

HOUSE BANKING SCANDAL

On March 5, the House Ethics Committee reported on its investigation of the House banking scandal. In case you missed it, the House has its own bank into which members' salaries are deposited and from which they are issued checks to pay their bills.

Sounds just like your bank, right? Well, the House bank has overdraft protection that your bank wouldn't dream of. Apparently, there's no cap on the amount, no due date for restitution and no fee for the overdrafts!

And there were overdrafts. Eight thousand three hundred and thirty-one of them according to the Washington Post. Who wrote all these rubber checks? Well, if the so-called House Ethics Committee has its way, you and I will never know, In the 39-month period that was Examined, the Committee found that 296 current and 59 former members overdrew their accounts....

The Committee has recommended that 24 *of the worst abusers* be identified. Not punished; not censured; not even rebuked. Just identified.

Should we infer that the other 331 just made an occasional miscalculation in their checkbook balance? Not quite. According to members of the Committee, some of those whose names would *not* be disclosed bounce more than 800 checks and some bounced checks in the neighborhood of \$100,000.

This is the same House of Representatives that a year ago, as the recession deepened, unemployment increased, and benefits ran out for thousands of their constituents, voted themselves raises of over 30 percent to salaries of more than \$125,000! Some of these overpaid underachievers figured out that they could float unsecured, interest-free loans of almost any amount of money, indefinitely. All they had to do was write a rubber check.

Now, they've decided we haven't any right to know who these free loaders are. They'll decide whose sins are bad enough to call out

What *should* be done? First, dispel the appearance of a cover-up. Release all of the name and amounts of all of the overdrafts. We all make mistakes balancing our checkbooks, and we can quickly recognize which members made innocent errors. And which members arrogantly abuse the system

The House Banking scandal is merely the latest example of an arrogance of power and we have seen too much of in Congress. Congress has overdrawn more than their bank account. They've over drawn-out patience and our respect.

For Ethics at Work, this is Gary Edwards.

