QUESTION OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to a point of a personal privilege.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. QUINN). The Chair has been apprised of the predicate on which the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER) seeks recognition and finds (in consonance with the precedents cited in section 708 of the House Rules and Manual) that it qualifies as a question of personal privilege under rule IX.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank the Members of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct for concluding what has been a 4-year nightmare to myself and my family. In fact, 4 years, 1 month and 31 days ago, a group associated with Ralph Nader filed an ethics complaint against me.

I have agreed to accept a single letter of reproval to settle this matter. Now, this letter of reproval deals with matters of appearances of improprieties to which I acknowledge. I am very pleased that the committee dismissed the wild and inaccurate charges originally filed by the Nader group. I am very pleased that not a single allegation, not a scintilla of evidence, not a hint of any of this referred to any actions that I took that influenced my activities as chairman of my committee.

Now, the Webster dictionary defines reproval. As we know, a letter of reproval, by definition, is the mildest form of sanction. The Webster dictionary defines it as, and I quote, ''to scold or correct, usually gently and with kindly intent.''

Now, I must confess I feel neither gentle nor kindly about this 4-year nightmare which has been so difficult for my family and which has cost hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees.

It began with this Nader organization complaint filed. And under the rules, it is a fact, not an opinion, it is a fact that, under the rules, such a complaint must include the signatures of three sitting Members. It is a fact, not an opinion, that at least one of those signatures, not only was not by a Member, his name was not even spelled correctly. So on the face of it, this should have been rejected in the very beginning. The then committee began the investigation by violating their own rules. But that is something behind us.

It is also a fact that, in the week of October 5, 1998, 2 years ago, the then chairman of the committee sought me out and said to me, and I can quote it because I immediately not only wrote it down, but also sent it to my attorneys and sent a copy of a letter to the distinguished gentleman himself to make sure that I had not misunderstood. He said to me that, after conferring with other Members of the committee, that they wanted to wrap up the matter by year's end because there was nothing of substance. It was, and I emphasize, I quote, ''B.S.'' I immediately prepared a memorandum, and of course my family and I proceeded on this basis.

As it turned out, that was 2 years ago. I was told they wanted to wrap it up by year's end. It did not happen. We regret that. But we went on to do our best to try to comply with this nightmare.

It is also a matter of public record that the chairman of the investigation committee and I have had bad blood over the years, largely, although not exclusively, over the fact that I refused to block a 6-runway which he wanted killed for his airport. At the time, people came to me and said ''you should object under the rules to that gentleman being chairman of the subcommittee.'' I said absolutely not. I said then that gentleman is an honorable gentleman, and I said now that gentleman is an honorable gentleman. So I agreed for us to proceed under those rules.

I agreed to this letter. It is true that, after my chief of staff of 22 years retired, I and my new chief of staff contacted that old chief of staff numerous times on official business to get guidance because that former chief of staff was the only one who had the knowledge that we needed to conduct the affairs of our office. If that created an appearance of impropriety, absolutely. That is true.

It is also true that my wife and I and my family went to Puerto Rico on what we believed to be an official trip. While it is true that we did, indeed, meet with two different organizations on official business plus, as a member of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, I took time to meet with DEA agents on drug matters relating to Puerto Rico, nevertheless it was concluded by the committee that this trip was more recreational. I accept that judgment that it created the appearance of recreation.

It is also true that my congressional staff contributed many times to work in my campaign. It is true that we kept no written records. I acknowledge that. I admit that. If that is an appearance of impropriety, so be it. We understand that the particular staff person in question did testify that she worked nights and weekends to make it up. But, absolutely, we did not keep records which have been deemed to be adequate, and so I have no problem in acknowledging that violation.

It is also true that the Bud Shuster for Congress Committee spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on dinners and charter flights. We identified it as political. But it is true that we did not spell out the details. We did not spell out who it was we had dinner with. We did not spell out the purpose of the dinner. We reported it all on our FEC reports, but we did not provide any detail. So if that is an appearance of impropriety, so be it. I accept it.

