

Lawmakers spend, campaign on the job

By Richard G. Thomas
special writer

A seat in the U.S. House of Representatives has become one of America's most secure jobs, upsetting the democratic notion that voters will regularly throw out rascals.

Nearly 99 percent of House members seeking re-election two years ago were returned to Washington. In recent decades, the return rate for House incumbents seeking another term has been well above 90 percent, notwithstanding poll after poll showing Congress overall to be unpopular among voters.

What accounts for their nearly automatic re-election?

LAWMAKERS LIKE to think voters are merely rewarding them every two years for a job well done.

But more detached observers, citing the uneven quality of the House membership, doubt that individual merit is the main reason.

Incumbents have been able to guarantee job security by amassing large sums of private funding and public appropriations for their political benefit.

Their private money is provided mostly in political action committee (PAC) campaign contributions from special interests, a system conducted partly in the open under sanction of law.

The legislative branch budget also pays for:

- Global travel.
- Generous medical and pension plans.
- Attentive Capitol Hill employees to help with logistics from crossing streets to riding elevators.

Roll Call Report

• Staff-chauffeuired rides to, and free parking at, capital airports.

DURING THIS year's floor debate on the congressional budget, U.S. Rep. Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., sought to reduce money for self-promoting newsletters that most House members publish at taxpayer expense and send postage-free to every mailbox back home.

"It is wrong for us to take money from the public to brainwash our constituents, which many of us work at systematically, in order to insure we cannot be defeated either in a primary in those districts which are one party or in a general election," said Gingrich.

U.S. Rep. William Ford, D-Mich., said cutting postal patron newsletter mailings would cause spending to rise for members' first-class postage.

A record vote on one of Gingrich's newsletter amendments is included in the accompanying 1988 Comfort Index, which shows how lawmakers stood on key votes relating to the greening of their personal or official existence in Congress. Most of the votes were on the \$1.81-billion legislative branch appropriations bill for

fiscal 1989.

HERE ARE the 1988 Comfort Index issues:

1. To pass congressional budget — By a vote of 277 for and 104 against, the House on May 18 approved a fiscal 1989 budget (HR 4587) of \$1.4 billion for legislative branch operations except the Senate, which later added its budget to the bill.

2. To freeze budget — By a vote of 184 for and 211 against, the House on May 19 rejected an attempt to freeze the House's version of the congressional budget at the figure approved a year earlier for fiscal 1988. This was to have been achieved by cutting 1.6 percent, about \$23 million, from HR 4587 (above).

3. To block large House staff — The House rejected, 172 for and 234 against, an amendment to HR 4587 to block the proposed hiring of 33 additional committee aides.

4. To limit free postage — By a vote of 190 for and 208 against, the House rejected an amendment by Rep. Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., to HR 4587 to reduce the annual appropriation for House members' mailing costs from \$58.9 million to \$48.9 million.

slight increase over the comparable 1987 authorization.

Roll Call Report is a syndicated service from Washington, D.C. The conclusions are the writer's.

1988 comfort index

representative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Carl Pursell R-2	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N		
Dennis Hertel D-14	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y		
William Ford D-15	Y	N	N	N	N	O		
Sander Levin D-17	Y	N	N	N	N	Y		
Wm. Broomfield R-18	O	O	O	O	Y	Y		
senator							Y	Y
Carl Levin, D							Y	Y
Donald Riegle, D							Y	Y

Legend:
Y = yes
N = no
O = not voting

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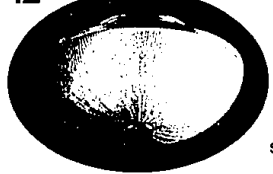
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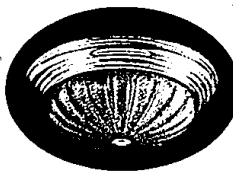
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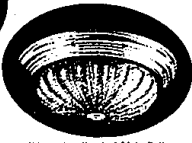
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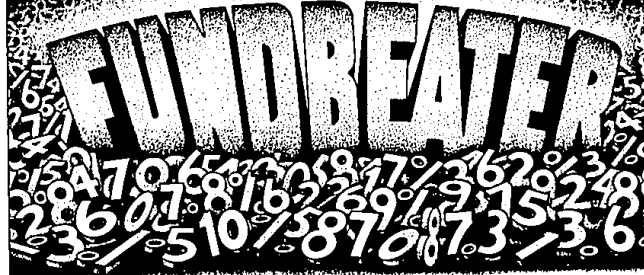
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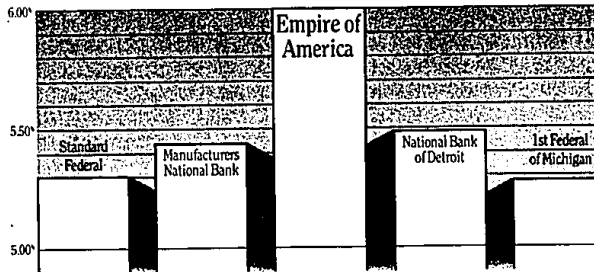


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