of recent developments. It is hard to fathom, for example, why Justice Department investigators were so clearly taken by surprise when it turned out that the Democratic Party had engaged in a systematic scheme of juggling its books, transferring money from one account to another in possible violation of the law. Had the investigators been doing their job, they would have also discovered months ago that the basis for Ms. Reno's repeatedly saying that there were no credible allegations of wrongdoing against Vice President Al Gore was flat wrong.

After disclosures in the press that the Democrats mixed campaign accounts that are supposed to be rigidly separate, Ms. Reno abruptly announced that her department would actively consider asking for a special counsel to take over the case. But there really is no need for delay in recognizing the obvious. Moreover, it would be a political subterfuge to limit the special counsel to Mr. Gore. His boss has earned one, too.

The first order of business ought to be fixing responsibility for the Democrats' fundraising abuses, not simply the shuffling of accounts but whether there were any quid pro quos for all those donors and whether anyone in a major responsibility knew of the laundering of money and illegal transfers of funds from foreign sources. Among the highest priorities, in addition, is determining whether Mr. Gore violated Federal laws by soliciting money from big donors from his office at the White House.

There may be a temptation among Democrats and others to suggest that bookkeeping violations are inconsequential. But that would be a fundamental misreading of the issue. The reasons go back to the reforms that followed the biggest political scandal in modern American history.

Watergate led to two historic changes in American politics. First was the establishment of a process in which the Attorney General may seek the appointment of a special prosecutor, which later became known as an independent counsel, to investigate cases against top Administration officials. In 1993 when the statute was renewed, Ms. Reno herself affirmed the importance of being able to turn to an outside counsel to avoid ''an inherent conflict of interest'' when the Attorney General, an appointee of the President, must oversee an investigation that could damage the Administration politically. She is burdened by that conflict today.

Watergate also produced limits on campaign contributions that were flagrantly violated last year. Since 1974, it has been illegal for an individual to contribute more than $1,000 to a Federal candidate per election or more than $20,000 per year to a political party for candidates election expenses. Individuals may not give more than $25,000 in such contributions a year for all candidates and parties put together. These strictly limited contributions that are used for direct candidate support are called ''hard money.'' Federal election law separates hard gifts from the unlimited ''soft money'' that can be given to the party for their operating and promotion efforts. Last week we learned that the Democratic National Committee routinely deposited soft money in its hard money or candidate accounts without informing the donors. Although some of the money was later shifted to other accounts, it is clear that the D.N.C. was casual about one of the law's most basic distinctions.

Ms. Reno's primary duty is to uphold the laws on the books. But her Democratic loyalty seems to flow toward those bearing endless legalistic explanations as to why the laws either do not mean what they say or can be ignored with impunity. She should step aside and let someone with a less partisan view of law enforcement take over the crucial task of investigating the White House money flow.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. EWING] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. EWING addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Montana [Mr. HILL] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. HILL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. HORN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. HORN addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. DIAZ-BALART] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. DIAZ-BALART addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. MANZULLO] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. MANZULLO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. ROGAN (at the request of Mr. ARMEY), for today, on account of illness.

Mr. COLLINS (at the request of Mr. ARMEY), for today, after 1 p.m. and the balance of the week, on account of a death in the family.

Mr. LAZIO of New York (at the request of Mr. ARMEY), for today, after 2:30 p.m., on account of illness in the family.

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska (at the request of Mr. ARMEY), for today, after 6 p.m., on account of personal reasons.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Mrs. MORELLA) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. HORN, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. MANZULLO, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. JONES, for 5 minutes, on September 29.

EXTENSION OF REMARKS

By unanimous consent, permission to revise and extend remarks was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. MOLLOHAN) and to include extraneous matter:)

Mr. KANJORSKI.
Mr. MATSUI.
Mr. CLAY.
Mr. MORAN.
Mr. MILLER of California.
Mr. POSHARD.
Mr. TORRES.
Ms. Christian-Green.
Mr. FILNER.
Mr. UNDERWOOD.
Mr. CLEMENT.
Mr. LIPINSKI.
Mr. STARK.
Mr. SHERMAN.
Mr. MARTINEZ.
Ms. Velázquez.

(The following Members (at the request of Mrs. MORELLA) and to include extraneous matter:)

Mr. GOODLING.
Mr. WALSH,.
Mr. WOLF.
Mr. CASTLE.
Mr. MCCOLLUM.
Mr. PAPPAS.
Mr. DAVIS of Virginia.
Mr. GILMAN.
Mr. WATTS of Oklahoma.
Mr. RILEY.
Mrs. MORELLA.
Mr. PORTER.

SENATE BILLS REFERRED

Bills of the Senate of the following titles were taken from the Speaker's table and, under the rule, referred as follows:

S. 542. An act to authorize the Secretary of Transportation to issue a certificate of documentation with appropriate endorsement for employment in the coastwise trade for the vessel FAR HORIZONS; to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

S. 662. An act to authorize the Secretary of Transportation to issue a certificate of documentation with appropriate endorsement for employment in the coastwise trade for the vessel VORTICE; to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

S. 880. An act to authorize the Secretary of Transportation to issue a certificate of documentation with appropriate endorsement for employment in the coastwise trade for the vessel DUSKEN IV; to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

ENROLLED BILLS SIGNED

Mr. THOMAS, from the Committee on House Oversight, reported that that