



Michael Schwab Studio

Campaign Reform Made Whole

By Henry A. Waxman

The recent revelations about fund-raising abuses by President Clinton's re-election campaign and by both national party committees have given Congress plenty of reasons to reform the system.

But as both parties become aware of the risks inherent in an aggressive investigation, the likelihood that Congress will do the job right is diminishing. Already, several Republican Senators, including Alfonse D'Amato of New York and Phil Gramm of Texas, have said they won't support financing any investigation that looks into Congressional races.

We must break the vicious cycle of "Watergate wannabe" investigations that are more concerned with scoring political points than with reform. Nasty partisan hearings would only fulfill the public's lowest expectations and deepen its cynicism. Instead, we should do something unexpected: Put partisanship aside and educate the public and ourselves about the corrupting role of money in politics.

First, Attorney General Janet

Henry A. Waxman, Representative from California, is the senior Democrat on the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, which has jurisdiction over the cam-

Needed: an outside prosecutor and a joint inquiry by Congress.

Reno should appoint an independent counsel to investigate the serious but unproven allegations against the Clinton campaign, including its acceptance of inappropriate donations.

Congress, for its part, shouldn't duplicate the independent counsel's work. It should concentrate on conducting a rational investigation. Unfortunately, the Senate and House investigations are proceeding in a haphazard fashion. Nine Congressional chairmen have already sent more than 30 different requests to the Commerce Department for information on the Clinton campaign. This waste of tax dollars makes no sense — identical multimillion-dollar Senate and House investigations are redundant. They should be merged into one comprehensive effort.

Most important, the Congressional inquiry should focus on all campaign activity in 1996. Everything must be on the table: the Presidential campaigns, the Democratic and Republican fund-raising organizations and individual House and Senate campaigns. We will have no credibility if

ignore the Congressional abuses.

The real scandal is what's legal and common. It is especially important that we stop the explosive growth of soft money and that we shed light on the new strategies the parties use to get around campaign-finance laws, such as having nonprofit groups finance clearly partisan activities. Our goal should be to understand how the process functions at every step, to expose its flaws and to get rid of the loopholes. This approach may not be popular in Congress, but leaders of both parties must realize that the situation has to change.

I've been part of the system for more than two decades, and personally raised millions in hard and soft dollars. I've received money from political action committees and given contributions from my own PAC. I know that the endless pressures of raising money threaten the integrity of the legislative process and drain more and more time from my colleagues.

Fred Thompson, head of the committee conducting the Senate investigation of campaign financing, recently said that "there will be no winners or losers" in this investigation. But if he and the Republican leadership agree to a sensible, bipartisan approach, there will be one big winner — the public. By conducting a fair and complete investigation, we might do the impossible and restore the nation's faith in Congress. □