Cover Story: Congress's new class: wild at heart

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By Richard Miniter

As it winds up its first semester on Capitol Hill, Congress's freshman class hasn't become the monolith that many pundits foresaw. Its members are a varied bunch and, while most want change, they favor different approaches, both individually and through their parties.

There are a lot of new faces getting their first look at Congress -- and many don't like what they see.

The largest freshman class since 1948 has been quick to take on everything from the picayune (one freshman thinks the electrical wiring is poor) to the gigantic (another wants to change nothing less than the way Congress is run). After all, as one former House member told freshman Rep. Ed Royce, a California Republican, "You'll never see things clearer than when you first arrive."

The differences between the new crop of lawmakers and the old guard can be measured in many ways. The 110 newcomers to the House of Representatives, who make up about one-fourth of the legislative body, are younger, less likely to have served in the armed forces and more likely to be women or members of a racial ethnic minority. In fact, participation of women and minorities is at a record high, largely because of new interpretations of the Voting Rights Act, which led 13 states to draw congressional districts specially designed to elect minorities.

Part of the reason for the large freshman class is that 1992 brought a record number of retirements (65) and more defeats of incumbents in primaries (19) than in any year since 1946.

Although as a group the freshmen are slightly more likely to hold advanced degrees than are veteran congressmen, they're slightly less likely to be lawyers. But law remains, by far, the best represented profession in Congress.

Though more than 65 percent of the freshmen hold advanced degrees, a number have other noteworthy educational backgrounds. Rep. Rick Lazio, a New York Republican, has the distinction of being the first graduate of Vassar College, traditionally a women's school, to be elected to Congress. Both Rep. Ron Klink, a Pennsylvania Democrat, and Rep. Mac Collins, a Georgia Republican, admit they never pursued college degrees.

Like any other freshman class, the new members in the 103rd Congress have their share of nerds, grinds, preppies, leaders, followers and mischief-makers. Congress is just like high school, goes one joke on Capitol Hill, only with ashtrays and money.

The anti-incumbent fever that swept over the electorate last year brought a variety of characters into office. There's Oregon Democrat Elizabeth Furse, a South African-reared peace activist. Because she was born in Kenya, says one solemn, khaki-clad aide, "she can never be president."

And there's Maryland Republican Roscoe Bartlett, a 67-year-old inventor who holds 20 patents and is one of the few members of Congress with a doctorate in a hard science, physiology. There also is Illinois Democrat Bobby Rush, a former Black Panther. Rep. Martin Hoke, an Ohio Republican, is a virtuoso classical pianist, while Rep. Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky, a Pennsylvania Democrat, can lay the claim to longest name in Congress.

This class may end up being different from its predecessors in a much more important way -- its members are out to change the Congress. Part of the impetus for change is that many of them won't be around to enjoy the privileges of seniority. To date, 15 states have imposed term limits on their congressional representatives. "I have six years to make changes in Congress," Rep. Richard Pombo, a California Republican, told the minority leader in a much-publicized phone call. "I have no time to waste."

Though the freshmen seem to want change, Democrats and Republicans go about it differently When Democratic freshmen wanted to take a crack at institutional reform, they demanded a meeting with each of the proposed committee chairmen in the House to see how responsive each would be to new ideas. There was some momentary trepidation on the part of the House leadership. The last time this request was made by a large group of freshmen was after the election of the "Watergate babies" in 1974 -- and the result was an ouster of the "old bulls." Nonetheless, this year the committee chairmen met with the Democratic freshmen and . . . nothing happened.

One reason was that these freshmen aren't revolutionaries like their earlier counterparts. Also, the Watergate babies are now chairmen themselves and have proved better able to hold on to power than those they replaced. The freshmen are political animals who have been tamed by years in state legislatures. For all the criticism of professional politicians made during the 1992 campaign, nearly 72 percent of the freshmen in both parties have held elective office previously.

