

Taxpayers pick up travel tab for U.S. reps

By Richard G. Thomas
special writer

Planeloads of lawmakers, their aides and often spouses too streaked repeatedly through international skies last year, as more than half the House membership took hundreds of official trips ranging from important business to nationally televised junketing.

Democrats Stephen J. Solarz of New York and Bill Richardson of New Mexico were the leading travelers among the 238 members who made house calls on foreign ports at taxpayer expense, according to Roll Call Report Syndicate's second annual survey of congressional globe-trotting.

Solarz spent the most days outside the United States, 64, on six trips to 27 countries. Richardson had the most trips, seven, spending 42 days in at least 10 countries.

Other House leaders, each with five trips and at least three weeks overseas, were Maryland Republican Helen Delich Bentley and Democrats Jaime Fuster of Puerto Rico, Dennis M. Hertel of Michigan, Jim Moody of Wisconsin, Solomon P. Ortiz of Texas and Charles B. Rangel of New York.

THE 238 HOUSE members, including several who left office at the end of 1990, took 517 trips over 3,239 days to 1,086 countries at a cost reported by committees at \$5.8 million. Roll Call Report's 1989 survey identified 214 members making 419 trips over 3,048 days to 929 countries, at a committee-stated cost of \$4.5 million. The cost figures also

cover staff travel overseas. The survey did not cover Senate travel or House members' extensive global travel at the expense of special interests.

It is based on reports that committees are required to file for publication in the Congressional Record. The reports do not state what the trips accomplish, nor indicate when spouses go along. But when the travel involves military aircraft, as most trips do, the Pentagon makes a public listing of passengers including spouses.

One Defense Department manifest shows that a four-day Foreign Affairs Committee visit to Paris in May, for a NATO parliamentary conference, included the spouses of these members: Republicans William S. Broomfield of Michigan, Gerald B.H. Solomon of New York, Thomas J. Bliley of Virginia, Jan Meyers of Kansas and Alex McCrill of North Carolina and Democrats Danie B. Rostenkowski of Illinois, Jack Brooks of Texas, Ronald D. Coleman of Nevada, James B. Blythe of Nevada and Nancy Pelosi of California.

CONSISTENT with House rules and custom the spouses' transportation was free because they filled otherwise empty seats on the Air Force plane.

House practice also permitted spouses lodging to be covered by the approximately \$300 per diem each lawmaker received from taxpayers for daily expense in Paris.

Several of the House's 1989 travel leaders were much less footloose in 1990. For example, California Dem-

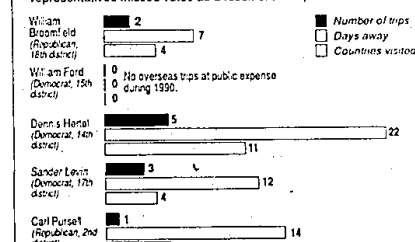
ocrat Mervyn Dymally had the most trips in 1989, eight, and the most days away, 59. He cut that to three trips and 28 days in 1990. California Republican David Dreier, who took the second most trips in 1989, six, was shown in committee records as going abroad only three times in 1990 on official business.

Trips abroad are almost always scheduled to avoid conflicts with legislative business. But some members still manage to miss record votes because of their travel.

IN THE "VOTE lag" category —

Travel at the public's expense

Taxpayers funded the following overseas trips for area members of the House of representatives during 1990. None of these representatives missed votes as a result of the trips.



Source: Thomas' Roll Call Report

they also flocked to such perennial pleasure zones as Paris, London, Vienna, Brussels, Bonn and Zurich. Barbados, normally a coveted

port, proved less hospitable than expected to nine House members who stopped there in April for a few days at or near the beach.

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