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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

VICE CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL SECURITY,
DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
AND RELATED PROGRAMS SUBCOMMITTEE

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND GENERAL
GOVERNMENT SUBCOMMITTEE

COMMITTEE ON BUDGET

August 25, 2026

Before You Accept the Ethics Committee's Conclusion

Dear Colleague:

Before voting for my censure I am asking you to do something both simple and important: **look beyond the conclusion of the Ethics Committee's report against me then examine the evidence and the extraordinary analytical leap required to reach that conclusion.**

I recognize that Members may view some of the interactions described in the report differently. I am not asking anyone to approve of every gift, compliment, friendship, social interaction or personal communication described in thousands of pages of material.

I am asking you to distinguish between conduct that someone, examining isolated excerpts *after* the fact, might consider unconventional and conduct that actually establishes **sexual harassment**.

That distinction is critical because of what the Committee **did not find**.

Consider the Committee's own conclusions:

The Committee concluded that I neither engaged in sexual activity with nor explicitly propositioned any individual staff member.

The Committee concluded that the allegations in this matter do not implicate quid pro quo sexual harassment.

And the Committee concluded that I did not violate federal sexual harassment law.

Those are not my characterizations of the evidence. **Those are the Committee's own conclusions.**

And yet, having reached those conclusions, the Committee traveled from conduct it acknowledged involved no sexual activity, no explicit sexual proposition, no quid pro quo sexual harassment, and no violation of federal sexual harassment law to one of the most damaging characterizations that can be attached to a Member of Congress: **sexual harassment**.

Members should stop and consider the extraordinary distance between those two points.

The report repeatedly relies upon interactions that it says "*could* be interpreted as romantic." But something that *could be interpreted as romantic* is worlds apart from establishing an **unwanted sexual advance**. An affectionate friendship is not a sexual proposition. A gift is not sexual misconduct. A compliment is not sexual misconduct. Poetry is not sexual misconduct. Socializing with a colleague is not sexual misconduct. Caring deeply about someone with whom you have worked and come to know for years is not sexual misconduct.

Yet individual acts that were not themselves prohibited were gathered together, assigned the most damaging possible interpretation, and then used collectively to support a conclusion far more serious than the underlying evidence.

That is not a minor analytical step. It is a chasm.

The Committee essentially moved from *this might be interpreted as romantic* to *therefore this constituted sexual harassment*-without first establishing the sexual conduct, proposition or unwanted advance that one would reasonably expect to support such a grave conclusion.

Members should ask whether that is evidence establishing misconduct or inference being used to bridge the absence of evidence.

The distinction becomes even more important because many of the activities emphasized by the report are not themselves prohibited.

There is no House rule prohibiting Members and staff from being friends.

There is no House rule prohibiting Members and staff from spending social time together.

There is no House rule prohibiting a Member from genuinely and deeply caring about people with whom he has worked closely for years.

And House gift rules recognize circumstances in which gifts between established friends are permissible.

Those distinctions matter. Otherwise, perfectly permissible conduct can become evidence of wrongdoing simply by accumulating enough examples of it and assigning them an improper motive.

Ten permissible acts do not become misconduct merely because they are placed together in ten paragraphs.

That concern is particularly acute here because I provided the Committee approximately **186,000 emails, texts, voicemails and documents**. Against that enormous universe of contemporaneous evidence, Members should ask how the communications quoted in the report were selected and on what basis they can fairly be characterized as representative.

The selectivity becomes even more striking when you examine **Appendix A-the evidence the Committee itself chose to place before Members**. Appendix A is not a neutral compilation of

all 186,000 communications and documents I provided. It is a highly selective collection chosen by the Committee to illustrate and support its findings.

Yet even the Committee's own selected evidence contains substantial evidence that cuts against its narrative.

Appendix A does **not** read like the documentary record of one person relentlessly pursuing two unwilling subordinates. It repeatedly reflects reciprocal affection and voluntary participation-particularly by Staffer 2. In the Committee's own selected communications, she asks about dinners, says she misses talking with me, compliments my appearance, expresses a desire to spend time together, says she had "a blast," says she looks forward to doing it again, says she would "love" to decorate a Christmas tree with me, offers to drive, proposes future meals, helps plan trips, suggests activities, rearranges dates, and continues substantial contact after leaving my employment.

That evidence is particularly important because **I did not select it. The Committee did.**

If evidence specifically selected by investigators to support their conclusions nevertheless documents reciprocity, voluntary participation, continued friendship and independently initiated contact, Members should ask what the full evidentiary record would show-and whether the Committee's characterization fairly reflects even the evidence it chose to present.

The Committee's own Appendix complicates and contradicts its own narrative.

The Committee says it considered the "totality" of the circumstances.

But totality cannot mean accumulating only those circumstances that support one interpretation while excluding circumstances pointing toward another.

Consider the gifts.

The Chairman personally asked me during my interview what gifts these staffers had given me. I answered at length. I described a custom made NFL jersey, bourbon and whiskey, custom throw blankets, whiskey glasses, a taxidermy animal, a planned skydiving trip, wall plaques, and other gifts.

Only one example that reciprocal gift-giving appears in the report.

Instead, the report extensively discusses gifts I gave the women even though some of them predated our time in Congress and some of them were provided as job related tools.

Reciprocity changes context.

I also testified that I gave gifts to other members of my staff-male and female-including wine, olive oil, cookware, rum, Kennedy Center tickets and even a handgun to a male staffer. Those facts are directly relevant to whether gifts to these two women demonstrated romantic interest or

reflected a broader pattern of generosity toward people with whom I worked closely, and that was a practice I exercised in my small business.

Those facts were omitted. Why?

The same problem appears in the description of the relationships themselves.

I testified that one of the women frequently referred to me as her **"second dad."** I know the Committee received testimony from another witness who had worked closely with us for years and viewed another of these relationships as a **father/daughter and mentor/mentee relationship.** The report itself recounts a third-party reference to one staffer as **"just a daughter figure."**

Surely those facts belong in any genuine examination of the "totality of the circumstances." Why were they not?

