

“MOST ETHICAL CONGRESS EVER” IS ETHICALLY CHALLENGED

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PINE BLUFFS — In November 2006, Speaker-Elect Nancy Pelosi, (D-CA) said, “This leadership team will create the most honest, most open, and most ethical Congress in history.” She has not made good on that promise.

Less than three months later, full of herself after the results of the 2006 elections elevated her to the position of House Speaker, and unhappy over her transportation arrangements, Pelosi demanded — at taxpayer expense — a larger aircraft to fly her and her entourage between Washington, D.C. and her own district in San Francisco, CA. Her request was denied, and it was pointed out to her that her plane was the same one provided to the former Speaker, Dennis Hastert (R-IL).

Undaunted, this self-styled commander-in-chief and secretary of state, embarked on a visit to the Middle East — at taxpayer expense — where she received a warm welcome from Syrian officials, most of whom are complicit in fomenting unrest in Lebanon and Iraq. In a prior day, she’d have been accused of “negotiating with nations hostile to our country;” i.e., treason. It didn’t occur to her that her actions were contrary to the President’s Middle East policy, nor that he, constitutionally, has sole power to conduct American foreign policy.

Meanwhile, back in those hallowed halls, led by Democrats, the work of Congress has ground to a screeching halt amid news of one scandal and potential scandal after another, while attempting to embarrass George Bush and handcuff his administration, it constantly debates the Iraq war, fails to confirm judicial nominations, and wastes time and taxpayer’s money on over 300 investigations of the Bush administration.

“Americans have been disappointed by a majority leadership that stages one show debate after another, while the only consistent legislative work getting done is the renaming of post offices,” said Jon Kyl (R-AZ) in July. “We really ought to be asking why this Democrat leadership won’t allow Congress to move forward on serious policy debates.”

In fact, despite Democrat promises to pass a comprehensive legislative program in their first 100 hours in office — think Republican’s Contract with America in 1994, which promised ten significant legislative initiatives in 100 days — only one significant initiative, the minimum wage increase, has become law in more than 200 days, while Democrats focus on the Iraq war with all-night troop-withdrawal debates and non-binding resolutions, while delaying more important issues, such as the Defense Department authorization bill.

“Well it’s certainly the lowest point I can recall in my 20-some-odd years here, and I think it is an illustration of why this new majority has sunk to a 14% approval rating in the polls,” Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) said, after Harry Reid ((D-NV) pulled the bill from the floor. “There are a whole lot of other extremely important things in that bill which need to be dealt with, and apparently we’re just going to put it aside . . .”

Meanwhile, in a classic case of Nero fiddling while Rome burned, this past Easter, Representative Bennie Thompson (D-MS), took nine other Democrat Congressmen and two Republicans on a junket through the Caribbean, Honduras, Mexico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands – at taxpayer expense – using military aircraft for transportation. When challenged about this extravagance, Thompson claimed he’d been fiscally responsible, staying at the Caneel Bay resort, at \$1,000+ per night, rather than at more expensive vacation spots, and stating that he’d received a special government rate, something which Caneel Bay representatives denied.

And how about Rep Eliot Engel (D-NY)? He, his wife and four other Democrats journeyed to the Caribbean recently, and while there, took several side trips to Trinidad and Grenada – all at taxpayer expense.

This type of fiscal irresponsibility and unethical behavior was exactly what Republicans addressed during the 2006 session of Congress, in passing earmark reform. That bill would have allowed lawmakers to vote on individual earmarks, specific funding requests attached to larger bills, a procedure Democrats promised they would not use during the process of considering twelve major annual spending bills. However, in order to keep their pet projects away from the “prying eyes” of voters, Democrat leaders have attempted to reverse the work of Republicans on this matter.

But House Minority Leader John Boehner, who was there in 1994 when voters handed over Congress to Republicans after 40 years of Democrat control, introduced a resolution on July 24, 2007, which would actually move Congress in a more ethical direction by restoring Republican earmark reforms. Here’s what Boehner said:

“Democrats, led by Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey (D-WI), have gutted those earmark reforms this year, refusing to allow members to challenge potentially wasteful spending on the House floor and instead setting up multi-billion dollar slush funds for secret earmarks.

“The leaders of the current majority are seeking to avoid the real transparency and accountability we instituted last year. They’ve traded earmark transparency for earmark secrecy, and American taxpayers deserve better.

“The earmark policy outlined by Mr. Obey yesterday is a sham. Democrats are keeping earmark requests secret until after the House has considered appropriations spending bills, preventing us from debating earmarks on the House floor and subjecting them to scrutiny. They want the House to approve massive slush funds for secret

earmarks; billions of dollars for Rep. Obey and his colleagues to spend as they see fit. This isn't transparent. This isn't accountable. It is outrageous, and Republicans are going to fight on behalf of American taxpayers."