Also, the word ''excessive'' was used in spending campaign funds. Now, if one comes from a rural area, we do not have the benefit of airlines, scheduled airlines. We have to use charter flights.

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But between the dinners and the flights, these campaign expenses were ''excessive.'' We thought that was something the FEC was supposed to deal with, but nevertheless we accept that. If that created the appearance of impropriety, so be it.

But I would point out, in fact, it really raises my hackles a bit when people say, ''Well, you didn't have any opposition.'' My colleagues, I have got to confess to the sin of pride. I am the only Pennsylvanian in our Nation's history who has won both the Democratic and the Republican nominations nine times. These Democratic nominations did not fall out of the sky. We conduct very, very complicated write-in campaigns. And in 11 counties, we have had to run 11 campaigns for a write-in campaign. It costs a lot of money.

We work 365 days a year on the political end of our activities, and we do spend an awful lot of money. And if that created the appearance of impropriety, I accept that.

Now, if our practices created the appearance of impropriety, our attorneys at one point said, wait a minute, these are common practices. I said, well, I thought they were, but maybe they are not. So our attorneys initiated investigations into the FEC reports as well as the ethics report of 35 Members of Congress, both sides of the aisle, particularly Members of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct and the leadership in the Congress to see whether these practices were also conducted by other Members of the Congress. And, indeed, they discovered that in a vast majority of the cases, meals, with the full range of Washington restaurants, Mr. K's, Red Sage, Morton's, Capitol Grill, were paid for by campaign expenses. The Palm, the MCI Center, private clubs, golfing expenses; all paid for with campaign expenses. Entertainment, music, florists, commercial airfare.

Indeed, I emphasize since we do not have commercial flights in rural Pennsylvania, I had to rely on charter flights, but we spent an awful lot of money on it. And if that created an appearance of impropriety, absolutely I accept that.

Members, as they traveled around in style, Sun Valley, campaign expenses or paid for by private groups; Sun Valley, Idaho, Jackson Hole, Aspen, Boulder, Miami, Boca Raton, Orlando, Ft. Myers, Naples, Palm Springs, Pebble Beach, the list goes on and on, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Bermuda, Virgin Islands, Cuba, Panama, London, Scotland, Ireland, Rome, Zurich, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Africa, et cetera, et cetera, all paid for by private groups.

Now, it is a fact that we did not keep a record of how much of my time was spent on official business and how

much time was spent on recreation. This is one of the things that the Congress and the committee might want to consider clarifying this, so that when a Member does go on a trip paid for by a private group, he should keep a record of how many hours and minutes he spends on official business and how many hours and minutes he spends on recreations so we would know clearly and so my colleagues do not find themselves in the same difficulty in which we have found ourselves.

In fact, I considered introducing legislation, but it is not my style to do something with tongue-in-cheek to say that we have got to have written records of every time we go and have a dinner with somebody, and we must write down who the person was and what was talked about. Do we really want that around here? Well, what is good for the goose is good for the gander, but it is certainly not my point to suggest that that should be done.

I have to tell my colleagues that my attorneys read the committee report, and they take violent exception to some of the characterizations in it, and urge, by the way, that all my colleagues read our reply to the report, but I accept the letter of reproval. I accept the appearance of impropriety. In the course of it, my attorneys tell me there were 150 subpoenas, 75 witnesses, 33 depositions; and they tell me time and time again in debriefings that they were informed that these witnesses by the staff attorneys were intimidated, were threatened, and were harassed.

I want to emphasize very strongly, these are not the gentlemen and ladies on the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct. As far as I have been apprised, the gentlemen and the ladies on the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct conducted themselves in a manner which we all would expect them to conduct themselves. The staff, of course, was a different situation.

