

## Congressional Man of Letters

Henry Waxman Puts His Own Stamp on Enron Probe

By MARK LEIBOVICH  
*Washington Post Staff Writer*

Repeat, spinmeisters: "Enron is a business scandal, not a political scandal."

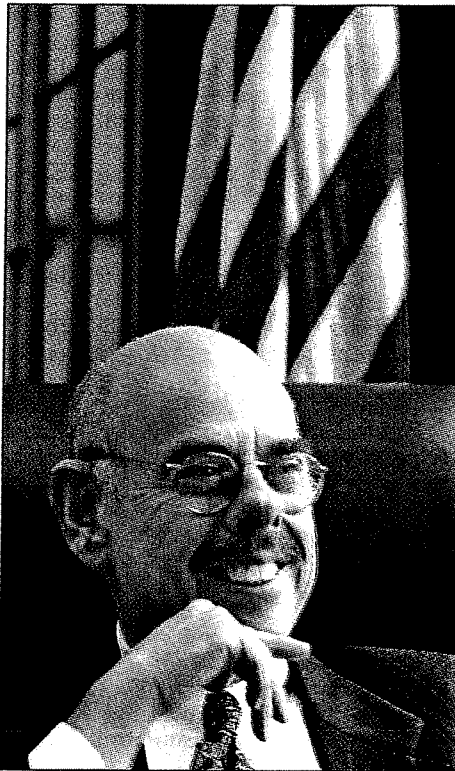
Hearing this mantra (again), Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) smirks his seasoned smirk, the smirk of a man who knows exactly when he smells the garbage disposal backing up.

"The Republicans are willing to hold hearings and say how terrible it is for employees and investors," says Waxman, 62. "But they are so careful to run away from any suggestion that this is an indictment of our political system."

Waxman is not, and even as 10 congressional committees have launched Enron-related inquiries, the pugnacious partisan has taken on the role of intentional nuisance in recent weeks. He has barraged Enron executives and administration officials with letters, demanding a library of information that may or may not turn out to be relevant to the investigation.

Enron is just the latest cause to

See WAXMAN, C4, Col. 1



BY MICHAEL ROBINSON-CHAVEZ—THE WASHINGTON POST

**The California Democrat's latest letter campaign demands information on the Enron scandal.**

# Alpha Mail: Rep. Waxman Puts Power Back in the Pen

WAXMAN, *From C1*

register on Waxman's outrage meter. His office has set up an "Enron Tip Line" on its Web site, inviting prospective whistle-blowers to share information that might be useful to Waxman's investigation. So far the line has yielded about 2,000 responses—not counting another 2,000 from right-wing antagonists and the occasional anti-Semite.

The responses have included dozens of promising leads from current and former Enron employees. Late Tuesday, a package arrived at Waxman's office that included nine videotapes of Enron employee meetings Lay presided over last year. And last month Waxman received a video e-mail from an Enron employee that led to the disclosure that Enron's top executives had touted its stock to employees when the company was on the verge of recording the biggest bankruptcy in U.S. history.

To many Democrats, these maneuvers are "Classic Henry," the work of a dogged liberal champion who has been a gadfly in the GOP's ointment since he was elected to Congress in the Watergate class of 1974. He has fought for, among other causes, tougher clean-air and water standards, more funding for AIDS research and harsher measures against tobacco companies.

Lately, Waxman has insinuated himself boldly into the Enron probe, and he has done this without the benefit of subpoena power, a committee chairmanship or a Democratic majority in the House.

"He's becoming the biggest pain in the [expletive] in Congress," said one high-level staffer for a Republican House committee chairman, referring to Waxman's penchant for writing letters.

Waxman's most recent letter was to Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.), urging the chairman of the House Government Reform Committee to hold a hearing on Enron's political ties to Washington. Burton said he would get back to Waxman on last Friday, but yesterday, Waxman had not received a reply. No matter. Waxman's staff promptly posts these letters on his Web site.

Burton has been one of Waxman's favorite addressees in recent years. Wouldn't it be easier to corner him in the hall? Hallway conversations don't provide grist for the Web site, though, or lend themselves to scholarly citations. "It's hard to talk to each other with footnotes," said Phil Schiliro, Waxman's chief of staff.

The Bush White House has been the latest target of Henry-grams, a modern version of the "Dingell-grams" popularized by Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) in the 1980s. He has written a flood of missives to the White House and Cabinet—to Vice President Cheney, to Karl Rove, Andrew Card, Lawrence Lindsey and Paul O'Neill, among others. "Henry Waxman, yes, I'm familiar with him," says Jennifer Millerwise, Cheney's press secretary. "I believe he's been writing a lot of letters."

