



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on November 7, 2011

House Ethics Comm. Probes Rep. Laura Richardson

The House Ethics Committee announced Friday that it is launching a probe into whether Rep. Laura Richardson (D-Calif.) required congressional aides to work on her 2010 reelection campaign on the government's clock while using House resources. The ethics panel had voted unanimously Thursday to establish a special subcommittee to investigate the Congresswoman, who was already investigated last year by the panel for receiving preferential treatment from a bank on her foreclosed home in Sacramento.



The *Los Angeles Times* [reported](#):

A source familiar with the preliminary inquiry discussed it on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. At least eight current and former Richardson staff members told investigators they felt compelled to work on her ... reelection campaign on their own time, the source said. Some said House resources, such as congressional phones and copying machines, were used in the campaign, the source said.

Politico obtained a letter of resignation earlier this year by Richardsons former district scheduler, Maria Angel Macias, who was previously interviewed under oath by ethics investigators. "On more than one occasion I was asked to do a task or coordinate an event that was on the ethical borderline and not in my job description," Macias [wrote](#) in the resignation letter. "I cannot work in a toxic and hostile environment like this, which is why I resign today."

The committee [affirmed](#) that the four-member "investigative subcommittee" will be created to "determine whether Representative Laura Richardson violated the Code of Official Conduct or any law, rule, regulation with respect to the alleged use of official House resources and personnel for work related to campaign activities and other non-official purposes."

Congressional staff can contribute to campaign work on their own time "as volunteers or for pay, as long as they do not do so in congressional offices or facilities, or otherwise use official resources," the ethics panel stated. But "in no event may a member or office compel a House employee to do campaign work."

Rep. Richardson [responded](#) in a statement that she looks "forward to a full, fair and expeditious inquiry" and "is confident that once the Subcommittee is able to gather all the facts, and we are permitted to respond, they will conclude positively." She also assailed the ethics panel for "unjustly" targeting members based on race (she is of mixed African American and white parentage), and gender and accused the committee of conducting two investigations against her while glossing over similar cases against other white male congressional members.

"Specifically, numerous Members have used their House offices for personal lodging, in some cases for years, saving tens of thousands of dollars personally at taxpayers expense," Richardson charged.



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“Under House rules, personal use of House resources is as impermissible as political use. Accordingly, I will raise this issue with the Ethics Committee.”

Earlier this year, the Committee for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), a watchdog group promoting ethics and accountability in government, [named](#) Richardson one of the most corrupt members of Congress. “In just three terms, Rep. Richardson has run roughshod over staff and federal law,” asserted CREW Executive Director Melanie Sloan. “She has been the subject of at least two ethics investigations, could find herself facing criminal charges, and is certainly one of the Most Corrupt Members of Congress.” The 7th edition of the “CREWs Most Corrupt Report” recounted:

Rep. Richardsons latest troubles stem from her 2010 re-election effort. One of the most egregious examples of misconduct comes from internal emails showing staff members were required to attend a fundraiser dubbed “Democratic Idol.” Employees were told to wear staff shirts embroidered with the phrase “37th Congressional District,” and spouses and interns were expected to attend as well. Similarly, staffers also reported they were required to work (under threat of termination) on her campaign after work and on weekends. Such actions violate federal law.

Also, by forcing congressional staffers to perform personal services like picking up her dry cleaning, Rep. Richardson violated the law which requires government funds to be used only for official purposes. Additionally, by certifying that staffers were paid only for work done for official purposes when she submitted payroll forms, Rep. Richardson appears to have made false statements to Congress.

“Few politicians break the law as brazenly as Rep. Richardson, which is why CREW has asked the FBI to investigate,” the government watchdog cited. “Someone somewhere needs to hold this woman accountable for her actions.”

Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) Chairman Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (R-Mo.) said in an interview that black congressional members worry that their minority colleagues are being wrongfully targeted, as Reps. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), Gregory Meeks (D-N.Y.), and Jesse Jackson, Jr., (D-Ill.) are all currently under investigation by the ethics panel. “Its something that is discussed by more than CBC members,” Cleaver [averred](#). “There are a lot of people who say, There seems to be a remarkable coincidence that a majority of the people pulled before the [Ethics Committee] are African-American.”

Rep. Richardson assured that the investigation will not block her efforts to fulfill her congressional duties. “During this period, I will continue to provide representation and service to my constituents,” she said. “I urge all to recall that the Committees step today is to investigate only and that less than one year ago, I was completely exonerated after a similar investigation.”

But analysts note that news of the investigation arrives at a delicate time for the Congresswoman, as she faces an onerous 2012 reelection bid. After new redistricting lines, she will be pitted against two fellow Democrats, Rep. Janice Hahn and state Assemblyman Isadore Hall, in the June primary. And recent developments regarding her financial troubles and alleged political malfeasance may derail Rep. Richardson’s efforts to secure another congressional term.



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