

House Democrats gathered in Santa Fe to unveil a slate of ethics and transparency bills Nov. 24.

The bills come after a year that saw a state Senator resign after violating the state constitution and the Secretary of State resigned after pleading guilty to six crimes, including two felonies.

One bill that they included was instituting a state ethics commission, legislation that has been introduced in one form or another for over a decade without ever passing. New Mexico is one of just eight states that do not have an ethics commission.

House Minority Leader Brian Egolf, D-Santa Fe, is the latest to attempt to bring the legislation to the governor's desk. In the 2015 legislative session, the legislation passed one committee but stalled in the House Judiciary Committee.

"Clearly with what has transpired with our former Secretary of State Dianna Duran and the current questions around the Governor's political financing regime, the time to create an Independent Ethics Commission is now," Egolf said in a statement. "We need to have a mechanism to receive complaints and concerns from the public and investigate them in an expedited and transparent way, just like we have for our judicial branch."

Egolf suggested that the Judicial Standards Commission could serve as a blueprint.

“This is important because every four years, gubernatorial inauguration committees raise money totaling nearly $1 million from many sources, including out-of-state corporations, lobbyists, local businesses, and hard-working New Mexicans,” Javier Martinez said. “In 2015, 90% of funds raised to the Gubernatorial Inaugural Committee were in the form of contributions of $5,000 or more. New Mexicans should have the opportunity to easily view information about these big donors, and see how this money was spent.”

Another piece of legislation surely to get a lot of attention this year is one by Rep. Matthew McQueen, D-Galisteo, that would strip the pension of any elected official who is found guilty of corruption. Again, this received attention following the charges and eventual guilty plea by former Secretary of State Dianna Duran over campaign finance issues.

After a plea deal, Duran will keep her pension, something that has opened up Attorney General Hector Balderas to criticism; he says that the law as is currently written does not provide for the stripping of the pension.

“If an elected official is guilty of corruption, the loss of their pension should be swift and certain; they should be off of the state’s payroll once and for all. If you read the current statutes, it’s not clear and it’s not certain,” McQueen said. “We need to give our current Attorney General and any future attorney general the tools they need to make sure this does not happen again.”

Rep. Javier Martinez, D-Albuquerque, said he will introduce legislation to require inauguration committees to register with the Secretary of State, report all contributions and expenditures and also place a limit on expenditures to the inauguration committees.

The FBI is reportedly investigating charges allegations about money related to Susana Martinez’s 2011 inaugural committee and her top political adviser, Jay McCleskey.

A fourth piece of legislation, also to be introduced by Egolf, is an updating of the campaign finance system. Media reports have brought campaign finance irregularities that were not caught by the Secretary of State to light in recent months.

Visit: www.nmpoliticalreport.com