I also testified that staff voluntarily helped me with personal matters-watering plants, caring for homes, meeting repairmen and accepting deliveries. Yet the report portrays my offers to help one of them with personal chores as evidence against me while largely excluding the reciprocal nature of that assistance. Why the exclusion?

I testified about social interactions with other staff members that were also omitted: attending the White House picnic with another female staffer at her request, attending an after-hours karaoke birthday party at her request, and visiting a male staffer's home after the birth of his child.

History and Familiarity Changes Context

The Committee knew these relationships did not begin in Washington. We had already worked together in my North Carolina Senate office and on grueling campaigns before going to Congress together. During those years, we exchanged gifts, traveled together to my district, and they visited my home; Staffer 2 even stayed overnight when my Senate office had no travel budget for lodging.

That history matters. Gift-giving, travel, time together outside the office, and familiarity with my home did not suddenly emerge after I became a Member of Congress. They were established features of longstanding relationships.

Yet despite knowing this history, the Committee completely omitted it from its report while assigning a different meaning to similar conduct in Washington. Why? A genuine "totality of the circumstances" analysis cannot begin in Congress while disregarding the years that came before it.

Again, **context matters.**

There is another significant issue.

I know the Committee received testimony from multiple sources that a former senior staff member whom I fired began spreading a false rumor that I was having an affair with one of these women. That rumor created discomfort within the office and ultimately entered the media environment surrounding this investigation. Why was it excluded?

A fair inquiry should carefully distinguish **discomfort caused by a false rumor about a relationship from evidence that the underlying relationship was itself improper**. Those are fundamentally different things.

Indeed, the affair rumor centered on one staffer, while much of the Committee's eventual analysis centers on my friendship with the other. Members should consider whether an investigation that began amid allegations of an affair gradually transformed into an effort to reinterpret ordinary aspects of longstanding friendships as evidence of something else.

There are factual disputes as well.

I explicitly testified that I did not buy one staffer drinks in a casino; the report says otherwise. I dispute the characterization that I invited another staffer to any private dinner outside a work activity. And where the report describes a senior staffer speaking to me on behalf of the women, I testified that the conversation concerned the effect the circulating affair rumor was having-not complaints that my conduct toward the women was unwelcome.

Perhaps most importantly, the report states that after that conversation I became "more aware of how the staff might be reacting" to these relationships but nevertheless continued my behavior.

What inappropriate behavior?

The report does not identify subsequent conduct that the Committee itself deemed inappropriate.

That omission deserves an answer.

The Ethics Committee unquestionably possesses broad institutional authority to enforce House standards. But broad authority demands careful judgment. It should not permit the evidentiary burden to be lowered simply because the underlying subject matter is sensitive.

When the conclusion is as devastating as **sexual harassment**, the evidence supporting it should be commensurately persuasive.

Here, the Committee had evidence supporting a profoundly different interpretation: longstanding friendships; reciprocal gifts; reciprocal personal assistance; father/daughter and mentor/mentee descriptions; social interactions with other staff; and approximately 186,000 communications and documents from which only a tiny fraction appears in the report.

Those facts do not disappear because they complicate the Committee's narrative or pre-determined outcome.

That is the fundamental problem I ask you to consider: the Committee says it evaluated the totality of the circumstances, but its report presents a selective totality.

It takes conduct that was not prohibited, removes important contextual evidence, identifies communications that "***could*** be interpreted as romantic," aggregates them, and then makes an extraordinary leap to the profoundly damaging characterization of sexual harassment-**despite finding no sexual activity or proposition or harassment.**

That is not simply a disagreement over interpretation.

That is a dangerous inversion of fair fact-finding.

Friendship is not misconduct.

Generosity is not misconduct.

Social interaction is not misconduct.

Caring deeply about colleagues who have become important parts of your life is not misconduct.

And conduct does not become sexual harassment merely because someone looking backward through thousands of pages can construct a theory under which it "***could*** be interpreted as romantic."

I am also including as **Appendix B** my response to the Committee's findings so that Members can consider my answers and objections for themselves. Remarkably, the Committee adopted its report **before it even received my response**. On a matter carrying consequences this serious, It was a profound failure of fair process for the Committee to finalize and adopt its report before even receiving my response—rendering judgment on my conduct and reputation before bothering to consider my defense.

Before accepting the Committee's conclusion, I respectfully ask you to examine the evidence, the omissions, the disputed facts and, above all, **the enormous distance between what the Committee actually found and the label it ultimately imposed.**

Possibility is not proof. Inference is not evidence. And selective context is not totality.

A finding this serious should rest on evidence equally serious.

This one does not.

Sincerely,



Chuck Edwards
Member of Congress

15 QUESTIONS MEMBERS SHOULD ASK

BEFORE ACCEPTING THE ETHICS REPORT

1

HOW DID THE COMMITTEE GET FROM THESE FINDINGS TO "SEXUAL HARASSMENT"?

The Committee itself concluded that Edwards did not engage in sexual activity with or explicitly proposition any individual staff member; the allegations did not implicate quid pro quo sexual harassment; and Edwards did not violate federal sexual harassment law. How did those findings lead to the profoundly damaging characterization of sexual harassment?

2

WHERE IS THE COMPLAINT FROM EITHER WOMAN?

Neither Staffer 1 nor Staffer 2 was the complainant. That fact deserves substantial weight when evaluating claims concerning whether interactions with them were unwelcome.

3

DOES "COULD BE INTERPRETED AS ROMANTIC" ESTABLISH AN UNWANTED SEXUAL ADVANCE?

Possibility of interpretation is not proof of intent, conduct or unwanted sexual behavior. The distance between those concepts and sexual harassment is not a minor analytical step - it is a chasm.

4

HOW WERE A HANDFUL OF COMMUNICATIONS "REPRESENTATIVE" OF APPROXIMATELY 186,000?