What was Mr. Obey's response? Basically, he said it would be impossible to review 30,000 proposed earmarks before adopting [the major] spending bills, so the public is just going to have to trust the House-Senate conference committee to decide which of the earmarks are worthwhile.

Well, you say, this kind of thing is simply business as usual in Congress. Has there been any actual criminal behavior on the part of Democrats? The answer is "yes". Black Congressman William Jefferson (D-LA), received over \$500,000 in bribes and sought millions more in nearly a dozen separate schemes to enrich himself by using his office to broker deals in Africa, according to a 16-count federal indictment handed down on June 4, 2007. The indictment alleges racketeering, soliciting bribes, wire fraud, money laundering, obstruction of justice, and conspiracy; charges which could earn him 235 years in prison. Jefferson had been under investigation by the Bush Justice Department for almost two years, since an FBI raid on his Washington home found \$90,000 in cash stashed in his freezer. Yet, Pelosi allowed him to retain his seat on the Small Business Committee, from whence he could continue trading on his good office and on Congress to further his allegedly corrupt schemes.

Are these charges substantive? You be the judge. Two of Jefferson's associates entered into plea bargains and have been sentenced. One, Brett Pfeffer, a Congressional aide, admitted soliciting bribes for Jefferson. Another, Vernon Jackson, a Louisville, KY telecommunications executive, pled guilty to paying between \$400,000 and \$1 million in bribes to Jefferson in exchange for his assistance in business deals in Nigeria and other African nations. Both have agreed to aid prosecutors in Jefferson's case.

Now, try this one. Pelosi, who lambasted Republicans for being "nothing but a bunch of crooks," has been deafeningly silent on the Democrat culture of corruption. Consider Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA). For six years, she served on the Military Construction Appropriations Committee (MILCON), while representing a liberal district in her state, which, not surprisingly, contains many voters who oppose the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Senator Feinstein has voiced her support both. Why? It now turns out that Perini Corporation – a civil infrastructure contractor which works on bridges, highways, subways and airports – and another company were major recipients of government work handed out by MILCON, to the tune of billions. Feinstein's husband, Richard Blum, together with Ronald Tutor, owned 75% of Perini's voting stock. And this went on for four years. You see? Feinstein was profiting from the Middle East policy pursued by Mr. Bush, and Nancy Pelosi said nothing. Indeed, the entire Democrat Party was profiting from the Afghanistan and Iraq wars while attacking legitimate companies like Halliburton and Vice-President Cheney for allegedly profiting from the war in unproven ways, and denigrating the President's policy of building Democracy in the Middle East.

In March 2007, Feinstein resigned from MILCON. Since her husband had sold Perini Corporation's stock two years ago, she had no reason to stay on the committee. But while receiving millions through MILCON, Feinstein and other Democrats – Howard Dean, for example, was taking funds from the Feinsteins in campaign contributions – she continued to blast the Bush administration for “failure to provide our troops with adequate body armor,” and “failure to provide adequate health services to our troops.” And the media, while whining about these issues, failed – to report much at all about Dianne Feinstein, Perini Corp, and the probable conflict of interest posed by her membership on the Military Construction Appropriations Committee all those years.

Finally, we have Nancy Pelosi herself. The Democrat-controlled House sponsored the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007, which raises the minimum wage in the United States from \$5.15 to \$7.25 in three installments over two years, and affects 5.6 million workers. President Bush, who signaled that he would sign the bill when it passed the Senate, did so. It took effect on August 14.

But after passage by the House in January 2007, a loophole was discovered in the bill, exempting American Samoa, which has a Democrat representative to the United States, from the operation of this law, while imposing it upon the Northern Marianas, which has a Republican representative. A partisan ploy? Possibly.

Then it was reported that StarKist and the tuna industry that dominates American Samoa's economy by employing 40% of the labor force there, would be free to pay only about half of the bill's mandatory minimum wage, or \$3.26/hour. StarKist is owned by, Del Monte Foods, and the latter is one of the largest corporation's in Pelosi's San Francisco district. Republicans quickly charged that the Act favored Del Monte Foods, and wondered why. When confronted with these facts, Pelosi promised to “close the loophole.”

In November 2006, voters, disgusted with a few cases of corruption by Republicans both in and out of Congress, “threw the bums out,” and gave control of Congress back to the Democrats. But instead of ending the culture of corruption in Washington, Democrats appear busy structuring their own brand of it. Fortunately, voters now seem aware of their error, as polls show Congressional ratings have sunk to an all-time low of 13%.

Republicans have made a start on improving matters. If they persevere, they can go a long way toward restoring public confidence and the faith the American people showed in them in the 1994, and again in 2000 and 2004.