

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell and 20 fellow House Democrats today urged the new Congress to pass strong and meaningful comprehensive ethics reform legislation that establishes an independent, nonpartisan panel to initiate and conduct ethics investigations.

Mitchell said establishing the independent panel is critical to the mission of “restoring honesty and transparency to government.”

“Arizonans expect a higher standard of ethics from their elected officials,” said Mitchell. “We have an opportunity to continue our work to clean up the culture of corruption. An independent ethics panel would serve as an important watchdog, and send the right message to the American people.”

Mitchell said that, in the past, Congress has taken action that demonstrates a serious need for greater oversight and accountability in the ethics process. For example, the 109th Congress changed ethics rules to prevent an investigation into potential ethics violations by then-House Majority Leader Tom DeLay. DeLay resigned his seat in Congress last year. [Source: Washington Post, April 27, 2005]

The freshmen Democrats said that tacit agreements in past Congresses have resulted in an enforcement process that is too slow when an investigation is initiated.

Mitchell urged Congress to continue its progress on ethics reform. On the first day of the new Congress, the House passed a sweeping ethics reform package also that included additional restrictions on travel and gifts and established ethics training guidelines. It also requires full disclosure of all earmarks, and requires members of Congress to certify that earmarks provided are for the public good and do not financially benefit them or their spouses.