

On July 11th, an editorial in this paper claimed that after seven months in power, our Democratic-led Congress had little to show for itself. I strongly disagree. While it is certainly true that after the last twelve years, Democrats faced historic challenges upon taking office, we have assembled a record that I am proud to be associated with. From ethics reform to government accountability, from veterans' care to educational opportunity, this Congress has truly represented a dramatic break from the past.

We can begin with the thorough cleaning that has been done in our own House. In the wake of the scandal-ridden 109th Congress, Democrats pledged to restore accountability and transparency to the nation's capital.

On the first day of the 110th Congress, I led my colleagues in passing a new Rules package containing some of the strongest ethics standards ever enacted. We prohibited House Members and employees from accepting gifts and travel from lobbyists and the organizations that employ them, or from traveling on private corporate jets. We also required all travel taken by a Member of Congress be pre-approved by the Ethics Committee, a welcome change after Tom Delay's golf junkets to Scotland.

Along with lobbyist influence, anonymous earmarks had fueled many major corruption scandals. But Democrats are unwilling to accept any more "bridges to nowhere." For the first time ever, we have required the full public disclosure of all earmarks passed by the House. Our goal is to eliminate every special project that isn't worthy of the tax dollars that support it.

All in all, Congress has gone from being an institution defined by corruption to one defined by the bills it passes and the hearings it conducts, which is how it should be.

Serving in House is a privilege, and this Congress has put the needs of the American people first. We have restored fiscal responsibility to the House, refusing to fund any new initiative with deficit spending. And we passed a budget that balances by 2012, all with absolutely no tax increase.

We have worked to honor our brave veterans who have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well

as the 24 million vets of other wars living today, by passing the largest veterans' funding bill in our nation's history. Our legislation increased spending for veterans by \$6.7 billion in order to ensure quality healthcare for 5.8 million men and women. It has paid for more than 1,100 new claims processors to reduce claims backlogs, provided new money for the maintenance of VA healthcare facilities (so necessary after the Walter Reed scandal), and added \$600 million in new money specifically to help soldiers cope with mental health challenges caused by afflictions like PTSD and traumatic brain injuries.

These same priorities were on display this past Wednesday when the House put our children first by passing the College Cost Reduction Act, legislation which will dramatically lower loan burdens for millions of students.

And of course, Democrats have fundamentally altered the debate on Iraq. We have brought our country closer than ever to responsibly ending our involvement in Iraq's ongoing civil war so that we may refocus our efforts on true national security priorities.

With a year and a half to go in this term, my fellow Democrats and I look forward to continuing our fight on behalf of the American people. Our country is facing great challenges, but with your support and the right leadership, I have no doubt that they are challenges we can overcome.