Beyond that, Millerwise would not comment on Waxman, whom former Wyoming senator Alan Simpson once called "tougher than a boiled owl." He meant it as a sign of respect, a familiar echo among Waxman's Republican adversaries, at least on the record. "He is a worthy opponent," says former California congressman William Dannemeyer, "indefatigable in his vision for America."

There is also a less charitable view that Waxman should have something better to do than write letters.

"You use whatever resources you have, and we don't have the resources of being in power," Waxman says.

He can be tenacious to the brink of monomania, devoted to his work and his issues to the exclusion of congressional backslapping or socializing. He has few close friends on the Hill and relishes a late-night policy discussion with his staff.

He represents the Bel Air, Hollywood and Beverly Hills district of Los Angeles, whose liberal and well-heeled voters have made him a reelection shoo-in. This dominance has spared him from worrying about single-issue interest groups and their advertising budgets. Compared with other members, Waxman spends relatively little time in his district—about one trip every three or four weeks.

Hobbies? "Henry loves to take long walks with his wife," Schiliro says.

Waxman doesn't like sports, rarely reads fiction and partakes of a me-

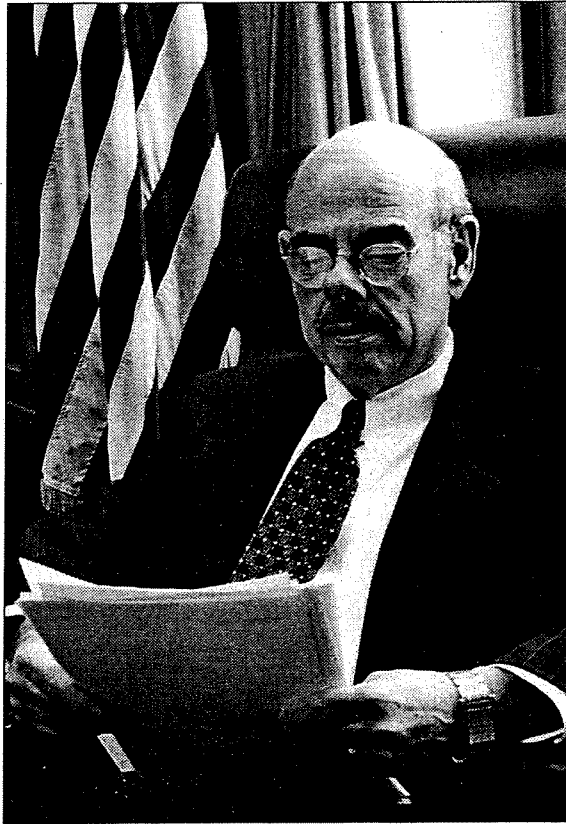
dia diet heavy with NPR, PBS and books on tape, mostly about history and politics, although he says he's listened to three of the four Harry Potter books. A pile of unread news clips, journal articles and memos adorn the bedside of his Bethesda home, which he shares with his wife, Janet. They have two children and three grandchildren. A Conservative Jew, Waxman never works on Saturdays. "Henry is someone who knows his priorities and he does not get diverted," says Mel Levine, a former Democratic congressman from Los Angeles who served with Waxman from 1983 to 1993.

Waxman quibbles with the notion that he is no fun. As he sits in his Rayburn Building office, there is a hint of pain in his voice that one could think otherwise. "I think I have a very good sense of humor," he says, shaking his head. "But I don't think that comes across when I'm sitting there growling at a witness."

He doesn't tell jokes, he acknowledges. He prefers the contextual, ironic brand of humor, the "Seinfeld" variety—one of the few non-PBS shows he ever made a point of watching.

Ultimately, he says, "I don't care

**Waxman, who came to Washington in 1974, has few close friends on Capitol Hill. "Henry . . . knows his priorities and he does not get diverted," says a former colleague.**



BY MICHAEL ROBINSON-CHAVEZ—THE WASHINGTON POST

whether the world knows about me. I just want the world to care about some of these issues and care about some of the things that I care about." Waxman is suddenly ill at ease until the conversation returns to Enron, "this terrible tragedy," a subject that seems to both horrify

and invigorate him.

"Whenever I feel I can't be outraged about anything anymore," Waxman says, "something like Enron comes along." He turns to an aide and asks if Burton has responded to his recent letter yet.

Not yet.