

opinion

Sneaky tactics blamed for Congress' pain

by Don Phillips

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Congress has a way of collectively putting its foot in its mouth, chomping down hard and then blaming the press and the public interest groups for the resulting wound.

The classic scenario, of course, involves congressional pay increases and outside income limits.

Congress again and again acts like a thief in the night, skulking around and through parliamentary maneuvers to sneak themselves a pay raise. Then when someone flips on the political lights and they are left standing there sheepishly, they blame those who turned on the light.

It never occurs that one reason they're treated like thieves is that they act that way. There are good reasons to increase congressional salaries; why not do it openly?

The same thing is true of congressional travel.

Not all congressional trips are junkets. Rep. Leo Ryan of California was not on a junket when he was gunned down on an airstrip in Guiana. And I doubt that anyone dodging bullets in Lebanon would consider the trip a junket unless a lengthy stay in Paris accompanied it.

Congress again and again acts like a thief in the night, skulking around and through parliamentary maneuvers to sneak themselves a pay raise.

Some trips are clear junkets. Any trip by a lame duck is a junket. One committee actually spent weeks in South America studying the postal systems of countries with some of the world's greatest

beaches and night spots. That's a junket.

But the destination does not necessarily make a trip a junket. The Interparliamentary Union meets in some of the world's great cities, but experience has shown that the congressmen who attend these sessions are serious about their work and come home with a greater understanding of the world and its needs, even if they do have a little fun while there.

The trouble is that Congress seems to treat all trips as if they were junkets.

Getting information on congressional travel, for instance, is deliberately made difficult. There is no central point to gather the information, and unless a congressman or a committee chooses to announce the trip, it is not certain that we ever will learn that a trip was made, much less its purpose.

There is no requirement that the trip

even have a purpose.

Common Cause, the ever-present self-styled citizens lobby, spent a lot of time digging into congressional travel for the past two and a half years and concluded that members of the House and Senate took 991 trips to 114 foreign countries at taxpayer expense.

The group said that its information

The point that the group made is that it often is impossible to distinguish between junkets and trips that benefit everyone, including the public.

"was difficult to acquire and often incomplete."

Common Cause made no knee-jerk judgments of congressional travel as such, saying that there are such things as

"critical fact-finding" trips. The point that the group made is that it often is impossible to distinguish between junkets and trips that benefit everyone, including the public.

Every reporter has had doors slammed on fingers, figuratively at least, attempting to get information on congressional travel. Staff members immediately become suspicious and begin hiding papers when the subject arises.

The Pentagon refers questions of travel on Air Force jets to Congress, and Congress often says to call the Pentagon. In fairness, some committees are open about travel, notably the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Then again, that committee with clearly legitimate travel needs.

But Congress sometimes seems to operate on the principle of the lowest common denominator. In this case, it often seems to act as if all trips were shamless and useless junkets.

Then Congress seems surprised when the press does the same thing.

Car industry upset by 'lemon-aid' laws

by Maxwell Glen and Cody Shearer

WASHINGTON — Auto industry analysts couldn't pinpoint last week why new car sales increased for the 11th consecutive reporting period. Favorable interest rates and improvement in automobile quality were the most common explanations.

One possible factor, however, may never show up in Detroit's official analysis: Car buyers in many states now enjoy statutory protections from new cars that're little more than lemons. While the proliferation of "lemon laws" might seemittersweet new to Detroit, it could speed the auto industry's recovery.

On Jan. 1 car buyers in California and Connecticut gained easier access to refunds or replacements if cars fail to perform as promised. Since then, 14 other

states have passed similar lemon laws, and at least 10 others may follow suit by the end of the year.

While most car purchasers won't drive away with lemons this year, many inevitably will. If, as the Washington-based Center for Auto Safety estimates, even only one in 1,000 cars is irreparably defective, Detroit could produce 6,000 or 7,000 lemons this year.

According to John Woodcock, the state legislator who drafted Connecticut's new law, the lemon can suffer from many maladies: vibrations, wind noise, roof leaks, engine and dashboard fires and losses in electrical power and oil pressure.

