mr. Rangel solicited these donations from individuals and entities during the same time that he and his staff were communicating directly with lobbyists of those companies about legislation that could impact their interests.

Is there any wonder why some witnesses said, under oath, that they felt pressure when asked

to give by the Chairman?

- As Members of Congress, we are all required to file annual financial disclosure statements. Is it easy to make a mistake on occasion? Absolutely.

But, again, the Ethics Committee found on a unanimous vote, by clear and convincing evidence, that Mr. Rangel's Financial Disclosure Statements – for 10 years – were filled with numerous errors and omissions, including failure to disclose assets of over a half a million dollars.

Sure we all make mistakes... but the Committee noted there is a pattern here.

- Using an apartment – intended to help someone in need who qualified for a residence – instead it was used as a campaign office in violation of rent-stabilization laws...

The list goes on... and on... and on... such that Mr. Rangel was found guilty on 11 of the 13 charges – the most counts ever assembled against a Member of this House.

This truly is a somber moment.

The truth be known, most of us who are privileged to serve here know early on that there are really very few among us who will one day become a household name known throughout the country.

We simply hope the people in our own congressional districts – at least every two years – know that our best effort is always to try to reflect their voice and concerns here in our Nation's Capital.

But when you do become a national figure – as Mr. Rangel is – clearly more is expected of you and there is less room for error.

As the final tally was ordered a few days ago, 9 out of the 10 members of the only evenly-divided Committee in this Congress found that the totality of Mr. Rangel's conduct represented an ongoing pattern of behavior – not just isolated incidents – and agreed with Mr. Rangel's own words that he, himself, should be held to a higher standard because of the substantial responsibilities that came with his position.

Some – here in the House and, no doubt, many others around the country – might wonder why we don't expel Mr. Rangel. After all, expulsion is our most severe punishment.

But I, for one, would not vote for such a penalty for as any student of American history knows, you can be appointed to the U.S. Senate... even President Ford showed us back in the 1970s that you could make it all the way to the Oval Office and not be elected – but the only way you can serve in this, the People's House, is to be elected by the people in our respective districts.

And while I believe what Mr. Rangel has been found guilty of rises to the question of whether he is fit to serve his constituents, I do not believe that it should be the will of this Body – but instead, the will of the people of New York's 15<sup>th</sup> Congressional District – that renders that most solemn judgment.

It is only unfortunate that his constituents were not given this final judgment prior to the last election.

Others, we know, would simply like to see the charge of "Censure" lowered to a Reprimand or some other lesser penalty.

They cite the fact that the last two Censures were reserved for Members who were found guilty of having improper sexual relations with House pages.

My friends, today those Members would be expelled or resign in disgrace. This is a different day and a different time and the American people expect more of those who claim to be public servants.

While ultimately the punishment rests with the entire House, I would close with this one reminder:

Mr. Rangel is a man who has spent more years on the Hill than all but five of our colleagues. He has served the people of his district longer than 24 of our Members have been alive.

Even so, the only evenly-divided Committee of this House has brought forth its recommendation of Censure.

This was not made lightly nor was it without respect for the totality of Mr. Rangel's life or the seriousness and number of charges for which he has been found guilty.

This is a sad day, for sure.

But now the entire House has the responsibility to join the Ethics Committee in rendering your judgment.

The people we work for will no doubt be watching with interest.