

## Congress suddenly remembers it has ethics rules

The resignations of three members of Congress over misconduct allegations demonstrate that the U.S. House — which most Americans think can't get its act together — not only has the capacity to hold members accountable, but can also do so rapidly. At least, when it wants to.



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overdue. It's now time for a deeper reckoning. When members who are accused of serious ethical violations are allowed to retain the trappings of office, continue raising unlimited campaign funds, take votes on controversial issues, and act as if nothing's changed, public trust vanishes.

That trust has been eroding for years as Congress kept members in their jobs too long after evidence emerged of wrongdoing. These three resignations are an important step, but if Congress wants a truly bipartisan clean sweep before the midterm elections, it should do two more things: Accelerate all pending investigations, and swiftly discipline members who have been found to flout ethics rules. Faster resolution of ethics claims would also have the benefit of clearing members who are found to be wrongly accused.

One pending investigation relates to Cory Mills, the Florida Republican whom the Ethics Committee has been investigating over allegations of domestic violence, revenge porn, campaign finance violations, and benefiting from federal contracts while in office.

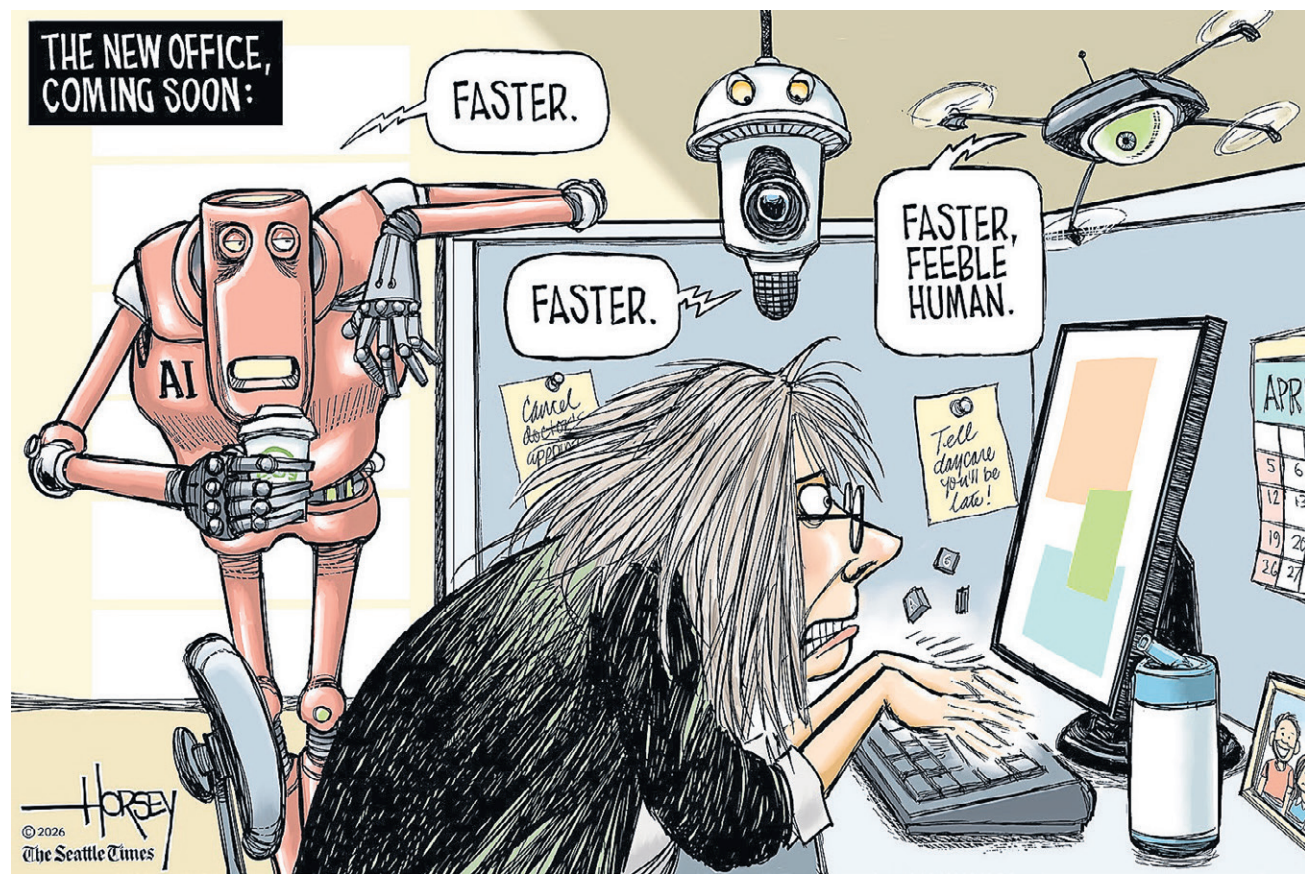
Mills denies all these accusations, and Republicans have gone out of their way to protect him. For example, after police obtained an arrest warrant for him last year after an alleged assault of a 27-year-old woman at his DC apartment in February 2025, Trump's interim U.S. attorney refused to sign it, according to the Washington Post. Democrats filed a resolution to formally reprimand Mills in September.

Not every Republican has stood behind Mills. Nancy Mace, a South Carolina Republican and advocate for sexual assault victims, tried to have Mills removed from the House Foreign Affairs and Armed Services committee. House leaders blocked that effort but said they would expand the ethics probe. Mace has also called for Mills to be expelled.

But — in a sign of just how many ethics investigations have piled up — Mace is facing her own probe based on a referral from the Office of Congressional Conduct. Mills has, in turn, called for Mace to be expelled.

