from Phyllis Schlafly

April 2, 1992

Ethics May Win Out, After All

What's happening is that the voters are getting back at Congress for the pay raise they so dishonestly passed in late 1989, as well as for the tax increase of l990. Congress thought it had put one over on the voters, passing the pay raise in the middle of the night without any opportunity for radio talk show hosts and C-Span junkies to alert the American people to rise up in protest, as they did when the pay raise was attempted earlier that year.

The problem isn't that sone Congressmen bounced some cheeks. “Bounce” is itself a coverup word designed to diffuse blame. The problem is that hundreds of overdrawn checks did NOT bounce but were illegally paid out of honest Congressmen’s deposits by a patronage employee of Speaker Tom Fo1ey. Freshmen Congressmen were bullied into depositing their paychecks in the House bank in order to provide cash for the float.

That's why the buck is properly stopping with Foley, who has known about the check kiting since 1989. He hired a patronage doorkeeper, Jack Russ, at a tax-paid salary of $119,000, to supervise a $1.3 million budget of taxpayers, money and to take care of insolvent Congressmen who were in on the scam.

Russ gave then letters falsely stating they were “clean,” and cashed 31 bad checks of his own with a value of $104,825. After he resigned, Russ said Foley was keeping him on the public payroll in another job so he wouldn’t lose his plush pension.

The free overdrafts were only one of the many perks of Congress’s privileged, prescription drugs, free parking at National Airport, a nearly-free gym elitist lifestyle. others include free health care, free (members pay $l00 a year for what should cost $1,000), very low-cost haircuts, the privilege of signing chits for meals at House restaurants where unpaid bills reached $300,000, free official photographers, free fresh-cut flowers from the U.S. Botanic Garden, discount merchandise at the stationery stores, the use of five rustic lodges in Virginia and the Grand. Tetons at low cost, free mailings and satellite transmissions that aid their reelection, and tax-paid junkets during which they spend a few hours on public business and the rest on monkey business.

Tom Foley appointed another patronage cloakroom worker, Robert V. Rota, to be the House Postmaster, where he oversaw a $4.4 million budget and 150 employees. Rota just resigned after it came out that the post office was illegally cashing personal and campaign checks, as well as conducting a scheme in which large sales of stamps were made in a backroom and then redeemed for cash.

How the political mood has changed can be seen in how Speaker Foley has reversed field. Two weeks ago, he was trying to engineer a coverup that would have thrown 24 congressmen to the wolves but protected the rest of the 355 current and former members of Congress who cashed bad checks with a face value of $25 million.

Now he has issued a press release indicating that he intends to de-perkolate the Imperial Congress. He appears to have borrowed most of the ideas from Rep. Jim Nussle's (R-IA) “stop Special Treatment” bill, the text of which is so funny that it's grist for a Russell Baker column or at least Saturday Night Live. Here are some excerpts.

“All Members of the House of Representatives and Senators shal1 pay full market, value for all medical services, medical tests, and medications provided by the Office of the Attending Physician. . . All beauty shops and barber shops Located on the premises of any property belonging to the House of Representatives shall be closed ninety days after the date of enactment of this Act…

“Members of Congress should be charged rates comparable to those in other parking facilities at Washington National Airport… All Members of the House of Representatives shall pay full market value for the use of the health facilities located on the premises of the Capitol or any House office building. The Federal Government shall not bear any of the cost of health insurance for Members of the House of Representatives.”

We’ve come a long way, baby, since the feminists in Congress excoriated Rep. Harris Fawell (R-IL) as a “sexist” for daring to offer an amendment to cut out a $375,000 appropriation to redecorate the House beauty salon, where the 28 female members of Congress enjoy low- cost hairdos.

Public reaction is most interesting. A poll showed that 50 percent of Americans believe that the check kiting done by Congressmen was illegal, but an even bigger

majority, 84 percent, believe they did something “unethical.” We just may have a moral majority in the United States, after all.

The American people do not believe that Congress should be an elitist class entitled to special perks, but, or the contrary, believe that public officials should be held to higher standards than we set for ourselves.

This will be a surprise to Bill Clinton, who expects the American people to overlook his sins because so many voters are guilty of the same ones. In the post-Rubbergate era, it’s not going to work that way.