So in conclusion, this 4-year ordeal is over. I accept the findings to stop the hemorrhaging of legal fees and to put this behind us. I am less than thrilled by the drumbeat of malicious, inaccurate newspaper stories which have appeared over the period of time. I certainly want to thank my family and my friends, my staff and my colleagues for their tremendous support which I have received during this 4-year nightmare. And perhaps most significantly, as a result of the tremendous support I have received, our Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure has been able to be an effective committee, has been a committee which in fact, more than any other committee in the Congress, I am told, has seen 119 pieces of legislation signed into law, the largest and most productive committee of the Congress with, indeed, some historic pieces of legislation.

So I accept the findings of the committee in order to put this behind us. And most importantly I want to thank all my colleagues for their tremendous support over this period of time.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. SHUSTER. I yield to the gentleman from Minnesota.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, the apologia pro vita sua we have just heard from the gentleman in the well is and represents one of the most intensely personal moments in this body; one of the most human experiences that we engage in. None of us, unless we stand in that well, as the gentleman has just done, can understand the pain and the difficulty, but also the strength of character it takes to deliver the statement the gentleman has just made, and to say ''I accept the judgment.'' But it is characteristic of the gentleman to do so.

The gentleman has led the committee throughout all this ordeal with dignity and effectiveness. I know how pained the gentleman is over this report, but I am proud of this moment that he has taken to address his colleagues and to address the country and to address this institution, and I thank the gentleman.

Mr. SHUSTER. Reclaiming my time, Mr. Speaker, I thank my good friend, and I yield back the balance of my time.

LAS CIENEGAS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA IN THE STATE OF ARIZONA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD). Pursuant to House Resolution 610 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 2941.

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IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 2941) to establish the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area in the State of Arizona, with Mr. QUINN in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from Utah (Mr. HANSEN) and the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. RAHALL) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Utah (Mr. HANSEN).

Mr. HANSEN. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume, and I rise in full support of H.R. 2941, which establishes the Cienegas National Conservation Area and the Sonoita Valley Conservation Planning District in the State of Arizona. Authored by my colleague, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr.KOLBE), this legislation will ensure the future protection and use of this area.

The purpose of H.R. 2941 is to preserve the many historical, recreation, and rangeland resources of the region while also allowing for environmentally responsible grazing and recreation to continue. The planning district consists of approximately 137,000 acres of land in the Arizona counties of Pima and Santa Cruz. The conservation area on the southern end of the planning district encompasses nearly 42,000 acres of Federal public land. Both of these management prescriptions will conserve, protect, and enhance for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations the unique aquatic, wildlife, cave, historical, and other resources and values which allowing livestock grazing and recreation to continue.

In 1995, the Sonoita Valley Planning Partnership was formed to work on public lands issues in the Empire-Cienega Resources Conservation Area, which the BLM established in 1988. The partnership is comprised of various stakeholders, such as hiking clubs, conservation organizations, grazing and mining interests, off-highway vehicle clubs, mountain bike clubs, as well as Federal, States, and county government entities. The SVPP has developed a collaborative management plan for these lands, and the National Conservation Area designation gives this plan's objectives permanence.

The establishment of this conservation planning district and national conservation will not affect any property rights of any lands or interests in lands held by the State of Arizona, any political subdivisions of the State of Arizona, or any private landowners. In addition, reasonable access to non-federally owned lands or interest in lands within the NCA must be provided. The establishment of the National Conservation Area must also allow for multiple use, such as grazing, motorized vehicles, military overflights, and hunting.

Mr. Chairman, this bill ensures the designation of the NCA will not lead to the creation of protective perimeters or buffer zones. This bill also assures that any activity or use on lands outside the NCA are not precluded as a result of the designation. In addition, this bill directs the Secretary to develop and implement a comprehensive management plan for the long-term management of the area.

Mr. Chairman, my colleague, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. KOLBE), deserves a lot of credit for bringing H.R. 2941 to this point. Following the initial hearing on this legislation, many concerns were raised about boundaries, private and State lands, and grazing language. After several months of negotiation with the minority and the Secretary of the Interior, he has produced legislation that is balanced and reasonable. I want to commend the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. KOLBE) for his patience and hard work. This is a worthy piece of legislation, and I strongly urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2941.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.