Edwards provided approximately 186,000 emails, texts, voicemails and documents. What methodology determined which communications appeared in the report?

5

DOES THE COMMITTEE'S OWN APPENDIX UNDERMINE ITS NARRATIVE?

Appendix A was selected by the Committee, not Edwards. Yet it repeatedly shows reciprocity and voluntary participation, including Staffer 2 initiating or proposing dinners and activities, saying she missed talking with Edwards, describing having "a blast," helping plan trips and continuing substantial contact after leaving his employment.

6

WAS THIS REALLY A "TOTALITY OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES" REVIEW?

Totality requires considering evidence pointing in both directions - not simply aggregating circumstances supporting one interpretation.

7

WHY WERE RECIPROCAL GIFTS LARGELY OMITTED?

Edwards testified about bourbon, whiskey, custom blankets, whiskey glasses, a taxidermy animal, a planned skydiving trip and other gifts he received from the staffers. The Chairman specifically asked about those gifts. Almost none appear in the report.

8

CAN PERMISSIBLE FRIENDSHIP BE TRANSFORMED INTO MISCONDUCT BY AGGREGATION?

House rules do not prohibit Members and staff from being friends, spending social time together, or deeply caring about people with whom they have worked for years. Gift rules recognize circumstances in which gifts between established friends are permissible.

9

WHY MINIMIZE THE FATHER/DAUGHTER AND MENTOR/MENTEE CONTEXT?

Edwards testified that Staffer 2 frequently called him her "second dad." Another witness reportedly characterized Edwards's relationship with Staffer 1 as father/daughter and mentor/mentee. The report itself references Staffer 2 as "just a daughter figure."

10

WHY PRESENT PERSONAL ASSISTANCE IN ONLY ONE DIRECTION?

The report criticizes Edwards for offering assistance with personal chores. He testified that staff voluntarily and repeatedly helped him with personal matters as well - including watering plants, caring for homes, meeting repairmen and accepting deliveries.

11

WHY OMIT COMPARABLE GIFTS AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER STAFF?

Edwards testified to gifts for other male and female staff and to social interactions including a White House picnic, a karaoke birthday gathering, and visiting a male staffer's home after the birth of his child.

12

DID AN AFFAIR RUMOR DISTORT THE INVESTIGATION?

Edwards says multiple witnesses told investigators that a fired chief of staff began spreading a false affair rumor centered on Staffer 1. Members should distinguish discomfort caused by that rumor from evidence that an improper relationship existed - and ask why much of the eventual report focuses on Staffer 2.

13

DID THE COMMITTEE ADOPT ITS CONCLUSION BEFORE CONSIDERING EDWARDS'S RESPONSE?

Edwards is including his Exhibit B response so Members can evaluate it directly. The Committee adopted its report before receiving that response. On a matter this serious, why was the report finalized before the Member's response was considered?

14

WHAT INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT OCCURRED AFTER EDWARDS WAS WARNED ABOUT STAFF REACTION?

The report criticizes Edwards for supposedly continuing his behavior after being made aware of concerns. What subsequent conduct does the report identify as inappropriate?

15

DID THE COMMITTEE PROVE ITS CONCLUSION - OR INTERPRET ITS WAY TO IT?

Friendship, gifts, compliments, poetry, social interaction and personal assistance may be interpreted differently by different observers. But an interpretation - particularly one built from selected evidence - is not a substitute for proof.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Did the Committee actually consider the totality of the circumstances - or construct a "selective totality" by emphasizing evidence supporting its theory while omitting evidence supporting an innocent explanation?

POSSIBILITY IS NOT PROOF. • INFERENCE IS NOT EVIDENCE. • SELECTIVE CONTEXT IS NOT TOTALITY.

APPENDIX B

**BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON ETHICS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
119th Congress, 2d Session**

**IN THE MATTER OF ALLEGATIONS RELATING TO
REPRESENTATIVE CHUCK EDWARDS**

August 3, 2026

**RESPONSE OF REPRESENTATIVE CHUCK EDWARDS TO THE
COMMITTEE REPORT**

I. Introduction and Summary

Representative Chuck Edwards submits the following response to the Committee's Report¹ issued by the Committee on Ethics (Committee) to the House of Representatives:

At the outset, it is important to emphasize that the Committee's findings exonerate Representative Edwards under House Rules governing sexual misconduct or harassment. Specifically,

- the Committee concluded that Representative Edwards neither engaged in sexual activity with nor explicitly propositioned any individual staff member;²
- the Committee also concluded that the allegations in this matter do not implicate *quid pro quo* sexual harassment;³
- the Committee also concluded that Representative Edwards did not violate federal sexual harassment law;⁴
- the Committee also concluded that Representative Edwards cooperated with the investigation;⁵
- the Committee's recommendation of censure, an extraordinarily harsh and infrequent punishment, is based solely on vague standards requiring credible behavior and adherence to the spirit of the Rules of the House; the Committee's recommendation is *not* based on a direct violation of House rules addressing sexual misconduct;⁶

¹ The Committee provided a Draft Report, *In the Matter of Allegations Relating to Representative Chuck Edwards* (hereinafter Report), to Representative Edwards' counsel on July 31, 2026. All page citations to the Report are to that draft.

² Report at 1.

³ *Id.* at 16.

⁴ *Id.* at 17-18.

⁵ *Id.* at 2.

⁶ *Id.* at 2, 20.

