CHICAGO – Today, U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley (IL-05) and U.S. Sen. Mark Kirk (R-IL) launched a bipartisan, bicameral effort to fight corruption at all levels of government by introducing two bills that target political clout and unethical conduct by public servants. The State Ethics Law Protection Act will allow states like Illinois to fight pay-to-play practices without federal interference. The The Public Officials Accountability Act restores a statute to prevent elected officials from using their offices for personal gain.

“Everyone in Illinois knows all too well the devastating costs of corruption, and it’s time to say ‘enough’,” said Quigley. “This is a bipartisan effort to use every tool at our disposal to make sure both our elected officials and the business they conduct are honest. We cannot lead without the public’s trust and these are two crucial steps toward regaining it.”

“Public corruption has turned the ‘Land of Honest Abe’ into the ‘Land of Public Corruption,’” said Kirk. “Illinois taxpayers pay a price for this in the form of a hidden corruption tax. We need to make sure our laws help federal prosecutors crack down on public corruption and restore integrity to Illinois.”

State Ethics Law Protection Act (SELPA)

SELPA allows states such as Illinois to ban pay-to-play practices in highway contracting. In 2008, the Illinois General Assembly unanimously passed a comprehensive anti pay-to-play bill, House Bill 824. The bill made it illegal for any entity holding or bidding on state contracts worth $50,000 or more to donate to the campaign fund of a statewide officeholder who has influence over awarding the contracts. In addition to every state lawmaker, the bill passed with strong support from good government advocates, including then-U.S. Senator Barack Obama. Other states including New Jersey, and Connecticut, have passed similar measures.

Unfortunately, shortly after the passage of H.B. 824, the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) threatened to withhold funding for transportation projects due to their interpretation of federal contract bidding requirements. Under threat of losing out on millions of federal highway

dollars, Illinois was forced to water down H.B. 824 to exclude transportation projects, effectively creating a loophole for pay-to-play.

The bill was introduced by Quigley and co-sponsored by then-Congressman Kirk, and passed the House of Representatives in the 111th Congress.

The Public Officials Accountability Act

The bill was crafted in response to numerous recent government scandals, including several in Illinois. It restores a tool used to convict former governor George Ryan and former City of Chicago official Robert Sorich. Prosecutors across the country have used the tool for decades to root out and respond to public corruption.

The statute, known as the “honest services provision,” addresses two forms of fraud by public officials: (1) bribes and kickbacks, and (2) undisclosed conflicts of interest resulting in personal financial gain. However, last year the United States Supreme Court narrowed the scope of the statute, wiping out the second category. Former Governor Rod Blagojevich was charged under the provision, but it was dropped following the Court’s ruling.

Unfortunately, a public official’s own conflicting financial interests can be every bit as damaging to the integrity of government as a bribe or kickback. The Public Officials Accountability Act fixes this problem and ensures federal prosecutors can hold public officials accountable to their constituents.

Quigley

Rep. Quigley has been committed to good government reform in his two terms in Congress. He founded the bipartisan Transparency Caucus, and has introduced a bill to provide every taxpayer with a receipt detailing how their tax dollars are spent. He recently released *Reinventing Government: The Federal Budget Part I*, a 70-page report on improving the budget process. *Part II* with specific recommendations for addressing our national debt will be released this week.

Kirk

Senator Kirk, a former five-term congressman from Chicago's north suburbs, has been committed to fighting public corruption since he joined Congress. In the House, he cosponsored legislation (H.Res. 85) to ban political contributions from earmark recipients to sponsoring members of Congress. He also led efforts in the House to cancel the pensions for members of Congress who are convicted of felonies. In addition, Senator Kirk has consistently supported the efforts of law enforcement and federal prosecutors to battle public corruption.