



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on June 27, 2016

Corruption in U.S. House: Fattah Forced to Resign; Rangel Chooses to Retire

Within days of each other, two House Democrats — one a petty thief, the other a big-time plunderer — have had to account for their unethical behaviors. The first was forced to resign from office; the other announced his intention to retire.

Chaka Fattah (shown on left), whose birth name is Arthur Davenport, represented Pennsylvania's Second District (mostly Philadelphia and its environs) from 1995 until Thursday, June 23 [when he was forced to resign](#). It wasn't his idea. Fattah wanted to stay in office until the day before his sentencing on October 4, milking his position for every last penny.



A year ago July, he and four of his associates were indicted on federal charges for their roles in a racketeering and influence peddling conspiracy. On July 21 Fattah was convicted of all counts — 23 of them — including racketeering conspiracy, bribery, bank fraud, mail fraud, money laundering, making false statements to a financial institution, and falsification of records. The conspiracy revolved around a complex scheme to use federal grant money to pay off a \$1 million loan Fattah received while running a failed campaign for mayor of Philadelphia in 2007. It accelerated over time and eventually involved grant payments of nearly \$6 million, intended to assist various non-profit groups that went instead into the pockets of Fattah, his associates, and their allies.

In other words Fattah is a piece of work, but is a piker compared to a master plunderer, one Charles Rangel (shown on right). Rangel has been in office since 1971 and has learned, from hard but profitable experience, [just how to milk the system](#). Rangel has “represented” New York's 13th Congressional District continuously, while doing very well for himself in the process. The pressure for him to resign has been building since 2008, when the House Ethics Committee launched its investigation into Rangel's failure to report (and pay taxes on) \$75,000 of rental income he earned from property he owned in the Dominican Republic. In addition, the committee investigated his illegal renting of four subsidized apartments in New York City, paying less than half the going rate while claiming his Washington, D.C., home as his primary residence for tax purposes. The difference between what he paid for those apartments and the actual going rate amounted to some \$30,000, violating House rules forbidding representatives from accepting gifts of more than \$100.

The committee also discovered that Rangel had parked his high-end Mercedes in the House parking garage for three years for free, in a space normally costing \$290 a month, which should have been reported to the IRS but wasn't.

In November 2008, the *New York Times* reported that Rangel had taken a “homestead” tax break on his Washington, D.C., home while simultaneously occupying those four rent-controlled apartments in NYC.



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In May 2009, an ethics complaint was filed against Rangel for taking trips to the Caribbean that were paid for by a number of businesses that were to bring issues before the House Ways and Means Committee that he chaired at the time.

Human Events exposed Rangel's deliberate withholding of financial information from his House disclosure forms, noting: "For example, while Rangel was reporting [a] net worth in the area of \$1 million, he 'overlooked' two accounts worth over \$250,000 each ..., another bank account, several other mutual fund accounts, and holdings in stocks and land totaling another roughly \$300,000. In other words, Rangel's unreported assets were worth about as much as his reported assets."

He lied about, or failed to report on, purchases, sales, or ownership of assets at least 28 times since 1978, according to the Sunlight Foundation, which added:

Assets worth between \$239,026 and \$831,000 appeared and disappeared with no disclosure of when they were acquired, how long they were held, or when they were sold, as House rules require.

In July 2010, House subcommittee investigators charged Rangel with 13 violations of congressional ethics standards. When he appeared before the committee, he tried to delay his trial, claiming that he couldn't afford to hire an attorney to represent him, despite having just paid \$1.4 million in fees to his lawyers at Zuckerman Spaeder for defending him against previous allegations and charges.

A clue to Rangel's mindset was revealed when he was asked about those charges, and he responded:

Even though they are serious charges, I'm prepared to prove that the only thing I've ever had in my 50 years of public service is service. That's what I've done, and if I've been overzealous [in] providing that service, I can't make an excuse for the serious violations.

The subcommittee convicted Rangel on 11 of those charges in absentia as he refused to appear, claiming indigence, and then afterward claiming that the convictions shouldn't stand because his due process rights had been violated in his absence!

In November 2010, the full committee voted 9-1 in favor of censuring Rangel and requiring him to pay any unpaid taxes on the unreported rental income from his vacation home in the Dominican Republic. In December the full House voted 333 to 79 in favor of censuring him for his financial misconduct, making him the first House member since 1983 to be censured.

When Fattah's conviction on 22 counts of corruption was announced last week, U.S. Attorney Zane David Memeger declared:

Chaka Fattah Sr. and his co-defendants betrayed the public trust and undermined our faith in government. Today's verdict makes clear that the citizens of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania expect their public officials to act with honesty and integrity, and to not sell their office for personal gain.

Hopefully, our elected officials in Philadelphia and elsewhere hear today's message loud and clear.

How is it that each of these thieves managed to get reelected year after year? Voters certainly had the opportunity to "term-limit" them every two years, and yet they returned them to office despite their law-breaking.

The voters appear to be deliberately deaf, including pastors of churches that consistently supported Fattah during those 11 terms. When Fattah's trial ended, Terrence Griffith, the senior pastor of the



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First African Baptist Church in Philadelphia, recalled only his alleged accomplishments with nothing said about his sins:

I've known him for many years. He has spent more than 20 years in Congress, and his constituents reelected him many times, so obviously, the constituents were pleased with his services. I think he has done a remarkably [good job] in terms of education; he has pushed for that. That will be his legacy —how he encouraged people to strive for higher education.

If these two are remembered only for their so-called contributions and not for their corrupt behavior, what message is being broadcast to the flock? Is not the electorate also to be charged with misconduct in electing and reelecting these criminals? And what does that say about the political and moral culture in New York City and Philadelphia?

A graduate of an Ivy League school and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at [LightFromTheRight.com](#), primarily on economics and politics. He can be reached at badelman@thenewamerican.com.



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