

CONGRESSMAN HENRY WAXMAN WAXES OPTIMISTIC

By JEFFREY HALL

On a recent visit to his Congressional District, where he was the guest of Tom Safran at a Sunday morning brunch with constituents, Congressman Henry A. Waxman sounded several optimistic notes regarding the state of politics today. The return to Democratic control of Congress, he said, represented an example of checks and balances in action. "What we've had is a lack of accountability."

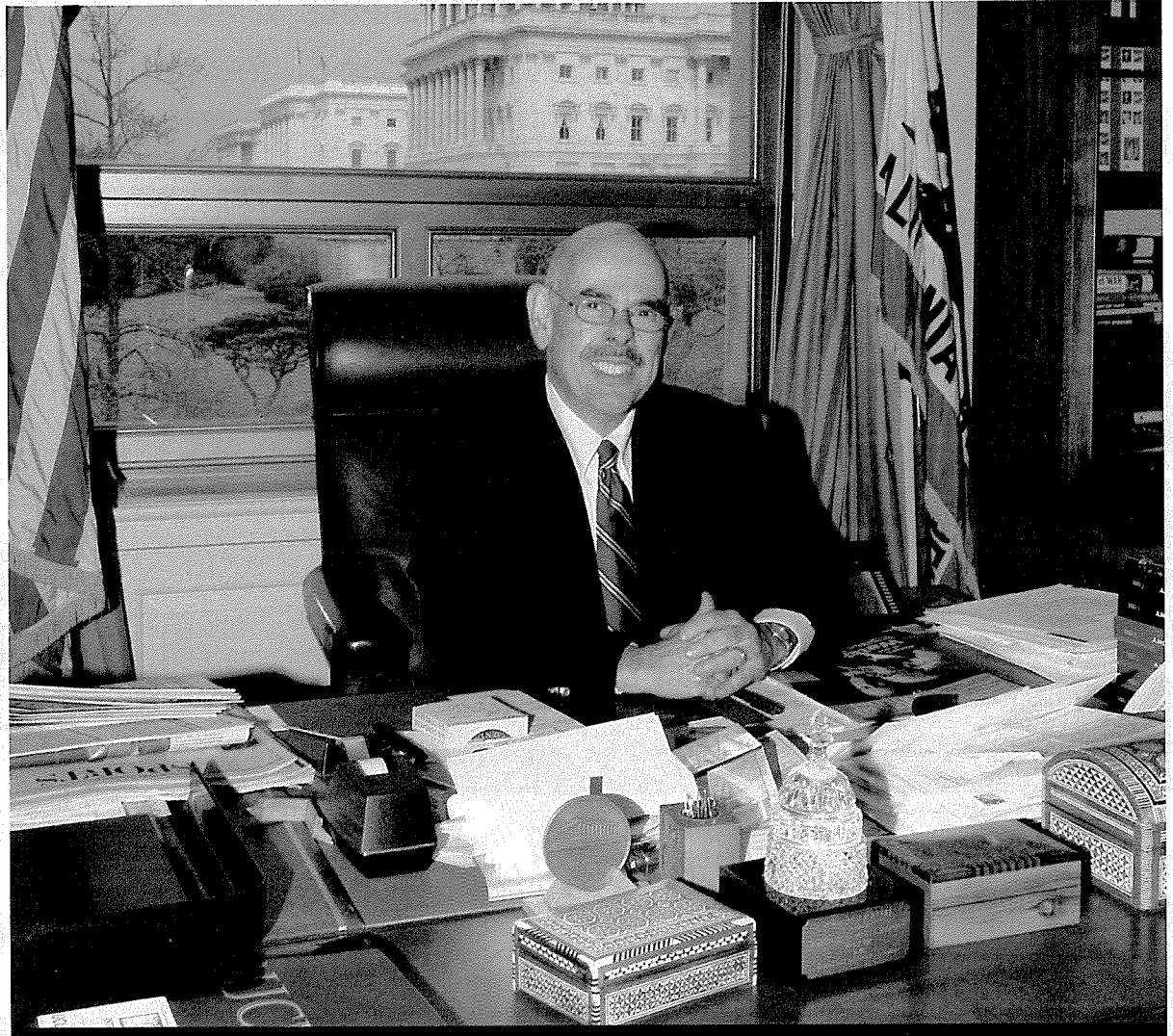
That said, the congressman, described by Time Magazine as the "scariest guy in Washington" because of the subpoena power he now holds as chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, promised that Democrats would not be as partisan going forward as the Republicans have been in recent years.

He indicated that there would be investigations, but these investigations would focus on issues that should be of equal interest to both Republicans and Democrats. He cited the case of \$12 billion in cash that went missing in the early days of the Iraq conflict and nobody has ever really found out what happened. "Seeking out waste, fraud and abuse is not partisan. If there is profiteering going on, we ought to know about it."

Waxman, who has represented most of the Westside since 1974, pointed out that many government agencies that used to command respect are now viewed as highly politicized extensions of the current administration. He cited FEMA and the FDA in particular and indicated that even elementary school science curriculums had been affected. His visit here came before recent revelations about the removal of US Attorneys for political reasons by the Justice Department.

"It's not our job in Congress to be good Democrats or good Republicans," he said. "We used to work together." He noted that much of the legislation he's been associated with over the years (clean air, clean water, AIDs research, nutritional labeling) became law only with Republican support. But he said that in recent years, Republicans stopped working with Democrats ... with the Grand Old Party just pushing through measures that they knew they had the votes to pass. He cited the Medicare Prescription bill as an example of lawmaking "at its worst."

Waxman said that now, with Democrats in charge of Congress, significant progress could be made on issues such as global warming, the development of alternative fuels and finding a way to end the war in Iraq. On the local front, he indicated hoped for progress being made on the problem of traffic. Specifically, he said he was taking steps to overturn an earlier ban on tunneling beneath Wilshire Boulevard that he had supported years ago. Doing so would be necessary if a subway was to run from downtown to the ocean; obtaining matching federal funds would be crucial to such a project.



"Seeking out waste, fraud and abuse is not partisan," he said. "If there is profiteering going on, we ought to know about it."

— Congressman Henry Waxman

Regarding another local issue — commercialization of the VA land — he cited his opposition to such development. Waxman said he thought Democrats should go along with initiatives to make redistricting less partisan. This might not be popular with some of his Democratic colleagues, he said, but it was still "the right thing to do."

Another right thing to do, he observed, was to create more opportunities for young Americans to serve their country in such venues as the Peace Corps, Vista and Teach for America. "We live in the greatest country," he said. "Everyone has an obligation to participate,"

whether through military service, charity, volunteering or simply voting. He also said that health care insurance was another looming issue and that it was encouraging that states were now taking the lead in legislating health care measures.

Returning to the partisanship issue, Waxman said if he were a Republican he'd be "very disappointed" in what has happened in Washington in recent years. Republicans were driving up deficits, pursuing "earmarks" to promote pork barrel spending and getting involved in issues that used to be considered a matter of states' rights.