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SUPREME COURT ETHICS

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The following information was released by the office of New York Rep. Louise Slaughter:

Last week I stood on the steps of the Supreme Court to deliver letters from Members of Congress, over 200 law professors, and more than 100,000 citizens. Our request? For the Supreme Court to adopt a code of conduct that will ensure accountability and transparency among the highest court in the land.

In the days that have followed, both the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle and The New York Times editorial boards have echoed our call for a Supreme Court code of conduct.

The Supreme Court is the only court in the United States that doesn't adhere to a binding code of conduct that applies to every other justice in the land.

Yet in just the last three years, Supreme Court Justices have been engaged in ethically dubious conduct at least 7 times- conduct that is explicitly forbidden among all other federal justices. However, since the Supreme Court does not adhere to the Code of Conduct for United States Judges, they have granted themselves immunity from the standards that would apply to this conduct.

As outlined by the New York Times, last week provided a perfect example of how a judicial code of conduct can ensure a transparent, accountable and fair system of courts. As described by the New York Times:

Judge Loren Smith, applying a federal statute, had awarded four oil companies \$87.3 million from the federal government in October 2009 to reimburse them for their costs in cleaning up hazardous waste from World War II. A few weeks later, he told the parties he realized his wife owned 98 shares of stock in Chevron, the parent company of Texaco and Union Oil, two companies in the lawsuit.

The government filed a motion to require that Judge Smith recuse himself from the case under the Code of Conduct for United States Judges, which applies to all federal judges except the Supreme Court justices. He acknowledged the conflict of interest about Texaco and Union Oil and asked that their claims be assigned to another judge. But he said he would retain control over the judgment for the other two companies in the case, Shell and Arco.

The government appealed his partial recusal decision, and the appeals court agreed, saying that the code of conduct required the judge to disqualify himself from the entire proceeding as soon as he discovered the conflict. Though he may have acted with proper intentions, the court said his decision contradicted the mandate of the code to remove himself from "any proceeding in which his impartiality might reasonably be questioned."

As explained by the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle this work is a continuation of my work on the STOCK Act. It is about ensuring that every single representative of the American people is accountable to the same standards of behavior as the citizens they serve. Said the DandC:

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SUPREME COURT ETHICS

Fresh off of efforts to hold the legislative branch accountable, Rep. Louise Slaughter has turned her eye to the judicial branch.

The Fairport congresswoman, author of the pending STOCK act preventing insider trading in Congress, is among lawmakers and judicial watchdogs urging the Supreme Court to adopt a formal code of conduct.

The call is timely, as the court is preparing this month to hear a legal challenge to President Obama's health care reform - a case in which two justices have been asked to recuse themselves: Elena Kagan because of her work as solicitor general in the Obama administration, and Clarence Thomas, because his wife has worked with political groups that opposed the law. Because there's no code, the decisions are left entirely up to the individual justices.

In America, no matter the title you hold, nor the power you wield, you should be equal in the eyes of the law. At the very least, we expect the Supreme Court to understand this basic concept of equality and justice. I urge Chief Justice Roberts to take the next step when it comes to Supreme Court ethics, and adopt the judicial Code of Conduct for the Supreme Court.

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