

# GOP feels bite of 'bulldog' Waxman

## California Democrat considered House champion of liberal causes

By Nancy E. Roman  
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He has emerged as the Republicans' most formidable adversary in two bitterly partisan fights, but even his GOP opponents will concede that Rep. Henry A. Waxman knows how the game is played.

The 12-term California Democrat is "absolutely and unequivocally" the most formidable minority member on the House Commerce Committee, said Rep. W.J. "Billy" Tauzin of Louisiana, the second-ranking Republican on the panel. From his Commerce Committee post, Mr. Waxman has emerged as a point man in the partisan wars over anti-smoking legislation.

"He's a brilliant adversary," said Mr. Tauzin, who has tangled with Mr. Waxman many times. "He's a bulldog."

Rep. Bill Paxon, New York Republican, described Mr. Waxman as "the most focused, tenacious liberal in Congress."

"Whether he is taking on Medicaid or defending the administration, if you underestimate Henry Waxman, you do it at your own peril," said Mr. Paxon, who also serves on the Commerce Committee.

But it has been his highly public wrangle with House Government Reform and Oversight Committee Chairman Dan Burton over the course and conduct of the House campaign-finance probe that has thrust the diminutive Mr. Waxman into the headlines.

While accusing Mr. Waxman of spearheading a Democratic stonewall of Mr. Burton's investigation, even Republicans say privately that he scored points in the fight with Mr. Burton over the release of taped jail house conversations by

convicted Whitewater felon Webster L. Hubbell.

"We felt we needed to correct the record," Mr. Waxman, 58, said in an interview with The Washington Times. "I had hoped my role would be to work with the chairman in a fair, bipartisan investigation. Since that hasn't been possible for the last year and a half, my role has been to point out things that are going on."

His staff spent most of Monday and yesterday transcribing tapes that Mr. Burton already had transcribed, looking for — and finding — discrepancies.

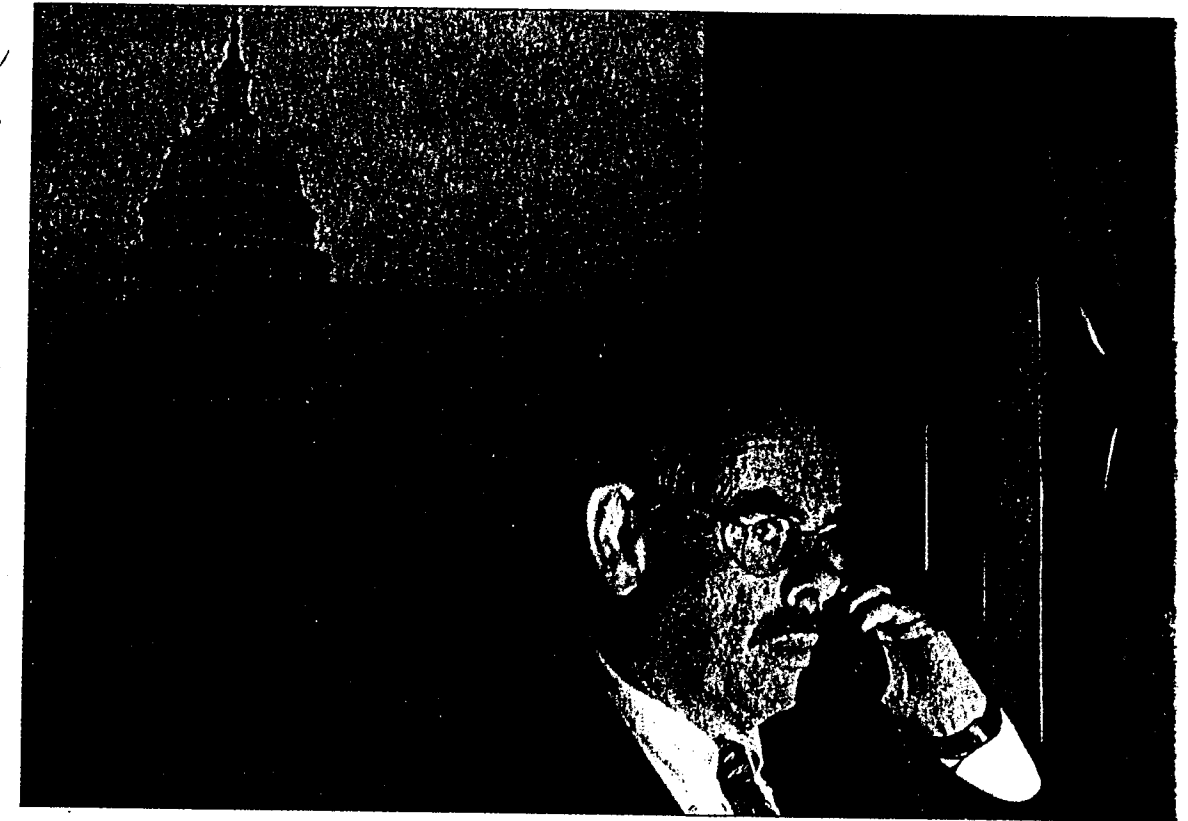
When House Speaker Newt Gingrich went on the offensive last week, charging House Democrats with obstruction of justice and a cover-up, Mr. Waxman was right there with the counterpunch.

"Are we stonewalling an investigation that is proper and legitimate?" he asked.

Phil Schiliro, Mr. Waxman's chief of staff, said his boss was watching the speaker on television when he jumped up and hurried to the House floor. He chided the GOP-led committee for what he said was the wasting of \$6 million to harass witnesses about drug use and other personal behavior that had nothing to do with campaign-finance abuse.

"Do you know what it is like to have the full force of the federal government ... staring at these people and telling them they will be in contempt of court and may go to jail if they do not answer questions about their personal lives?" asked Mr. Waxman, red-faced.

Mr. Gingrich was so incensed that every Democrat on the Government Reform and Oversight Committee voted against immunity for four witnesses in the campaign-finance investigation



Rep. Henry A. Waxman, California Democrat, is never far from the House floor to challenge conservatives. Photo by Kenneth Lambert/The Washington Times.

that he threatened to take the vote to the House Oversight Committee, chaired by Rep. Bill Thomas, California Republican.

"Fine," Mr. Waxman said. "It could not get any worse."

House Majority Leader Dick Armey, Texas Republican, said Mr. Waxman is protecting President Clinton.

"I wish Mr. Waxman would show more leadership for the American people rather than the White House stonewalling effort," he said.

Still, fellow Democrats love Mr. Waxman for his loyalty to liberal causes and his skill at working their agenda into law. Many on both sides of the aisle credit him

with expanding Medicaid, beefing up water pollution controls, and putting the pressure on the tobacco industry when Democrats ran the House. And he has proven one of the more effective Democrats in their four years in the minority.

"Fifty percent of the social safety net was created by Henry Waxman when no one was looking," said Tom Scully, who advised President Bush on health care.

Friends and foes describe Mr. Waxman, whose west Los Angeles district includes Hollywood and much of the liberal entertainment community, as "dogged; he makes it a point never to leave meetings where bills are being negotiated —

to ensure the other side doesn't slip something by in his absence.

He does not have a reputation as a press hound, but is occasionally given to theatrics. Once, when the government reform panel, under then Chairman William Clinger, Pennsylvania Republican, was set to release a report on "Travelgate," Mr. Waxman led a walkout of Democrats, vowing, "I leave this committee with absolute disgust for it and its chairman!"

After one "particularly obnoxious performance," said one GOP aide, disgusted Republicans cut out photos of Mr. Waxman and put them in the bottom of ashtrays with the slogan: "Put your butts here."