

Murphy Leads Way as House Passes Historic Ethics Reform Bill

Contact: Kristen Bossi

(202) 225-4476

WASHINGTON, D.C. - After months of prodding the House leadership to bring a strong ethics reform bill to the floor for a vote, today Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) praised the passage of legislation to change the rules of the House to allow an independent panel to investigate ethics violations by Members of Congress.

"At a time when people have lots of new reasons to doubt the integrity of public officials, this bill demonstrates to Americans that ethics and honesty in government is not a talking point but instead the very foundation of our democracy," said Murphy.

Currently, Members of Congress can bring ethics complaints to the Ethics Committee, comprised of sitting Members, who then decide if the complaint warrants an investigation. Only Members of Congress can make complaints, and no investigation can commence unless both parties agree to begin an inquiry. As Congress has been plagued by scandals in recent years, the Ethics Committee, beset by partisan stonewalling, has ceased to operate effectively.

The bill passed last night, by a 229 to 184 bipartisan majority, would establish an independent citizens ethics panel, that will be able to initiate and investigate claims of ethics violations against members of Congress. The panel will forward their findings to the existing Ethics Committee in the case that punitive action is necessary against a Member.

At the beginning of the Congress, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi set up a task force to provide recommendations on what the House of Representatives should do to change the ethics enforcement process. As the reform effort appeared to lose steam, Murphy stepped in to lead the effort to restart the ethics reform debate. His efforts included:

- In May, Murphy organized 21 Members of the freshman class to join him in a press conference to call on the leadership to establish a nonpartisan, independent entity to vet, initiate, and conduct Congressional investigations.
- In July, when the House took up a separate lobbying reform bill, Murphy again organized a group of newly-elected Democrats to speak on the House floor in support of adding ethics enforcement reform to the package.
- In November of last year, Murphy introduced, with Congressman Zach Space (OH-18), his own ethics legislation which would create a truly independent ethics commission. Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to promoting ethics and accountability in government and public life, endorsed their bill, calling it "the solution the House needs to address the inadequate ethics enforcement that has haunted the House over the past decade and contributed to public dissatisfaction with Congress."
- Earlier this month, when the task force finally reported out a ethics reform proposal, Murphy and Space offered an amendment before the House Rules Committee to allow the new ethics board a form of subpoena power. The Murphy-Space amendment would have supplemented an important provision in the underlying proposal, which would allow the ethics board the power to recommend subpoenas. The Rules Committee did not make the amendment in order.

"With or without subpoena power, the establishment of the new Office of Congressional Ethics is a landmark step forward for good government. Never before has Congress authorized a group of citizens to enforce Congressional ethics rules. We've made a big step today in restoring the nation's sense of trust in this body," said Murphy.

#