

## KeyOpinion

## You Cannot Embarrass Katherine Harris

Richard L. Hershatter  
Contributing Columnist

*When a solon has been caught in double dealing,  
But two years later gives the money back,  
It's not from any sudden surge of feeling;  
It's merely to avoid a lot of flack.*

*Once the deed is done, a crime has been committed,  
And when the person's caught (s)he has to pay;  
A breach of ethics cannot be permitted;  
At least, not in the good old U.S.A.*

**News item** — 1994: Riscorp makes illegal contribution of \$30,000 to Harris for State Senate campaign.

**News item** — 2004: MZM Corporation makes illegal contribution of \$50,000 to Harris for U.S. Congress campaign.

**News item** — Two years later, candidate for U.S. Senate Harris gives the \$50,000 to charity and makes statement deploring "disrespect for the rule of law."

**March 15, 2006** — Harris promises to donate \$10 million of her own money to her election campaign.

Poor Katherine Harris: she didn't know the gun (gift) was loaded. It's a problem many of her Washington conferees seem to have a problem with these days.

Unfortunately, reversing direction and firing the load off in a different direction doesn't make the outcome any better, as Dick Cheney could have told her.

The facts are these: the law limits monetary contributions from an individual to a U.S. Senatorial candidate to \$2,000, and prohibits making a donation in someone else's name or bundling contributions from employees and then reimbursing them the amount of their contributions. Violation of the law is a felony.

You can kick in an additional \$2,000 in your wife's name, of course, but the only way that can be brought up to \$50,000 is if you're a Utah follower of Brigham Young and support 24 wives.

The purpose of the restriction is to prevent undue influence and a situation in which a heavy contributor

can exact special favors, such as introducing a federal funding request for the donor's pet project or according him the privilege of hosting the candidate at a fancy restaurant for dinner.

The MZM Corporation has had many millions of dollars in defense contracts, and Congresswoman Harris did enjoy a sumptuous meal with the president of the company and introduced a request for funding for the company (which was not granted).

In her defense, Ms. Harris reported that she would have done as much for any citizen, with or without the meal and \$50,000 in campaign contributions.

She conceded, however, that "in hindsight," she would have done things differently. (KFC or McDonald's, perhaps?)

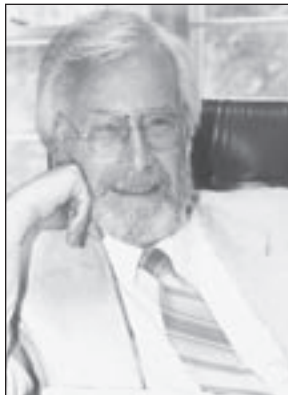
Actually, it is easy to understand the lady's confusion, for it seems that in the United States Congress, all the big boys do it.

Representative Tom Delay has been forced out of his leadership position because of an indictment in the courts of his home state for very similar peccadilloes.

The company president responsible for the Harris \$50,000 has pleaded guilty to bribing Republican Congressman Randy Cunningham, of California, with cash and gifts and dinner at sumptuous restaurants, and the Congressman has resigned.

He also admits to illegal contributions to a Republican congressman from Virginia.

And the recent scandal involving lobbyist Jack Abramoff is still unfolding, as his "little black book" continues to spew forth names of recipients from both political parties, with hands and tin cups held out in eager anticipa-



tion.

It's a sad situation. When the founding fathers established the wonderful concept of "checks and balances," they could not have anticipated that one-party rule would give rise to a situation where cash and checks would throw the government off balance.

It is enough to make citizens look back nostalgically to the era when all scandals were sexual in nature, and people only shot at each other after challenges to a duel in defense of the honor of one's mistress.

This column is not meant to demean or embarrass Representative Harris. Ambitious and hard-driving, her claim that any breaches of law were inadvertent should be accepted at face value.

As of this writing, however, polls indicate that come November, her candidacy will go down in flames like an aborted fourth-of-July rocket.

Sadly, it is evident that the lady is in over her head. She would have been better advised to run for the United States Senate from New York, opposite Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The advantages are twofold: She doesn't need to be a resident — all that's required is a statement supporting the New York Yankee's baseball team, and the ethical ground rules were originally established by the late Mayor Jimmy Walker.

*When a politician takes a contribution,  
Then claims (s)he didn't know the cash was bad,  
All excuses will not stave off retribution  
At the polls when voters find that they've been had.*

*For a bribe's a bribe — no matter how you paint it,  
And can't be used in anyone's campaign;  
And once it's known the money's truly tainted,  
Any hope of winning goes right down the drain.*

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## Here's Congress

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Contributing Columnist

Right now, seven responsible citizens in Florida's 13th Congressional District are engaged in the time-honored practice of asking their fellow citizens to elect them to Congress. On the Republican side, you have a formidable list of candidates. Vern Buchanan is making the biggest splash because he has already started his TV campaign. This also tells you he is likely the best fundraiser. He is opposed by Sarasota Tramm Harding and state legislator Nancy Detert. Detert has some district recognition and already had some input nationally when former New Jersey governor, Christine Todd Whitman, came out to headline a fundraiser for her. On the Democratic side there are two who really matter. Jan Schneider is gearing up for her third try, having lost twice to current Congresswoman, Katherine Harris. She is being seriously challenged by Christine Jennings, a Sarasota banking executive. This is likely a very decent group of people, most of whom are quite accomplished and remarkably successful.

They are all pledging to do things for us that either need to be done or they think we want done. We are told electing one or the other will return government to the people, end waste and corruption, put an end to the influence of moneyed interests or even clean up the mess in Washington. Both Democratic and Republican candidates weigh in against government spending.

A word of warning to both the candidates and the citizens — none of you are going to curtail federal spending or the growth of government. The process will work against you, then grind you down and you will awake one day to find out you have become part of the mess in Washington.

Here's how it will happen. You can't get elected to Congress without money — lots of money. The money



you are raising now, like the money you will be raising to get reelected will come from (gasp!) special interest groups, or, as they like to say of themselves, citizens seeking access to the political process. So right from the start you find you can't escape the influence of money and the special interest groups.

But let's say you get elected. Now you can go to work and fight for the taxpayer. You are ready to tune out the special interests to better enable you to hear the voice of the people. The problem is, now that you are in Washington, you are not going to meet any of the people. They are all back in the 13th District working so they can pay their taxes. The people you meet with are from organized groups who want prized access to the political process and, if you help them get that access, they will give you support, i.e., money.

You will often be a prisoner in your office and you will spend a good deal of your time listening to people from organizations for every conceivable purpose on this planet. A few will have relevance to the 13th District. Spokesmen for the elderly will seek you out immediately because there are many elderly in your district and they (we) are a demanding lot. You will quickly discover there are legions of special interest groups lobbying on aging issues. Some, like Seniors Against Federal Extravagance, only oppose spending not dedicated to insuring all retirees, including the very wealthy, can siphon money from the still-working class. Then you will learn, in mind-numbing detail, about the programs of the Council for a Livable World and how, if we would just follow the dictates of the member college professors, we and the world would be just fine. You will probably remember that William Buckley once observed that he would rather be governed by the first 2000 names in the Boston phone book than by the Harvard faculty. You probably now agree with him.

Other groups will pin you to your desk. The Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals will come in on animal rights. Any one of the 67 educational lobbying groups will pound on your door because they want money to study why no one is learning anything. Others will want money to establish that we don't need

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