- Representative Edwards has been denied the opportunity to challenge the factual allegations guaranteed to him under House rules.⁷

The Committee — acting on unverified rumors of sexual misconduct reported in the media, in the absence of a complaint from any affected individual — initiated an investigation pursuant to Committee Rule 18(a). Surprisingly, the Report elides the fact that the Committee initiated this matter without receiving a complaint.⁸ The Committee acknowledges that these scurrilous rumors of an affair or sexual misconduct were quickly disproved. However, the Committee continued its investigation into a long-standing working relationship and personal friendship between Representative Edwards and two female staffers which predated his tenure in the U.S. Congress. After conducting its inquiry, the Committee concluded that Representative Edwards’ conduct violated the rules that a Member “shall behave at all times in a manner that shall reflect creditably on the House,” and “shall adhere to the spirit and the letter of the Rules of the House.”⁹

Despite its assertions to the contrary, the Committee has failed to demonstrate that either of the two staffers expressed discomfort to Representative Edwards regarding his conduct with them. Nonetheless, the Committee contends that “Representative Edwards knew or had reason to know that Staffer 1 and Staffer 2 were uncomfortable with his conduct at least as early as May 2025” when a senior staffer spoke to him about the issue.¹⁰ The Committee fails to acknowledge, however, that it also received testimony that Representative Edwards sincerely believed that the staffers’ discomfort emanated from false rumors reported in the media that he was having an affair with one of them. The effect of false rumors of misconduct on individuals is a far cry from evidence that Representative Edwards knew or should have known that the staffers did not welcome his conduct or otherwise felt uncomfortable. Moreover, while the Report credits evidence it received that the staffers “did not always feel free to reject Representative Edwards’ attentions without fear of professional consequences,”¹¹ it dismisses both Representative Edwards’ testimony to the contrary and documentary evidence where he expressly informed one of the staffers that she “set the boundaries, and I get to respect them.”¹² As addressed later, the Committee also rejected documentary evidence indicating that Representative Edwards had a good faith reason in the months after May 2025 to believe that his conduct with Staffer 2 post-employment was welcomed.

Compounding its decision to cast aside exculpatory evidence produced by Representative Edwards and other witnesses, the Committee has trampled on its own rules and procedures and imposed the most severe punishment ever on a Member of Congress for conduct of a similar nature. Despite the Committee’s acknowledgement that no sexual misconduct occurred¹³ — a

⁷ *Id.* at 2-3.

⁸ *E.g., id.* at 3 n.3 (citing April 20, 2026 Committee Statement without addressing use of Committee Rule 18(a) to initiate this investigation).

⁹ *Id.* at 2.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 7.

¹¹ *Id.* at 8.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.* at 16-18.

conclusion which would normally militate for a resolution of this matter in a manner consistent with decades of House precedent (*i.e.*, resolution at the Committee-level rather than before the full House) — the Committee has recommended that the House adopt a resolution to censure Representative Edwards. Censure is a sanction that, based on counsel’s extensive research, has never been imposed in a situation comparable to the findings stated in this Report.

Further, the Committee has reached this recommendation through a process which abandons the adjudicatory structure mandated by the Committee’s own rules. The Committee’s actions deny Representative Edwards any opportunity to examine the underlying evidence in the matter, present contrary evidence, or otherwise mount a defense to the charges — all actions normally guaranteed by House and Committee rules. While Representative Edwards sat for an interview conducted by Members of the Committee and Committee counsel, he testified blind to many of the allegations contained in this Report; nor was he provided a subsequent opportunity to address many of the factual claims and testimony contained herein.

Accordingly, this Response serves as Representative Edwards’ only chance to counter these allegations along with the outcome-driven, truncated, and *ultra vires* proceedings deployed by the Committee. Set out below is a legal and factual defense to the charges leveled by the Committee.

* * *

From the start, Representative Edwards cooperated with the Committee-initiated Rule 18(a) review. He produced all responsive material in his possession, including documents, emails, texts, and telephone voice messages; he also provided a voluntary interview where he answered every question posed by Committee Members and Committee counsel. This Response does not attempt to relitigate every characterization in the lengthy Report which the Committee provided to Representative Edwards. Rather, it addresses the multitude of errors relating to 1) authority and proof contained in the Report, and 2) the Committee’s investigative process leading to its unwarranted recommendation for censure.

Nothing in this Response should be read as an admission that any particular gift, message, or conversation described in the Report was intended as, or received as, an unwanted or romantic advance, or that Representative Edwards’ actions created “a hostile work environment.” Representative Edwards addresses several specific inferences where the record the Committee assembled is directly contradicted, refuted, or not supported by its findings; silence elsewhere in this Response does not concede any of the Report’s characterizations.

The Committee’s first error relates to its authority and process. Our understanding is that no complaint was ever filed relating to Representative Edwards’ conduct. Rather, the Committee’s recommendation that the House censure Representative Edwards is based on a Rule 18(a) Committee-initiated, information-gathering record; there has been no Investigative Subcommittee, no Statement of Alleged Violation (SAV), and none of the processes Committee Rules 19 to 24

require before a floor sanction may issue. Simply put, House rules do not authorize the Committee to recommend censure in this matter, and a respondent's coerced capitulation cannot supply the Committee with authority withheld from it by the rules.

The Committee's second error is one of proof. The Report's narrative rests, at several of its most consequential points, on inferences the record does not support, and in places affirmatively contradicts. The Report suggests that Representative Edwards "intentionally" deleted messages, on a record that shows that he produced hundreds of documents (after a costly and extensive search conducted by a reputable data retrieval service). It finds that Staffer 2 "felt pressured" into a trip without addressing evidence produced to the Committee that demonstrates that Representative Edwards believed the opposite. And it imports characterizations of his conduct from sources it does not identify and who possess no first-hand information about Representative Edwards' intent or knowledge.

Before proceeding with his response to the Report, Representative Edwards wishes to emphasize the following:

Having reviewed the testimony and evidence assembled by the Committee and set out in the Report, Representative Edwards sincerely regrets that his behavior created discomfort in any way for Staffer 1 or Staffer 2. As the Report mentions, although it does not credit his statement, after Representative Edwards learned of the Staffers' concerns he acknowledged the issue and stated that he would respect all appropriate "boundaries." At no time did either staffer provide any indication to Representative Edwards that his general behavior made them uncomfortable or was unwelcome.

