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Taxpayers absorbing hidden costs

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Rep. Robert Badham, R-Calif., didn't go around the world in 80 days. He took longer, and taxpayers would have preferred a balloon to his costly military flights.

During an 11-month stretch ending in October, Badham spent at least 82 days — nearly three months — joining eight delegations for journeys on Air Force planes to 24 countries. His

wife flew free. On 12 days while Badham was abroad as Congress' leading globetrotter, he missed roll call votes on Capitol Hill.

Figuring conservatively, his share of the government-financed travel exceeded \$90,000, including flight costs, meals, lodging and lavish services from host embassies and military escorts eager to win friends in Congress for the Pentagon.

Badham, a member of the House Armed Services Committee who defends his foreign excursions as benefiting the public, hardly is the only member of Congress whose forays to distant lands are draining the treasury.

In a four-month investigation, United Press International and the non-profit Better Government Association traced \$15 million in unreported costs and a trail of abuses and excesses by congressmen living like royalty, far from public scrutiny.

Much congressional travel is worthwhile, but expenditures are hidden and uncontrolled. The budget — set by Congress' own 1978 legislation — is permanent and limitless. It is supplemented by a Pentagon "black bag" fund of nearly \$1 million to wine and dine congressmen overseas, and millions of dollars in support services from the Defense Department and U.S. embassies.

House and Senate committees listed foreign travel costs of

\$5.9 million on disclosure statements filed for fiscal year 1983.

UPI and the BGA, after a month-long Freedom of Information fight that resulted in a suit against the Air Force, documented that taxpayers footed a bill of at least \$21.6 million as members of Congress flitted the globe.

Besides frittering big dollars for chauffeured cars, for dining in some of Europe's most sumptuous restaurants and for slip-

Hildenbrand, two aides to Hildenbrand, then-Senate Sergeant-at-Arms Howard Liebengood, three staffers and four military escorts. Hildenbrand said his office provided "most of the logistics" on the trip and he would let others judge whether its participation "looks bad or not."

The three senators could have flown first class on commercial flights for under \$30,000. Instead, it cost \$244,013 to ferry the entire group to Japan, Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong aboard the Air Force's Special Air Mission plane. Total cost of the trip: \$286,574. No details of the trip are on file with Hildenbrand's office, which collects disclosure reports on such costs.

Item: In January 1983, Peter Rodino, D-N.J., chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, led a mostly Italian delegation including his son, Peter Rodino III, Reps. Frank Annunzio, D-Ill., Romano Mazzoli, D-Ky., and Hamilton Fish, R-N.Y., to Italy for 13 days, and Austria for 2 days. An aide said they looked into international "refugee matters," in Rome, and damage from Italy's earthquake. But the trip to the fatherland also included stops in Palermo, Florence, Siena, Venice and Trieste.

Rodino and colleagues reported military airfare costs as \$23,720, but the actual pricetag for transporting the four House members and three aides was

\$112,384. Rep. Nicholas Roules, D-Mass., arrived later on a commercial flight, paying \$1,045.

Item: Rep. Joseph P. Addabbo, D-N.Y., twice led delegations from his House appropriations subcommittee to China in at a cost of about \$600,000 recent weeks. Addabbo went to the Far East, Kevin Price, D-Ill., visited twice in fiscal 1983, once accompanying House Speaker Thomas O'Neill, D-Mass., on a trip that cost \$360,200, leading his own delegation cost of \$322,794.

Item: In September, Dante Fascell, D-Fla., led a special House committee trip to Spain. Demands for a 17-plane fleet of the Air Force's C-137 jet was summoned to Washington the day after the trip. A C-137 then returned to Spain to fetch the delegation. Cost of what was just a 10-day Atlantic trip: \$175,000.

All told, UPI and the BGA found at least 357 separately financed trips to 85 countries and Antarctica — by 700 members, 236 House members more than 1,300 aides and accompanying agencies officials in fiscal 1983.

During the latest recent congressional delegations, the House

Hawkins wound up a country, globe-circling into drug trafficking with a third stop in 13 months in Hong Kong, which foreign officers gustedly called a "shop" — shopping opportunities. Although Hong Kong is a British Crown Colony that makes foreign policy, 62 members of Congress and 51 staffers had a chance in fiscal year 1983 to buy made clothing.

Another contingent, led by Rep. Dan Rostenkowski, Ill., unloaded trunks of suits at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., — apparently bypassing customs inspectors — on military escorts chauffeured travelers to their homes.

Most congressmen viewed about overseas as a way to monitor U.S. exports and policies worldwide.

"I feel that the real problem," said Maxwell Rabb, U.S. ambassador to Italy, "is a complete understanding of the nature of congressional visits because (congressmen) operate in a tremendous and unfair handicap, which is the worst handicap, which is a hate word that the business they perform."

