of California

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 3, 2003

HON. DOUG OSE

Presidential Gifts Accountability Act

The total value of gifts retained by the former First Family over an 8-year period creates at least an appearance problem. The fact that so many gifts were undervalued raises many questions. The fact that gifts were misplaced or lost show sloppiness and maybe more. The fact that U.S. government property was improperly taken is troubling. And, the fact that, after the former First Lady's election to the U.S. Senate and before she was subject to the Congress' very strict gift acceptance rules, the former First Family accepted nearly $40,000 in furniture gifts and the First Lady solicited nearly $40,000 in fine china and silver is disturbing at best. Public servants, including the President, should not be able to enrich themselves with lavish gifts.

The revised version of my bill, which I am introducing today, reflects several recommendations made by public witnesses at both hearings on the earlier version, these include the President of Common Cause and the Director for Public Service of The Brookings Institution stated, "In this moment of heightened public confidence in government, the presidential gift process offers the potential for staggering embarrassment and diminished accountability. The current fragmented process for logging, valuing, and mangling gifts to the president defies bureaucratic logic, and appears to frustrate accountability than enhance it. One could design a more unwieldy system if any, are needed to prevent future abuses.

In my Subcommittee’s hearing and findings, and recommendations made in my Subcommittee’s hearing and a second hearing by the Government Reform Subcommittee on Government Efficiency, Financial Management and Intergovernmental Relations. The Report’s findings included: Non-Competitive Hiring of Political Appointee for Career Job, Some Gifts Over the Reporting Threshold Were Not Disclosed, Some Gifts Were Solicited, Many Gifts Were Undervalued, Some Gifts Were Not Included in the White House Database, Some Gifts Were Lost, Questionable White House Counsel Rulings, Some U.S. Property Was Taken, Most Furniture Gifts Were Coordinated, Some Gift Certificates Were Accepted, and Huge Gifts to the Presidential Library.

The Subcommittee found that several laws, involving six Federal offices and agencies, govern the current system. In February 2001, there were press accounts of numerous furniture gifts to the White House residence, which the Clintons returned to the U.S. Government. These press stories led me to question how the current Presidential gifts system works and what legislative changes, if any, are needed to prevent future abuses.

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 1104) to prevent child abduction, and for other purposes: Ms. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1104 the Child Abduction Prevention Act. This legislation takes a significant step toward bringing child abductors to justice by aiding law enforcement agencies to effectively prevent, investigate and prosecute crimes against children. H.R. 1104 also provides families and communities with immediate and effective assistance to recover a