This is especially true of Democrats. "Everywhere I go;" freshman Rep. Bob Filner of California told Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, "there are state senators to the left of me, state representatives to the right." Filner served on the San Diego City Council. As a rule, these newly elected Democrats are more likely to concentrate on influencing "the process" than on changing it.

But freshmen on the Republican side of the House say they want a revolution. Since one of four Republicans in the House is a freshman, and most tend to be more conservative than their elders, they provided the margin of victory needed to sweep conservatives into top party posts. Now Minority Leader Robert H. Michel, an Illinois Republican who cultivates a grandfatherly image and prefers negotiation, is surrounded by younger, more confrontational conservatives. "The freshman Republicans have continually been the spark that unites Republican opposition" to President Clinton's agenda, says Peter Roff, executive director of Americans for Tax Reform, a nonpartisan antitax group. Roff says freshmen were the key to unifying opposition to "tax increases and out-of-control spending."

The impact of Republican freshmen also can be seen in the way they changed the political calculus within their party. Rep. John Linder of Georgia proposed a three-term limit on ranking minority

members of committees. Pennsylvania Republican Bud Shuster, a ranking minority member on two powerful committees, argued that Republicans would be shooting themselves in the foot by placing rookies in key posts. Other senior Republicans may not have liked the term limits, but they couldn't muster the votes to stop it. "We have to practice what we preach," Linder says.

Next, there was the effort to abolish four of the five select committees. These committees were established to deal with problems such as hunger and aging, but, unlike other committees, couldn't draft legislation or send it to the House floor. Whatever product emerged from these select committees, which had combined staffs of more than 100, had to be referred to the relevant committee, which repeated most of the work done by the select committee before voting on it. To the surprise of the leadership in both parties, an initial vote favored elimination of the committees. When Michel scrambled to save them on a limited basis, it was the Republican freshmen who forced him to reverse course. Those committees now have been abolished.

The battle over Clinton's budget provided ample opportunity for freshmen Republicans to force symbolic votes, as two amendments to the so-called competitiveness bill show. The bill doles out more than $ 1.5 billion over two years in the form of loans and research grants by the Commerce Department and National Science Foundation. Georgia's Collins made a big splash with an amendment to limit the loans to legal residents of the United States. Worried they might be seen as unpatriotic, 37 Democrats switched their votes. The amendment carried, 263-156. Collins plans to attach similar amendments to all spending bills that allow amendments under House rules. (His amendment was the first piece of legislation from a freshman to be passed this term.)

Following Collins, Rep. John J. Duncan Jr., a Tennessee Republican who was elected in 1988, sponsored an amendment to cut the funding of the "competitiveness bill" by 10 percent. If Duncan's amendment had passed, it would have saved more than $ 154 million over the next two years, though spending still would have increased 148 percent. "This amendment gives members an opportunity to do more than just pay lip service to doing something about the deficit," Duncan said in a speech. He was counting on freshman support to carry the amendment over the top.

The vote was close -- 208-213 -- but controversial. All five congressional delegates -- who represent American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands -- voted against the Duncan amendment. Counting delegate votes is a new policy adopted by the House leadership this spring, perhaps to partly offset Republican electoral gains. Its chief advantage is psychological: The delegates are all Democrats, and counting their votes makes Democratic victories seem larger and defeats seem smaller. Under House rules, the delegates' votes can be nullified later if they determine the outcome of a vote. Since the Duncan amendment still would have failed by one vote without the delegates, Republicans couldn't force a second vote.

Rep. Clifford B. Stearns, a Florida Republican also elected in 1988, rose next to sponsor an amendment to cut the funding across the board 9.9 percent. Stearns's amendment essentially was identical to Duncan's except that the proposed cut was $ 100,000 less. This prompted an interesting colloquy on the House floor. Rep. Tim Valentine, a veteran North Carolina Democrat known for steering research grants to Duke University, urged his colleagues to vote against the cut.

