

Congress votes more 'comfort' for itself

By Richard S. Thomas
special writer

Members of Congress showed once again in 1987 that it's much easier for them to preach frugality for the rest of the country than to practice it.

While the great majority of members spent the year denouncing budget deficits and counseling their constituents to expect less from the federal government, Congress as a whole was going in the other direction — actually increasing spending on itself at a rate that outstripped inflation.

legislative branch appropriations bill, covering fiscal 1988, that was nearly 5 percent higher than the one it approved a year earlier for fiscal 1987. By comparison, inflation (as measured by the Consumer Price Index) rose 4.5 percent between December 1986 and December 1987.

THE NEW CAPITOL HILL house-keeping budget of \$1.75 billion increased spending for personal and committee staff operations and support agencies such as the Library of Congress and General Accounting Office. And it provided fatter outlays for perquisites, retirement benefits, travel and other items that add comfort and security to the job of sitting in Congress.

House members and senators also accepted two personal pay raises totalling \$14,400 during the year, raising their salary to \$89,500. Their collective payroll of more than \$46 million is drawn automatically from the Treasury and not counted as part of legislative branch appropriations.

The \$1.75 billion legislative branch price tag for fiscal 1988 appears certain to be increased in coming months as Congress approves

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supplemental appropriations to replenish dried-up accounts. Last fiscal year's legislative branch appropriations bill, initially funded at \$1.65 billion, grew to more than \$1.8 billion by House and Senate add-ons during the year, according to Office of Management and Budget figures. Constituents can decide for themselves whether Congress deserves its enlarged budget as a reward for a job well done in 1987 or whether, instead, it merits criticism for having gone on a personal spending spree while doing little to solve national problems.

Folks back home can also note how their House and Senate representatives stood during 1987 on issues relating to members' emoluments and Internal Capitol Hill operations.

Here are capsule descriptions of the issues that are the focus of Roll Call Report Syndicate's 1987 Comfort Index.

HOUSE

1. FREEZE COMMITTEE SPENDING — By a vote of 127 for and 268 against, the House on March 19 rejected a proposed freeze in committee spending. It then voted to spend \$47.6 million in 1987 on the "investigations and studies" budget that covers about half the cost of its 27 committees. The \$47.9 million figure was up 9 percent over 1986.

A yes vote was for freezing this category of committee spending.

Voting yes: Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth.

Voting no: Dennis Hertel, D-Harper Woods, William Ford, D-Taylor, Sander Levin, D-Southfield, and William Broomfield, R-Birmingham.

2. CUT STAFF SALARIES — On June 29, the House rejected an amendment to cut nearly \$6 million, primarily in staff salary outlays, from the House's \$530 million share of the fiscal 1988 legislative branch appropriations bill. The vote was 155 for, 224 against.

A yes vote supported the \$6 million cut.

Voting yes: Broomfield.

Voting no: Hertel, Ford, Levin.

Pursell didn't vote.

3. PROBE CORRUPTION — By a vote of 77 for and 297 against, the House on June 29 rejected an amendment to set up a bipartisan commission of private citizens to probe an alleged "ongoing pattern" of corruption within the House.

Robert Walker, R-Pa., a sponsor, said "I think we should be concerned about the fact that many of the American people regard this House as an ethical morass."

A yes vote endorsed the special probe. No area congressmen voted yes.

Voting no: Hertel, Ford, Levin, and Broomfield.

Not voting: Pursell.

4. CUT ELEVATOR OPERATORS — By a vote of 141 for and 235 against, the House on June 29 rejected an amendment to cut spending by nearly \$81,000 in order to eliminate by attrition six jobs of House patronage employees who operate elevators that are automatic.

A yes vote was to eliminate the six jobs. No local members voted yes.

Voting no: Hertel, Ford, Levin and Broomfield.

Not voting: Pursell.

5. SUBJECT LAWMAKERS to independent counsel — By a vote of 169 for and 243 against, the House on Oct. 21 rejected an amendment to

put members of Congress within the potential jurisdiction of independent counsels.

These counsels are appointed by U.S. appeals judges to prosecute errant administration officials, on the theory that the attorney general is unlikely to vigorously prosecute his political allies.

Supporters of the amendment said an independent counsel is needed to watch over lawmakers because an attorney general may not want to prosecute individual members of Congress. Opponents noted many lawmakers have been prosecuted by the Justice Department throughout history.

A yes vote favored putting lawmakers within reach of independent counsels.

Voting yes: Republicans Pursell and Broomfield.

Voting no: Democrats Hertel, Ford and Levin.

SENATE

6. TABLE COMMITTEE funding cut — The Senate refused to cut its committee budgets for calendar 1987. This occurred last Jan. 28 when it voted, 58 for and 36 against, to table (kill) an amendment cutting a \$45 million committee outlay by 5 percent.

A yes vote killed the cut.

Michigan Democrats Carl Levin and Donald Riegle voted yes.



'Leader'

Kathleen A. Sullivan, director of administrative services at the Royal Oak Campus of Oakland Community College, has been chosen for an international leadership training program for two-year college administrators. Sponsored by the League for Innovation in Community Colleges and the American Association of Women in Community and Junior Colleges, the program pairs mentors and participants for training in supervision, budgeting and organizing.

Health division asks for feedback

Public feedback on community health division programs is being sought from Oakland County residents beginning this week.

"We've set up a series of town hall meetings in nine communities to ask residents what they think about the current mental health services being offered and if they are effective," said Dr. James Graves, director of the county's community mental health division.

The meetings will be hearings at which public officials, families, consumers and other interested people can express their views. Graves will open the sessions with a brief update on specific county services.

The schedule for area communities:

• Thursday, Jan. 28 — Pontiac City Hall, 450 E. Wide Track; 7:30-9:30 p.m.

• Thursday, Feb. 11 — Rochester Hills Public Assembly Area, 100 Rochester Hills Drive; 7:00-9:30 p.m.

• Thursday, Feb. 25 — Walled Lake City Hall, 1499 East W. Maple; 7-9 p.m.

• Thursday, March 3 — Birmingham, Baldwin Public Library, 300 W. Merrill; 7-9 p.m.

• Thursday, March 10 — Southfield City Hall, 26000 Evergreen; 7-9 p.m.

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