"It's a whole litany of problems," Woodcock told our reporter, Michael Duffy.

Some state laws are tougher than others. Connecticut's manufacturers are required to replace any new car that remains a problem after four trips to the repair shop or stays out of service for 30 days during the first year of ownership. (Refunds are also an option.)

Minnesota, meanwhile, mandates replacement in the event of a safety hazard in the car's design; New York extends protection through the second year of ownership.

While Congress has long guaranteed the replacement of products after "reasonable" attempts at repair, the new state laws reduce the need for costly legal assistance. Now car owners can simply approach a locally-convened arbitration board established by the auto companies under Federal Trade Commission guidelines; unsatisfied petitioners may appeal to the courts later. In Connecticut, at least 20 residents have received replacement models through this process in 1983.

Auto dealers have largely welcomed the new legal environment. Lemon laws not only give dealers legislative guarantees with which to reassure paranoid car buyers, but also lay the responsibility for replacing a defective car squarely on the manufacturers, who are obviously not too pleased.

Yet, in some states, Detroit has responded to an ever-increasing number of lemon lawsuits with "consumer action" panels of its own. The panels, insisted Ford spokesman Dale Leibach, "... reflect a growing realization that quality and consumer satisfaction are extremely important."

In fact, they may simply reflect an interest in reducing the number of outright court awards, which have topped \$700,000 in some lemon cases.

THE DETROIT FREE PRESS
COPIES BY THE TRIBUNE COMPANY



Heroines of female equality war could find success in television

by Dick West

United Press International
WASHINGTON — One government spokesman referred to her as an "Easter bunny." Another described her as a "low-level munchkin."

It could be, however, that the somewhere over the rainbow Barbara Honegger will find a job as a television news broad — oops, I mean broadcaster.

Certainly she and Christine Craft, the anchorperson who won a \$500,000 judgment against a Kansas City station, appear to have something in common.

Both became national celebrities in the pursuit of female equality.

Craft, as talk show fans are well aware, filed suit against her ex-employers on grounds she was demoted because of age, appearance and failure to project "warmth and comfort" on camera.

And Honegger, as talk show fans also are aware, resigned from the Justice Department after criticizing President Reagan's women's rights policy.

I don't know whether Honegger is young and attractive enough to report the news, but thus far she has been fully as durable as Craft when it comes to

being interviewed.

In one interview, she said "a source" using her own voice told her three years ago that she would serve as a women's rights defender in the Reagan administration.

Does that mean she would have a more promising career in the studio than in the courtroom? We shall see.

There is a world of difference between a Playboy-type bunny and the Easter type. Judging from Craft's complaint, women who fit the former mold are more likely to succeed as anchorpersons.

It was Larry Speakes, the White House press secretary, who identified Honegger as "the Easter bunny at the White House Easter Egg Roll."

She, however, denied having appeared on the White House lawn in a rabbit suit. She said it was on other occasions that she dressed as a March Hare.

Thus were laid the contradictions for what some sources now are calling "Bunnagate."

Speakes also was invited to comment on the remark of Tom DeCair, a Justice Department spokesman who characterized Honegger as a "low-level munchkin."

"What is a munchkin?" Speakes asked a good question.

Although you won't find that word in most dictionaries, it will be familiar to readers of "The Wizard of Oz."

In the movie version, the fidgety inhabitants of Munchkin Country were midgets. Honegger is not terribly tall, but she would tower over Hollywood's concept of a munchkin — however contorted. So my guess is that DeCair was alluding to inhabitants of Munchkin City in Germany.

Anyway, the verb "to munch" nicely defines the eating style of rabbits. Therefore, both Speakes and DeCair could have been within the perimeters of hyperbole and anthropomorphism established for government spokesmen.

Furthermore, I'm sure most television stations would be delighted to hire a woman in a rabbit suit, if not as an anchorperson at least as a political commentator.

Sources of the kind Honegger has could be invaluable on election day.