"Do we give them Republicans another bite at the apple? Do we stay here into the evening on the fifth day, as I said? Do we suffer them to offer amendments reducing it by $ 100, and if that fails, $ 50? Where does it end, Mr. Chairman?" he asked.

The Stearns amendment also failed, and freshmen Republicans got an education into how the Congress works. "It is aggravating in terms of what we see going on," says Royce, who wants the House to obey its own parliamentary rules rather than waive them whenever it is convenient.

As for Valentine's remarks, Royce said they were "not surprising, given the mind-set around here."

Valentine's complaint -- and a string of other defeats -- didn't deter freshman Rep. Rod Grams, a Minnesota Republican, from sponsoring an amendment to save an estimated $ 200,000. The Grams amendment would bar the use of House funds to move congressional offices prior to an election year.

With Clinton drawing many Democratic congressmen to serve in the executive branch, there have been a number of midterm elections. Since members' offices are doled out by seniority, and some offices are much better than others, each time a congressman moves out an average of four others move up. Grams's amendment would have allowed moves only every two years. The winner of the special election would move into the office of the congressman he replaced.

This outraged some of the old guard. "You mean a freshman would get former congressman, now budget director Leon Panetta's office?" one surprised Democrat asked Pombo. Panetta's change of address set in motion 31 other office moves.

"If you can't cut $ 200,000, how can you cut $ 2 billion?" asks Pombo. After all, he says, the measure was "totally internal; there were no special interests involved." None other than congressmen, anyway. The Grams amendment passed, but was made nonbinding.

For now, the Democratic House leadership can sidetrack or contain the efforts of freshmen who want to trim the budget or streamline Congress. But change is coming. Former President Nixon predicts that the Republicans could pick up 25 House seats in 1994 -- which could give the perpetual minority party working control of the House and a fresh brigade of revolutionaries.

In the midterm elections in 1978, the last time a Democrat occupied the White House, the Republicans gained 33 seats. Linder thinks Republicans will achieve a majority: "I think we can win this House in the next three election cycles, maybe sooner." In the meantime, freshmen will continue tugging at the sleeves of establishment and calling for change.

Ed Royce (R-Calif.)

Born: Oct. 12, 1951, Los Angeles. Occupation: Tax manager Family: Wife, Marie Terese Porter Political Career: California Senate, 1983-93. Committees: Foreign Affairs; Science, Space and Technology.

Ed Royce is leaning forward in his chair, his hands trying to give form to his ideas. "They are trying to rewrite history. They're trying to convince people that the prosperity of the Reagan years was anything but," says the freshman Republican from Orange County, Calif. To get to Orange County, the heart of Reagan country, you can fly directly into John Wayne Airport, and when you

say "they" out there, most of the time you mean liberals.

"Republicans have become the tax collectors of the welfare state," he says, more worried about the size of the deficit than the size of goverment. "If we froze spending at 1980 levels, by 1984 we would have had a balanced budget. If we froze spending at 1984 levels, the budget would have been balanced by 1989," he says. Instead, spending outpaced both economic and tax revenue growth throughout the 1980s.

After a decade in the state Senate, Royce is a seasoned lawmaker -- but he's enthusiastic about slimming down the leviathan. And, unlike many politicians, he is equally enthusiastic about cutting entitlements in his own district. He wants to trim farm price supports, maybe even phase them out. And he is opposed to what he calls "corporate welfare," even though the aerospace firms he represents are lining up for government assistance.

"I think that large corporations were the losers in the 1980s," he says, citing statistics that almost all of the 18 million jobs created in the Reagan era were in firms with less than 100 employees. Overall, the Fortune 500 lost some 4 million jobs. Large companies are bureaucracies just like government agencies, he says. And to survive in the recessionary 1990s, big business is turning to big government for guaranteed loans, tax credits, research subsides and other industrial policy bonuses. Royce opposes these.

