



January 4, 2007

The Honorable Mark Kirk
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Kirk:

On behalf of the 350,000 members of the National Taxpayers Union (NTU), I write to strongly endorse H.R. 14, the Congressional Integrity and Pension Forfeiture Act of 2007. Your bill would deny a Congressional pension to a Member convicted of – and denied final appeal for – any of a wide range of crimes directly relating to public duties. This common-sense reform is long overdue, and we applaud your leadership in tackling an important ethics issue that is likely to find few champions within the House of Representatives.

As you know, Congress has constituted a retirement system for itself that includes pension and 401(k)-style plans, whose payments are far more generous than what similarly salaried workers in the private sector typically receive. Most taxpayers are surprised to learn that no Member of Congress is required to forfeit a pension unless convicted of crimes related to treason and espionage. As a result, over the past 25 years at least 20 lawmakers guilty of other serious offenses have enjoyed Congressional retirement payments. This needs to stop.

Late last year NTU led a diverse coalition of 23 citizen groups that called on Congress to end the practice of allowing convicted lawmakers to draw taxpayer-subsidized retirement benefits. While many of our members would prefer to deprive Members of their pension for any felony committed during Congressional service, your bill would make an extensive list of offenses (such as bribery, illegal compensation, false claims/fraud, solicitation, expenditures to influence voting, and tax evasion) grounds for pension removal.

We agree completely with your statement that “a breach of law by a Member of Congress is a very serious offense that should have very serious consequences.” Our members look forward to working with you to pass this important reform to the Congressional pension system, and roll call votes on H.R. 14 will be included in NTU’s annual Rating of Congress.

Sincerely,

John Berthoud
President