FROM: Phyllis Schlafly

68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 / (618) 462-5415

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THE PHENOMENON OF JACK KEMP

One of the unwritten "laws" of the media is that Senators are newsworthy, Congressmen are not. When a Senator goes into another state as a visiting VIP, his news conference is sure to be covered by the local media and his remarks often hit the wire services.

When a Congressman travels off his home turf, the response is ho-hum. Maybe that's because the Senate is an exclusive club of 100, while there are 435 Congressmen.

Congressmen seldom develop national name ID. That's why, every biennium, some of the most ambitious of the 435 Congressmen give up safe seats, where they could be reelected for life, and risk a long shot for the Senate. That's why, every biennium, others who see the U.S. House as a treadmill take their pensions and retire in frustration because of the lack of national recognition of their talents.

A corollary of this media "law" against newsworthiness of mere Congressmen is that it is nearly impossible to be taken seriously as a contender for President or Vice President unless you are a Senator or a Governor. Of course, Big Media can create an exception for a special favorite (e.g., Geraldine Ferraro).

So, with all those "givens," it is remarkable that the most sought-after speaker in the country after President Ronald Reagan and former President Gerald Ford is not one of the 100 Senators or 50 Governors, but one of the 435 House members: Jack Kemp.

It isn't because he is riding the wave of America's love affair with football. It's because Jack Kemp has the most powerful combination in politics: a personality riding an issue that appeals to every group -- tax reduction and simplification, tax reform based on fairness and the creation of new jobs.

A New York Times poll reports that almost 95% of the American public feel that the present tax system is unfair to the ordinary American worker. By a 2-to-1 margin, the public favors simplifying the tax system and reducing the tax rates.

The American people believe the current system is unfair because of the unfair way that it impacts on families and children, because it is too high, because its immense

complexity damages its credibility, and because it allows too many people to avoid paying altogether.

Four years ago, when Ronald Reagan moved into the White House, Jack Kemp's "supply-side" economics was controversial. Now, everyone must admit that it works; it is the centerpiece of our economic recovery which has produced seven million new private-sector jobs during the last two years.

Under the strong leadership of Jack Kemp (R-NY) and Senator Bob Kasten (R-WI), the 1984 Republican Platform adopted in Dallas last summer stated positively: "We oppose any attempts to increase taxes. ... For families, we will restore the value of personal exemptions, raising to a minimum of $2,000 and indexing to prevent further erosion."

What was considered "off the wall" last August today represents the fundamental assumption of all current tax reform proposals. Several plans are before Congress, but they all bear the indicia of the Kemp-Kasten approach.

The President endorsed Kemp economics in his Second Inaugural Address. "The heart of our efforts," he said, "is one idea vindicated by 25 straight months of economic growth: freedom and incentives unleash the drive and entrepreneurial genius that are the core of human progress. We have begun to increase the rewards for work, savings and investment; reduce the increase in the cost and size of government and its interference in people's lives."

The 1985 Kemp-Kasten "Fair and Simple Tax" (FAST) plan calls for a modified flat tax by dramatically reducing the number of tax brackets, doubling the personal exemption to increase fairness for families, raising the income tax threshold above the poverty line to help break the poverty cycle, and greatly simplifying the tax code. It eliminates many deductions and loopholes that distort economic activity, and it tries to make sure that all Americans pay their fair share.

The flat tax rate on taxable income is 24% but, since the plan contains an employment income exclusion of one-fifth of all employment income below $41,700 a year, the effective marginal tax rate on those earning below $40,000 will be 19%. The tax on capital gains is kept low enough to allow risk taking, entrepreneurship, venture capital formation, and new business starts, all of which are essential to creating new jobs.