P.S. to the NEWS
by PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

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Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002
Phone: 618-462-5415

SCHEMES TO REELECT CONGRESSMEN

Aspiring candidates are now jockeying into position to run for Congress in the 1980 elections. Filing dates begin in December this year. A Congressman's salary plus perks and a potential for national publicity and influence will lure many challengers into the race.

But wait. Before you call a press conference and announce, you should have a man-to-man talk with yourself about one depressing statistic. At least 90 percent of Congressional incumbents running for reelection are successful. Those are rather risky odds on which to gamble giving up your present job, whatever it is.

Running for Congress wasn't always that difficult. The turnover rate throughout the 19th century was 40-50 percent, even though it is likely that the average Congressman's desire for reelection was as keen then as now. The explanation for the difference is given in a book by Professor Morris P. Fiorina of the political science department of Caltech called "Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment" (Yale University Press, 1977).

Its thesis is that Congress, at first by accident and later by design, has contrived to manipulate the machinery of the welfare state so as to secure, more or less permanently, the incumbency of its members. The Congressmen's use of tax-funded resources to promote their reelection has been an unforeseen by-product of the growth of an over-activist federal government.

Here is how the system works. Congressmen earn electoral credits by voting for various liberal spending programs, knowing full well that some federal bureau will have to promulgate a mountain of rules and regulations which trample on numerous toes. Then the Congressman is asked by his aggrieved or hopeful constituents to help ameliorate the problems that result.

According to Professor Fiorina, "the cycle closes when the Congressman lends a

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sympathetic ear, piously denounces the evils of bureaucracy, intervenes in the latter's decisions and rides a grateful electorate to ever more impressive electoral showings. Congressmen take credit coming and going."

Professor Fiorina ought to add another chapter to his book on how the Congressmen have seized on Watergate as an excuse to try to raise their win percentage even higher than 90. That was the real meaning of the Taxpayer Financing of Congressional elections which liberal Democrats tried to push through Congress earlier this year. Fortunately, that multi-million dollar giveaway was unsuccessful.

Now, however, the same eager sponsors have contrived a new package under a phony "reform" label called the Campaign Contribution Reform Act of 1979. Having given up on the plan to force the taxpayers to finance Congressional election campaigns, the new scheme is to place severe restrictions on political fund-raising that helps conservative Congressmen and challengers, while giving free rein to the fund=raising methods generally used by liberals, as well as the growing and valuable perks of Congressional incumbents.

Sponsored by Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.), this misnamed "reform" bill stems from some strange and untenable premises. PAC (Political Action Committee) money is bad, but political party money is good. Business money and help are bad, but union money and help are good. Direct-mail advertising and fundraising are bad, but other types are good.

The double standards of the Obey bill are so blatant that it is hard to see how any Congressman has the gall to present such a bill in the name of "reform." It is specifically designed to aid liberals and incumbents and to disadvantage conservatives and challengers.

PACs represent the voluntary pooling of campaign donations by individuals who want to support candidates who represent the positions the donors like. That's as American as apple pie. Any attempt to restrict PACs can only result in a further loss of confidence by our citizens in representative government.

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