

Ethics and Oversight

When I came to Washington, I realized that if we didn't begin the process of restoring the American people's faith in their government, then we wouldn't be able to achieve the legislative successes we aimed for. We still have further to go, but we have made some important improvements in how we run Washington.

One of the first, and biggest, challenges I took on was reforming Congress' internal ethics process. Unfortunately, Congress had been plagued by scandals, yet the Ethics Committee, comprised of sitting Members of Congress who operated in secret, was operating under a truce to not investigate and punish Members for violations. So I endeavored to fix the structural flaws of that process. After months of prodding the House leadership to bring to the floor for a vote a strong ethics reform bill, I introduced my own legislation to create a truly independent ethics commission. I continued to exert pressure on House leadership by organizing a group of my fellow new Members to publicly speak out about the need for reform at press conferences and on the House floor. Finally, a compromise bill was brought to a vote, one that allowed an outside panel to investigate ethics violations by Members of Congress. With that vote, we took a big step toward the goal of restoring people's trust in their Congress.

In order to hold our government accountable, I joined the Oversight and Government Reform Committee. There I have been active on investigating everything from how our Medicare Part D program has been administered, to how the Bush Administration handled the war in Iraq, to how we got into our financial crisis.

Through my work on the Committee, I pushed into law a bill to increase the transparency of government contracts with private defense firms, such as Blackwater. Previously, private companies that did the vast majority of their business with the federal government were not required to disclose any information about the massive profits and CEO salaries essentially being paid for by the taxpayers. Now, the salaries of the top executives at these companies will be made public.

I am also working with Republicans and Democrats to update USASpending.gov, a clearinghouse for how federal funds are spent. It currently allows taxpayers to view approximately \$1 trillion in Federal grants, contracts, earmarks, provides updates of data concerning Federal spending, and displays spending data according to contractor, grantee, and Congressional district. Our goal is to expand the information available on the web site, as well as to make the data more accessible and readable.

Our work here is far from done, but we are making progress in the fight to clean up Washington. The best way to accomplish this goal, while cutting spending, decreasing waste, and preventing fraud, is to continue to be vigilant in our oversight. Congress needs to be accountable to the people, and I am proud to be a leader in bringing about these changes.

Relevant Press Releases