At least House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries has signaled he's committed to policing his members in response to the public's displeasure. Unlike Speaker Mike Johnson, Jeffries removed Cherfilus-McCormick as chair of a foreign affairs subcommittee as the ethics case proceeded, and Swalwell's swift resignation put pressure on Republicans to get Gonzales to resign.

Every member of Congress deserves due process, but the delays embedded in the ethics system allow members to abuse it, using it both as a weapon and a shield. Congress' approval rating is now near rock bottom at 10%. Clearing the ethics docket while cleaning house would be one long overdue, and bipartisan, way to improve it.



## We're likely to witness déjà vu in Lebanon

There isn't much in the Middle East to celebrate these days. The two-week ceasefire between the United States and Iran, which provided some respite from weeks of bombing and missile attacks, is set to expire this Wednesday if the parties don't find a way to extend it.

The Gulf Arab states, which have gotten used to being an oasis of tranquility in an unstable region, are now on the front lines of a conflict that has exposed its many vulnerabilities. Gaza remains in a state of purgatory, with millions of Palestinians still dealing with a humanitarian crisis and the future of the territory very much in doubt.

So when President Donald Trump's administration announced a 10-day ceasefire last Thursday to stop the fighting in Lebanon, it was understandable why many had smiles on their faces. The cessation of hostilities, the product of the most senior-level meeting between Israeli and Lebanese officials in over 40 years, is designed to provide both countries with an opportunity to establish a durable diplomatic process that, one hopes, results in a formal peace agreement and an official demarcation of their disputed border.

According to the terms, the ceasefire can be extended if Israel and Lebanon agree and enough progress is made by the Lebanese government in asserting its sovereignty against Hezbollah, the nonstate militia that resumed its war against Israel days after Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in an Israeli airstrike.

Unlike the war in Iran, in which Trump has equivocated between negotiating a settlement and threatening to annihilate Iranian civilization, it appears that the White House wants to see the ceasefire in Lebanon survive. Israeli and Lebanese officials are scheduled for another meeting in Washington later this week. Trump went so far as to write on his Truth Social page that, from now on, he's prohibiting Israel from striking Lebanese territory, a warning that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was so irked by that he asked his ambassador in Washington to register complaints to the White House about the tone of Trump's message.

Lebanese civilians are hopeful that the Israel-Hezbollah war is closer to being over for good. Some of the hundreds of thousands of people who were displaced from Lebanon's south are now returning to their homes despite Israeli warnings against doing so.

Despite the hope, however, it's wise to remember that positive

vibes in the Middle East are often snuffed out by spoilers and competing agendas. Lebanon is no different. U.S. officials should hope for the best but prepare for the worst.

Indeed, we've been here before. In November 2024, after more than a year of Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon and Hezbollah rocket attacks on Israel's northern communities, the two were pushed into a ceasefire accord that was also supposed to bring a comprehensive peace. Israeli troops were expected to withdraw from the Lebanese territory they occupied; the Lebanese army would replace those troops by deploying 10,000 of its own soldiers into the area; and the Lebanese state would go to work on disarming Hezbollah. Southern Lebanon, a portion of the country where the Lebanese state's presence was historically thin, would finally rejoin the country.

But it didn't turn out that way. Israeli forces, who dealt Hezbollah's leadership a serious blow, were never enthralled with the truce and doubted the Lebanese government could disarm Hezbollah even if it wanted to. Israeli troops withdrew from some Lebanese territory but remained stationed along five points inside the country, arguing that it was a national security necessity as long as Hezbollah remained a threat. The Lebanese government called Israel's continued presence a violation of the deal and argued that it was upholding its end by bringing Hezbollah's weapons caches under the state's control.

The war never really ended either because Israel continued striking Hezbollah positions. Every Israeli strike sparked more anger in Lebanon that Netanyahu was going back on his commitments. Meanwhile, the only party served by these developments was Hezbollah, which argued that Israel's military

action showed why Lebanon needed an organization like it to resist Israeli aggression.

The November 2024 ceasefire was the best possible alternative at the time — certainly better than more war. But it was also an imperfect arrangement meant to be a holding pattern for bigger and brighter things: Hezbollah decommissioned, Israeli troops out of Lebanon and the Lebanese government finally having a writ over the entire country.

As we know, reality had something else in mind. The Lebanese army made some progress, yet not enough for Israel to fully withdraw. Hezbollah spent the time between November 2024 and early March this year rebuilding its missile capability for another round of conflict. And despite the Trump administration's attempts to pressure both sides to fulfill their obligations on schedule, Israel and Hezbollah assumed more war was an inevitability.

Unfortunately, those assumptions proved correct. On March 2, the fighting resumed after Hezbollah sent rockets into Israel in solidarity with Iran. Far from treating this attack as a symbolic one-off, Netanyahu viewed it as a golden opportunity to throw the previous diplomatic arrangements into the paper shredder and authorized yet another Israeli ground invasion of southern Lebanon. Israel's current air and ground campaign is more extensive than it was in 2024, with the Lebanese capital of Beirut a frequent target and senior Israeli officials now talking about essentially keeping a swath of Lebanon under Israeli occupation for the long haul. If the goal of Hezbollah's renewed attacks was to demonstrate to Tehran that it wasn't sitting still, it merely made its situation worse.

The phrase "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes" is used so often that it has become a cliché. In Lebanon and the Middle East, it couldn't be closer to the truth.



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If you would like to write an In My View column, call Don Wilkins at 270-691-7299 to talk over your idea.

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The Messenger-Inquirer reserves the right to reject any letter based on the newspaper's ethical standards and any that does not follow the policy. Letters can be submitted through the Messenger-Inquirer's website — [www.messenger-inquirer.com/site/forms/online\\_services/letter/](http://www.messenger-inquirer.com/site/forms/online_services/letter/).

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