* * *

Six specific points are addressed through this Response:

One. Procedurally, a record developed under a self-generated investigation pursuant to Committee Rule 18(a) supports, at most, the disposition the Committee reached in the *Savage*¹⁴ and *Hastings*¹⁵ matters: a public report and a statement of the Committee's disapproval, without a floor sanction. Under applicable House Rules, a censure recommendation requires an Investigative Subcommittee and an adopted SAV, which in turn afford the respondent an opportunity to answer and participate in an adjudicatory hearing at which every count must be proved by clear and convincing evidence. This matter provides none of the required processes. No staffer identified in the Report filed a complaint for the Committee to adjudicate; rather, the review followed press reporting after the Committee's public statement inviting information. Representative Edwards

¹⁴ Comm. on Standards of Official Conduct, *In the Matter of Representative Gus Savage*, H. Rept. 101-397, 101st Cong. 2d Sess. 1 (1990) (hereinafter *Savage*).

¹⁵ Comm. on Ethics, *In the Matter of Representative Alcee L. Hastings*, H. Rept. 113-663, 113th Cong. 2d Sess. 16 (2014) (hereinafter *Hastings*).

has no SAV to answer, and no opportunity to examine the witnesses whose characterizations the Report adopts or the evidence gathered by the Committee.

Two. The Report does not find, and on this record cannot find, a violation of House Rule XXIII, clauses 9 or 18 relating to sexual harassment or misconduct. Its finding rests entirely on clauses 1 and 2 which require behavior “that shall reflect creditably on the House,” and adhere to “the spirit and the letter of the Rules of the House.”¹⁶ The Committee’s own precedent concedes that these standards are “far from paragons of clarity and precision.”¹⁷ The Committee’s rules address that imprecision with a heightened burden of proof, tested through an adjudicatory hearing, not by dispensing with required elements to accelerate resolution. Further, the Report should say plainly that it does not find sexual harassment or discrimination, because “the spirit of the House’s prohibitions on sexual harassment” invites a reader to make conclusions the Committee did not make. Even the Report’s findings relating to the “spirit” of the law fail to give Representative Edwards (or any future Member subject to similar inquiry) notice of what actual conduct is prohibited under specific, applicable rules.

Three. House gift rules exempt gifts motivated by personal friendship,¹⁸ and the record includes evidence that Representative Edwards extended comparable generosity — dinners, tickets, gifts — to numerous other staffers. Personnel decisions, including the promotion the Report treats as evidence of favoritism, are naturally committed to the Member’s discretion as an employer; the “general consensus”¹⁹ the Report cites in its place is not a legal standard, and derives in material part from witnesses with a personal stake in that decision or with no responsibility for making such personnel decisions.

Four. The Report’s adverse inferences regarding message deletion and the Las Vegas trip are unsupported by, or contradicted by, the record the Committee compiled. A third inference — that a remark made by a singer sent for her birthday confirms that Staffer 2 did not see herself as a “daughter figure”²⁰ — rests on hearsay that the Report does not attribute to any statement or instruction by Representative Edwards.

Five. Conduct occurring after a staffer’s House employment ended cannot support a finding under House Rule XXIII, clauses 9 or 18, which are premised on the employment relationship those clauses protect; such conduct should not be permitted to influence the Committee’s analysis under clauses 1 and 2 either.

Six. The Committee’s own precedent, and testimony regarding the effect of a now-refuted rumor campaign, counsel a public report without a floor sanction — not a harsher result than the

¹⁶ Report at 16-18.

¹⁷ *Manual of Offenses and Procedures, Korean Influence Investigation*, Pursuant to House Resolution 252, House Comm. on Standards of Official Conduct, 95th Cong. 40 (Committee Print 1977).

¹⁸ See *House Ethics Manual* (2022) (hereinafter *Ethics Manual*) at 40-41.

¹⁹ Report at 11.

²⁰ *Id.* at 6.

Committee reached in *Savage* or *Hastings*. It is also clear that the numerous media reports which appear to have prompted the Committee's inquiry — and related leaks to the media which continued throughout the inquiry — emanate from some of these same sources. The Committee's reliance on these sources in its Report undermines significant aspects of its findings and further counsels against accepting the Committee's harsh censure recommendation.

II. A Committee-Generated House Rule 18(a) Proceeding Cannot Support a Censure Recommendation

Every path by which a report or a sanction recommendation reaches the House floor involves an Investigative Subcommittee, as established by Committee Rule 19. Rule 19(f) authorizes the adoption of a SAV only on a finding of “substantial reason to believe” that a violation occurred; Rule 19(g) addresses the report the subcommittee must file where no such Statement is adopted; Rule 21 establishes the Committee's reporting requirements once a subcommittee has acted; Rule 22 governs the respondent's answer to a SAV; Rule 23 governs the adjudicatory hearing, at which counts must be proved by clear and convincing evidence; and Rule 24 — the Committee's authority to recommend a sanction such as censure, or to issue a Letter of Reproval — is reachable only after an adjudicatory hearing under Rule 23 has produced a proved count.

Conversely, Rule 18(a) authorizes a completely different approach. That provision simply authorizes the Chair and Ranking Member to “jointly gather additional information concerning [an] alleged violation” and to “jointly take appropriate action consistent with Committee Rules to resolve the matter.” The phrase “consistent with Committee Rules” incorporates the rules, it does not suspend them. Rule 18(a) permits the Committee to gather facts and to resolve a matter within the authority otherwise conferred by the rules. It does not permit the Committee to find that a Member violated the Code of Official Conduct and, on that finding, recommend the most serious sanction available, while bypassing the process every other rule makes a condition of that recommendation.

This is not simply a drafting quibble. Representative Edwards has been denied nearly all process that normally protects a respondent. No staffer identified in the Report filed a complaint with the Committee. Instead, the review began after the Committee's April 20, 2026 public statement inviting anyone with information to come forward — followed by press reporting based on leaks about the inquiry.²¹ Representative Edwards was never presented with a SAV framing specific counts, never answered specific counts under Rule 22, and has not had a complete opportunity to address testimony from the witnesses whose characterizations the Report adopts or test their accounts against a hearing transcript. A recommendation of censure cannot rest on an information-gathering record measured against no evidentiary standard beyond the Committee's own view of an untested record. Despite the Committee's efforts to justify the procedure in this

²¹ *Id.* at 2.

matter, Representative Edwards faced a Hobson’s choice whether to waive his rights to the process guaranteed to him under Committee rules; this scenario cannot be transmuted into consent for a result expressly foreclosed by House rules.