"The more travel members of Congress do, the better," Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, noting many of America's problems are "worldwide problems." Pell acknowledged there are abuses, and said \$20 million costs "would be outrageous."

Badham, a politically conservative, said of his frequent travels including a recent Paris Air Show, "Somebody is going to do more than others. My constituents must approve of the conduct my office."

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ping away to resorts, members of Congress squandered vast sums through carefree use of military aircraft.

Item: On a Banking Committee trip to the Far East in August, Sens. Jake Garn, R-Utah, Paula Hawkins, R-Fla., and Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., filled a spiffy converted Air Force 707 with their spouses, Garn's secretary, Secretary of the Senate William

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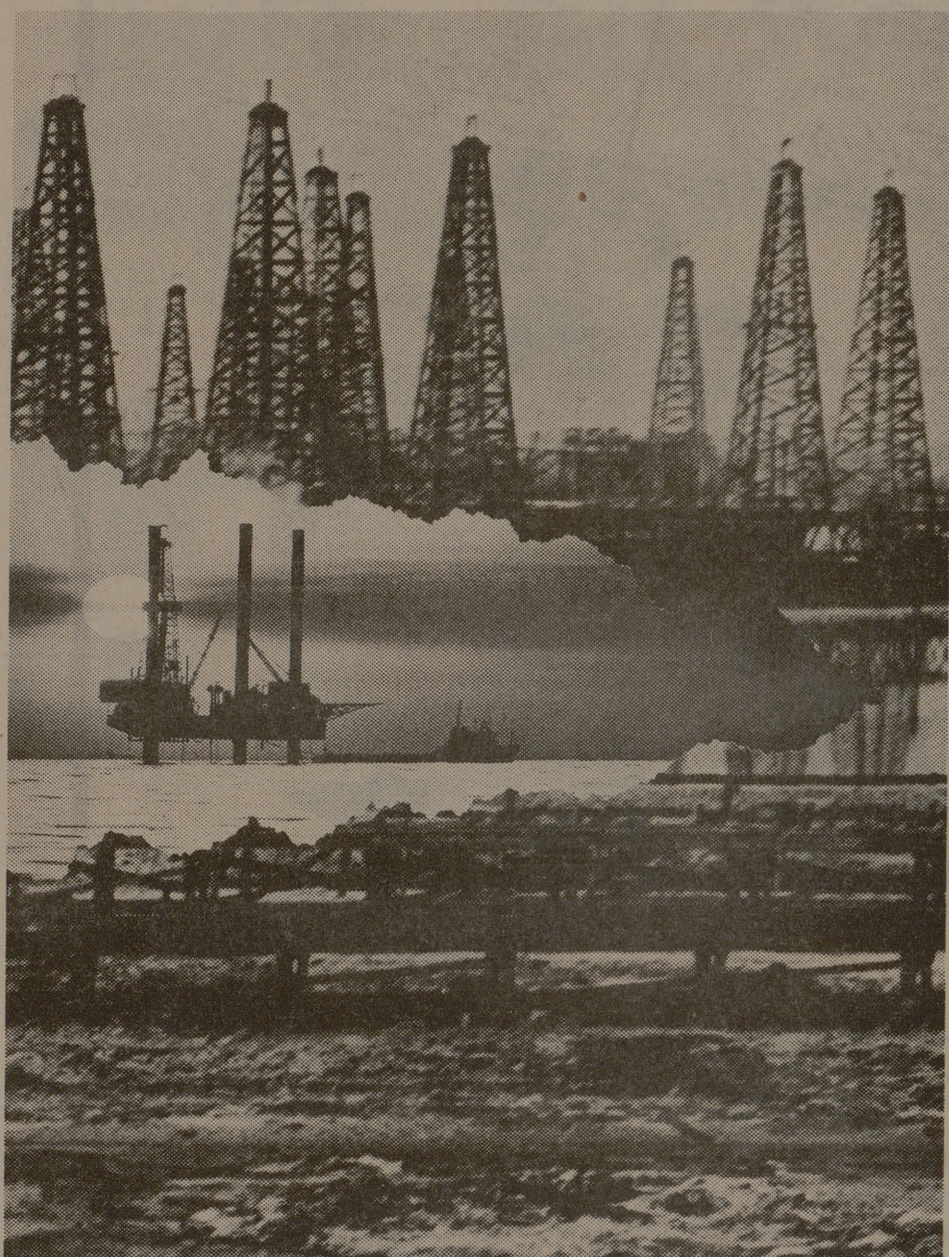
Get to Know International Friends!

Reception: February 7, 7:00-8:00pm
Room 212 MSC

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MSC Committee for Awareness of Mexican - American Culture

Next Meeting - Monday, Feb. 6
7-8:30 704 Rudder