The Battalion

USPS 045 360

Member of
Texas Press Association
Southwest Journalism Conference

Editor: Hope E. Paasch
City Editor: Kelley Smith
Sports Editor: John Wagner
News Editors: Daran Bishop, Brian Boyer, Beverly Hamilton, Tammy Jones
Staff Writers: Robert McGlohon, Karen Schrimsher, Angel Stokes, Joe Tindel
Copy editors: Kathleen Hart, Beverly Hamilton
Cartoonist: Scott McCullar
Photographers: Brenda Davidson, Eric Evan Lee, Barry Papke

Editorial Policy

The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting newspaper operated as a community service to Texas A&M University and Bryan-College Station. Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the editor or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M University administrators or faculty members, or of the Board of Regents.

The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Communications.

Questions or comments concerning any editorial matter should be directed to the editor.

Letters Policy

Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length, and are subject to being cut if they are longer. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must also be signed and show the address and telephone number of the writer.

The Battalion is published Monday through Friday during Texas A&M regular semesters, except for holiday and examination periods. Mail subscriptions are \$6.75 per semester, \$33.25 per school year and \$35 per year. Advertising rates furnished on request.

Our address: The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald Building, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.

Columns and guest editorials also are welcome, and are not subject to the same length constraints as letters. Address all inquiries and correspondence to: Editor, The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843, or phone (409) 845-6111.

Our address: The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald Building, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.

United Press International is entitled exclusively to use for reproduction of all news dispatches credited to it. Rights of reproduction of all other matter herein reserved.

Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843.

Reagan hosts 'meet the people'

by Ira R. Allen

United Press International
WASHINGTON — For half an hour twice a week, President Reagan puts aside the business of state and meets with Americans from different walks of life.

During the 30 minutes of "administrative time" late Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, Reagan spends five minutes with people who have been brought into the Oval Office by aides or Republican members of Congress to shake hands, have their pictures taken and exchange chit-chat.

It is one way a president has of meeting face to face with more ordinary Americans, although they are well-scrubbed and carefully screened.

The parade of children, senior citizens and handicapped generally have one thing in common: They have achieved something or overcome some adversity. Occasionally, someone wants

to present him with a gift or an award.

Despite the obvious public relations aspect of the exercise, reporters are not usually allowed to witness the exchanges. Photographers, however, are.

In recent weeks, the only substantial thing participants would say upon leaving the Oval Office was the comment from Miss Teen Age America, Amy Sue Brenkacz of Joliet, Ill., who said, "I love to talk but it was the first time ever I've been speechless."

Among the approximately 50 visitors in the past month were: A craftsman who makes quill pens for the Supreme Court, the mother of a freshman House Republican, the editor of the Times of London, America's Junior Miss, the poster child for the Asthma and Allergy Foundation, a Vietnamese girl who lived in a box on the streets of Saigon, Red Skelton on his 70th birthday, the 94-year-old woman who served Reagan meals at his college

fraternity, officials of the Mars candy company, five new White House reporters, an epileptic who walked across America, Kiwanians and Optimists and broadcasters whose gift of a 1920s-style microphone was snuffed for bombs before entering the White House.

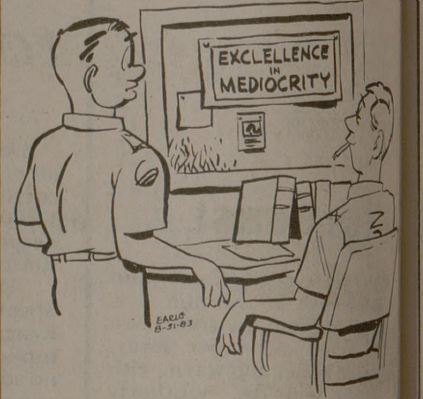
Irreverents among the news photographers who record the stream of visitors refer to the parade as "the freak-a-week" show.

To be sure, it does the president no harm to greet less exalted guests than the heads of state and staff aides he usually sees. And it is good public relations.

"He likes it very much," an aide said. "It's a chance to have contact with a good cross-section of America."

But since the "cross-section" is always sponsored by White House staff members or friendly congressmen, the visitors are not only awe-struck, but guaranteed not to tell Reagan anything he doesn't want to hear.

Slouch By Jim Earle



"Can I ask you a question?"