The Committee could have chosen to proceed pursuant to its own rules. On a Rule 18(a) record, in matters the Report itself recounts, the Committee has issued a public report and a statement of disapproval and stopped there; *see, e.g., Savage and Hastings* reports (addressed in Part VI). If the Committee concluded that Representative Edwards’ conduct warranted additional action, the rules inform its process: impanel a subcommittee and adopt a SAV, at which point Representative Edwards would answer specific counts and be heard through the processes provided by Rules 22 through 24. What the Committee is not authorized to do is impose a sanction *ultra vires* as it recommends in the Report.

III. The Report Finds No Violation of Clause 9 or Clause 18, and the “Spirit of the Rules” Cannot Substitute for Defined Elements

A. The Committee finds no clause 9 violation.

The Report states that “the allegations in this matter do not implicate *quid pro quo* sexual harassment.”²² Its hostile-environment discussion goes no further than to say the conduct “exposed his office to the litigation risk of a viable sexual harassment lawsuit.”²³ Regardless of the accuracy of this highly speculative assertion, litigation risk is not a finding that the defined elements of sexual harassment have been met. The Report identifies no findings on this issue, including no finding that any employment decision turned on submission or rejection, and no finding of conduct severe or pervasive enough to satisfy the standards it recites. The Report should not use language implicating clause 9 that is unsupported by the Committee’s own analysis.

B. The Committee finds no clause 18 violation.

Similarly, the Report states that “the Committee did not find that a [sexual] relationship existed” under clause 18(a), and it identifies no finding of unwelcome sexual advances under clause 18(b).²⁴ The Committee should not import clause 18(b)’s “unwelcome sexual advances” language into its discussions of clauses 1 and 2 in a manner that implies a finding the Committee declined to make.

²² *Id.* at 16.

²³ *Id.* at 17.

²⁴ *Id.* at 18.

C. The Report uses an indeterminate standard, but Committee Rules mandate proof of violations rather than inference.

What is left, after the Committee has disavowed clauses 9 and 18, is a finding under clauses 1 and 2 — that Representative Edwards failed to “behave . . . in a manner that shall reflect creditably on the House” and to “adhere to the spirit . . . of the Rules.”²⁵ The Committee has described that standard candidly in its own precedent: it is a standard the Committee adopted to “deal with infractions that rise to trouble it without burdening it with defining specific charges that would be difficult to state with precision,” and prior committees have emphasized that the resulting standards are “far from paragons of clarity and precision.”²⁶

That admission undermines the standard deployed in this Report. A standard the Committee itself concedes is imprecise is not a license to paper over gaps in the evidence with inference; it is the reason the Committee’s own Rules condition any sanction on clear and convincing proof, tested through the adjudicatory hearing Rule 23 provides. The Manual’s instruction that “a narrow technical reading of a House Rule should not overcome its ‘spirit’” answers a different question — how to read a rule once a violation is established — and does not relieve the Committee of the obligation to establish one in the first place.²⁷ On a Rule 18(a) record, with no adjudicatory hearing and no proof standard applied, the Committee is using the “spirit” of clauses 1 and 2 to do the work the Rules reserve for a different process.

Representative Edwards does not ask the Committee to hold that friendship, concern for staff, or the giving of gifts can never implicate clause 1. He asks that if the Committee wishes to find that particular conduct fell short of the decorum clause 1 requires, it do so through the process that tests such a finding — Investigative Subcommittee, SAV, answer, and adjudicatory hearing — rather than through an information-gathering record that has not been defended in an adversarial proceeding.

Further, it is entirely inappropriate for the Committee to bootstrap a finding that alleged violations of clauses 1 and 2 implicate federal provisions governing sexual harassment or similar misconduct.²⁸ These laws, which were of course passed by the U.S. Congress, have specific meaning and elements. Representative Edwards does not contest that “Members of Congress are held to a higher standard than just strict compliance with federal law.”²⁹ But utilizing well-defined federal prohibitions to justify a sanction pursuant to vague and amorphous rules governing credible behavior and adherence to the spirit of the rules is an end-run around Congress’s own intent in passing those rules.

²⁵ *Id.* at 1, 19-20.

²⁶ *Manual of Offenses and Procedures, Korean Influence Investigation*, Pursuant to House Resolution 252, House Comm. on Standards of Official Conduct, 95th Cong. 40 (Committee Print 1977).

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ Report at 16-18.

²⁹ *Id.* at 17.

D. Gifts motivated by personal friendship are not prohibited, and personnel decisions rest with the Member.

The House gift rule exempts gifts “based on a personal friendship” from its general prohibition.³⁰ The Report treats the volume and frequency of Representative Edwards’ gifts to Staffer 1 and Staffer 2 as evidence of impropriety without addressing that exemption, or his record of similar generosity toward other staff. During his interview with the Chair, Ranking Member, and Committee Counsel, Representative Edwards detailed gifts, dinners, and tickets extended to many other named staffers and demonstrated that the practice was not confined to Staffers 1 and 2. To cite just one example, Representative Edwards testified that he recently gifted a handgun to a male staffer.

