PS 1 for 2/2/89 # Congressmen Are Out of Touch

As I waited for the Inaugural Parade to come down Pennsylvania Avenue, I thought of the proposed 50% Congressional pay raise. Congress's mishandling of both the parade and the pay raise reflects its insularity from the real world; Congressmen are simply out of touch with mainstreet America.

Americans of all ages love a parade, and the Inaugural Parade promised to be one of the best. Sadly, it was about two hours behind schedule because Congressional leaders were enjoying a lavish luncheon, with toasts and conviviality, at the U.S. Capitol.

They were apparently oblivious to the thousands of people who were packed some twenty persons deep, body to body, on both sides of Pennsylvania, eagerly awaiting the marching bands and magnificent floats.

The weather smiled on George Bush's Inauguration. Although the sun didn't emerge from the clouds the moment he took the oath of office (as it had done for Ronald Reagan at his first Inauguration in 1981), when George Bush talked about a new breeze blowing, it did. It blew away some of the clouds so the sun could play hide and seek all afternoon.

It wasn't too cold for spectators to enjoy a two-hour parade. But the weather was definitely too cold and damp to enjoy a two-hour parade after standing and waiting outside for two previous hours. I called it quits after two hours; by that time I had seen only one marching band and not a single float out of the 211 bands and floats I had come to watch.

The delay meant that the parade was overtaken by darkness. The last half hour of the parade couldn't be seen except by those lucky enough to be in the immediate vicinity of President Bush's box with the television lights. Think of the disappointment of those in the last score of bands and floats, who had to march in the dark.

There is no excuse for the appalling lack of consideration on the part of the Congressmen who lingered over luncheon with their peers while thousands of plain people were left standing out in the cold. There is no excuse for the lack of consideration for the hundreds of young people in the marching bands and on the floats, who had lined up for so many hours to perform in the historic parade.

The 50% Congressional pay raise is cut from the same cloth of callousness. It shows again that the Congressmen think they are some kind of royalty who don't need to be bothered with the wishes of the people.

The pay raise was a taboo subject during the Inaugural festivities. To mention opposition to the pay raise in the presence of Congressional friends was to evoke a reaction as though a bad word had been spoken.

The Congressmen think they are "worth" higher salaries than they are getting. So what! Practically everybody thinks he is "worth" more than he is currently being paid. But, in a free

country, salaries are not based on “worth”; salaries are a compromise between what you **think** you are worth and what someone is willing to pay you.

The **Washington Post** survey shows that 85% of the American people oppose the pay raise. If Congressmen are not satisfied with their pay, they are free to look for another job, which would be a good thing in the light of the 99 percent reelection rate for incumbents.

Just as important as the issue of the pay raise itself is the way it is scheduled to come to pass without a vote by Congress. The fix is one, so that the pay raise automatically goes into effect if Congress takes no action within 30 days.

The word around Washington is that Congressional leaders of both parties have cooked up a deal whereby they will have a vote AFTER the 30-day headline, which will have no effect. Part of the deal is that neither party will make it an issue in the 1990 Congressional elections, and that any Congressman who tries to upset the applecart will be kept off of “good” committees and his favorite bills will never be allowed to come to the floor for action.

If Congress lets the pay raise go through, that will be proof positive that Congress believes the deficit is a phony issue. If Congress lets the pay raise go through without an honest up-or-down vote within the 30-day time period, that will be proof positive that Congress believes that ethics is also a phony issue.

If Congress fails to vote down the pay raise, it will severely alienate the American voters not only from themselves but from the democratic process. Congressmen are out of touch with the real world if they think the American voters will forgive and forget.