The same principle bears on the Deputy Chief of Staff promotion the Report treats as evidence of preferential treatment.³¹ Personnel decisions — who is promoted, and on what basis — are committed to the Member’s judgment as employer. Then-Supreme Court Chief Justice Burger explained the following in a dissent in a case addressing the unique nature of congressional employment:

Congress has historically treated its employees differently from the arrangements for other Government employees. Historically, staffs of Members have been considered so intimately a part of the policymaking and political process that they are not subject to being selected, compensated, or tenured as others who serve the Government. The vulnerability of employment on congressional staffs derives not only from the hazards of elections but also from the imperative need for loyalty, confidentiality, and political compatibility — not simply to a political party, an institution, or an administration but to the individual Member.³²

The “general consensus” among staff that the Report cites as contrary evidence is not a legal standard for evaluating a Member’s personnel decision.³³ Representative Edwards submits that this account derived in material part from a witness who himself sought the position and was not selected. A personnel decision within the Member’s discretion does not become evidence of harassment because a disappointed candidate, or those who credited his account, describe it that way.

³⁰ *Ethics Manual* at 40-41.

³¹ Report at 11.

³² *Davis v. Passman*, 442 U.S. 228, 249 (1979) (Burger, C.J., dissenting).

³³ Report at 11.

IV. The Report’s Central Factual Inferences Are Contradicted by, or Unsupported by, the Record

The Report is replete with factual inferences and assertions that are either unsupported by the facts in the Report or are unsupported by the entire record. The examples below highlight some of the most egregious errors or omissions.

A. The finding that Representative Edwards should have known Staffer 2 felt pressured into taking the Las Vegas trip should be reconciled with the full record.

The Report finds that Staffer 2 “ultimately felt pressured to go [to Las Vegas] in part because of his persistence and in part because Representative Edwards continued to have influence over her career in another public service role.”³⁴ The Report quotes a September 2025 text in which Representative Edwards wrote, “I hope you were serious about us going to Vegas together. We could have such a great time!” as evidence of that persistence.³⁵ However, the Report ignores a voice message produced by Representative Edwards to the Committee demonstrating that, at the very least, he genuinely believed that Staffer 2 was “excited” to take the trip:

Hey, Chuck, I wasn’t calling for any particular reason, so don’t worry about like needing to rush to give me a call back or anything. I was just calling to yap and check in, see how you were doing since it’s been a few days and say that **I’m still so excited for Vegas. It’s going to be so much fun.** You’re right. It seems like it’s forever away. But yeah, just wanted to call and check in and say hello. So one of those reasons, like one of those times where I’m just calling for no reason. Anyway, I hope you’re having a good night. Talk to you later. Bye.³⁶

The Report utilizes statements from Staffer 2’s interview with the Committee as evidence that Representative Edwards should have known that he was causing discomfort without acknowledging directly contradictory evidence in its possession. This approach is patently improper for an entity in a prosecutorial posture and casts doubt on the Committee’s assertion regarding Representative Edwards’ knowledge and conduct. Of course, had the Committee followed its own procedural rules, Representative Edwards would have been afforded the opportunity to present this and other exculpatory material to an Investigative Subcommittee.

B. The “daughter figure” inference rests on hearsay from a source without first-hand knowledge of Representative Edwards’ intent.

The Report states that a singer arranged to perform at Staffer 2’s birthday party told her the song was “from a special someone,” and that “the Committee received evidence that Staffer 2 told

³⁴ *Id.* at 9-10.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ Transcript of October 23, 2025 voice message from Staffer 2 to Representative Edwards (recording produced to the Committee by Representative Edwards) (emphasis added).

a friend this led her to believe that the Congressman did not view her as ‘just a daughter figure’” and that she was “scared lowkey.”³⁷ The Report offers this account — a friend’s report of what Staffer 2 said she believed, prompted by a comment made by a singer, not by Representative Edwards — as evidence bearing on his intent. No witness with first-hand knowledge of what Representative Edwards intended supports that inference. Rather, the assertion emanates from the singer’s choice of words, through Staffer 2’s belief about it, to a friend’s later account of that belief. Representative Edwards submits that the statement may have been made by the singer, but that he never requested such a statement. The Report should not rely on this exchange for any finding regarding Representative Edwards’ state of mind.

C. Conduct after a staffer’s House employment ended should not support a clause 9 or 18 finding, and should not drive the clause 1 and 2 analysis.

Clauses 9 and 18 are, by their terms, protections keyed to an existing employment relationship: clause 9 prohibits discrimination “with respect to compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment,” and clause 18(a) and (b) address a Member’s conduct toward “an employee of the House” under the Member’s supervision. Staffer 2 had left the congressional office before the November 2025 Las Vegas trip, before the handwritten letter the Report quotes, and before the Adam Sandler invitation. Whatever the Committee makes of that conduct, it did not occur within the type of employment relationship addressed by clauses 9 or 18, and it supplies no basis for a finding under either.

The Report nonetheless relies on that post-departure conduct — the letter’s language, the trip itself — to inform its clauses 1 and 2 analysis.³⁸ Representative Edwards does not dispute that the trip occurred. He asks the Committee to recognize that conduct with a non-employee differs from conduct toward a subordinate, and that treating the two as identical risks extending clauses 1 and 2 well past the relationship those clauses were adopted to protect.

V. The Report’s Account of Office Morale and the Staffers’ Departures Omits Material Testimony in the Committee’s Own Record

The Report attributes the departure of Staffers 1 and 2, and broader office discomfort, to Representative Edwards’ conduct, and states that he “was aware . . . that his excessive attention toward the young women had led to rumors and innuendo in the office” without identifying the source of those rumors.³⁹ Representative Edwards submits that the Committee’s record contains testimony from a witness interviewed by the Committee attributing rumors that Representative Edwards was having an affair with Staffer 1 — including rumors reaching reporters and the House Speaker’s office — to a former staffer terminated from the office. At his own interview, Representative Edwards discussed his former staffer’s motivation and involvement in spreading

³⁷ Report at 6.

³⁸ *Id.* at 8-10.

³⁹ *Id.* at 1.

the rumor. The Committee failed to engage with the witness testimony or Representative Edwards' own statements; nor did it acknowledge the effect of the rumors on Staffers 1 and 2. The Report repeatedly concedes that no conduct by Representative Edwards supports the spurious rumors. Once again, the Committee's choice to omit evidence undermining the Report casts doubt on the soundness of the Report's conclusions.

This omission matters because the Report repeatedly draws a causal line from Representative Edwards' conduct to the staffers' discomfort and departure, and from that discomfort to its conclusion regarding office-wide morale and the fairness of the promotion decision addressed in Part III.D. A Report that omits testimony tracing the source of that discomfort to a rumor campaign, rather than to the conduct the Report catalogs, has not weighed "the totality of the circumstances," the hostile-environment standard the Report itself invokes.⁴⁰ Representative Edwards does not ask the Committee to discount the Staffers' own accounts of their experiences; he simply asks the Committee to include, alongside those accounts, testimony in its possession describing events occurring in the office at the same time — including testimony that some of the same individuals who described a "long-term affair" to reporters were also witnesses the Committee relied upon in the Report.

VI. The Committee's Own Precedent Counsels a Public Report Without a Floor Sanction

The Report recounts the Committee's precedent at length. However, that same precedent undermines the Committee's sanction recommendation here.

The Committee's finding in *Savage* is a prime example. On conduct by Representative Savage described in the Report — unwanted advances toward a Peace Corps volunteer, including forcing her to kiss him⁴¹ — the Committee issued a public report, found the conduct contrary to clause 1, stated that it "clearly disapproves," and determined that no further action was warranted.⁴² Here, the Report expressly finds that Representative Edwards made no sexual proposition and engaged in no sexual activity.⁴³ His conduct is certainly less serious than the conduct the Committee declined to sanction in *Savage*. The Report's reply is that the Committee now "does not agree" with *Savage* and that "[t]imes have changed."⁴⁴ Representative Edwards does not contest that times have changed and that standards of conduct must as well. However, disagreement with precedent, announced as policy, is not a basis for a harsher result in this case or justification for abandoning procedural rules designed to ensure a fair process and full hearing.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 16.

⁴¹ *Savage* at 5.

⁴² *Id.* at 14.

⁴³ Report at 17.

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 19.

The Report also cites to the *Hastings* matter. There, the Committee reviewed sexual-harassment allegations, took no further action, and issued a report with a corrective reminder to the Member and the House.⁴⁵ The Report quotes *Hastings* for the proposition that Members must be held to account “in cases where such discrimination can be proven.”⁴⁶ The Report does not purport to meet that condition here. Indeed, it declines to find clause 9 discrimination at all.

Finally, *Kihuen*⁴⁷ serves as the Report’s closest analog for a sanction.⁴⁸ However, *Kihuen* reached the Committee through an Investigative Subcommittee that made findings the Committee then adopted, including conduct the Committee described as repeated unwanted advances, many of an overt sexual nature, including unwanted kissing and touching⁴⁹ — conduct materially more severe than anything found here, where the Report expressly finds no sexual activity and no explicit sexual proposition. *Kihuen* also confirms the point in Part II of this response, rather than the Report’s finding. Specifically, *Kihuen* demonstrates that if the Committee wishes to reprove or sanction, it must use the subcommittee process, not that a Rule 18(a) record will support a sanction on less serious conduct.

Censure is a sanction the House has used sparingly in this context and directed only at matters of severe sexual misconduct. Application here would be literally unprecedented. Only two prior censures — Representative Gerry Studds, in 1983, for a sexual relationship with a minor House page, and Representative Daniel Crane, in 1983, for a sexual relationship with a minor House page — involved sexual misconduct.⁵⁰ Three more recent censures, of Paul Gosar in 2021 for posting a video depicting violence against a sitting Member,⁵¹ of Adam Schiff in 2023 for statements made in his capacity as a committee chairman,⁵² and of Rashida Tlaib in 2023 for statements made about Israel,⁵³ involved conduct unrelated to this matter and provide no support for censure here.

VII. Conclusion

Members of Congress operate in a meat grinder of public opinion driven by a highly partisan and polarized environment. Members face intensive media coverage often fueled by political operatives who choose to harm a specific Member or political party to advance their own interests. Certainly, the U.S. Congress, including the House Ethics Committee, is currently

⁴⁵ *Hastings* at 2.

⁴⁶ Report at 14.

⁴⁷ Comm. on Ethics, *In the Matter of Allegations Relating to Representative Ruben Kihuen*, H. Rept. 115-1041, 115th Cong. 2d Sess. (2018) (hereinafter *Kihuen*).

⁴⁸ Report at 15-16.

⁴⁹ *Kihuen* at 3-6.

⁵⁰ Comm. on Standards of Official Conduct, *In the Matter of Representative Gerry E. Studds*, H. Rept. 98-295, 98th Cong. 1st Sess. (1983); Comm. on Standards of Official Conduct, *In the Matter of Representative Daniel Crane*, H. Rept. 98-296, 98th Cong. 1st Sess. (1983).

⁵¹ H.R. Res. 789, 117th Cong. (2021) (enacted).

⁵² H.R. Res. 521, 118th Cong. (2023) (enacted).

⁵³ H.R. Res. 845, 118th Cong. (2023) (enacted).

confronting this charged political environment along with rapidly shifting societal standards. As the Report notes repeatedly, times change and institutions must adapt.

However, some things remain inviolate even in the face of pressure and change. Reliance on legal precedent and compliance with procedural rules protecting notice and an opportunity for an accused to confront allegations of misconduct are hallmarks of the House ethics process.

In this matter, Representative Edwards cooperated with an investigation which he believed would provide him with the right to the standards and rules that had governed all previous matters. Instead, the Committee has chosen to circumvent those rules in pursuit of an expeditious and unfounded resolution. Members of Congress confronting this matter should be aware that these rights were developed to protect the entire body. When they are ignored, anyone subject to the Committee's jurisdiction is harmed.

Finally, Representative Edwards emphasizes that he has endeavored to comply with all applicable laws regarding his conduct during his time as a Member of Congress and before. Once more, he states his sincere regret if his conduct caused any staff member discomfort or was unwelcome.

Respectfully submitted,

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