"All the would-be entrepreneurs, because of the new tax breaks, will pay the price for the loans that government gives to big business," Royce says. "That's not the government's role."

Taxing successful small businesses to subsidize large ailing ones isn't the only thing Royce wants to change. There is also the small matter of changing the way Congress works. If he could change just one thing about Congress, what would it be? "I'll have to think about it," he says one morning.

Later that day the phone rings. "I've got it! I got the answer!" Royce says. "Follow the rules."

Congress should obey the original rules of order, he says, the ones that get waived virtually every time the House acts. He has discussed the issue with the House parliamentarian, the official responsible for interpreting the operating rules of the lower house.

The original rules were written by Thomas Jefferson, who formulated them for the Senate. The House adopted them soon thereafter. Royce plans to offer legislation to require the House to obey its own rules.

This is no small matter. If Royce succeeds, many of the techniques used by Democratic chairmen to pass unpopular bills would be taken away. Passing legislation would be much harder.

Specifically, Royce's proposal would open most committee meetings to the press and the public, maybe even C-Span. This would include closed-door meetings of the Ways and Means Committee, which recently locked out the public and voted to use the Social Security tax increase for general revenue instead of putting the money in the Social Security trust fund.

Bills also could be amended much more easily That would reduce the power of the Rules Committee to decide which amendments can come to a vote. "Our goal is to make sure that every member's vote is as equal as possible," Royce says.

Returning to Jefferson's rules also would spell the end of what Royce calls "ghost voting." That is when committee members who are not present for the hearings and debates on a bill simply give their proxy to the committee chairman. With a handful of proxies, the chairman usually can decide the fate of legislation. Royce compares the congressional committee to a jury in which half the members are absent during the trial and the foreman gets to decide the verdict.

Royce's proposal would eliminate the practice of the "rolling quorum," which allows a committee chairman to keep a voting session open indefinitely. Usually, this maneuver is used to give the chairman enough time to buttonhole wayward lawmakers and gather the votes he needs.

Since returning to Jefferson's rules would greatly diminish the powers of Democratic chairman to run the House, the majority party probably will toe tag Royce's proposal the same way it did Ronald Reagan's budgets -- "Dead on Arrival."

Richard Pombo Calif.)

Born: Jan. 8, 1961, Tracy, Calif. Occupation: Rancher Family: Wife, Annette Rena; one child. Political Career: Tracy City Council, 1990-93. Committees: Agriculture; Merchant Marine and Fisheries; Natural Resources.

He's probably the luckiest freshman in the Congress.

Aside from his one term on the Tracy (Calif.) City Council, Richard Pombo had never run for public office. When the 32-year-old talked to his wife, Annette, "she thought I was teasing about running for Congress." His brothers and parents were "a little skeptical at first, too," he admits.

Most political veterans would have called the 11th District, which includes parts of San Joaquin and Sacramento counties, a safe Democratic seat. Democrats outnumber Republicans by about 15 percent in the mostly agricultural district.

His fundraising base? Mostly family and friends who have known him all his life. About 80 percent of his funding came from inside the district, which is unusually high. And most of the money from outside the district came from Amway distributors.

His preparation? Pombo, who calls Amway "grass roots free enterprise," joined the consumer products company in 1979. The company asks salesmen to recruit other salesmen in a rapidly growing company that rarely advertises. He says it makes good preparation for campaigning. "Amway makes you step out of your comfort zone and teaches the basics of how the free enterprise system works."

His political training? On the campaign stump he just told people what was on his mind. "I wasn't giving a political answer. I just told them what I thought," he says. His thinking was largely shaped by dinner table conservation with his family. His parents, he says, admire Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan.

After a hotly contested campaign, during which his liberal Democratic opponent outspent him, Pombo won -- albeit by two points.

Once he got to Washington, he worked very hard to get on the Agriculture Committee. He says he earned his seat because of his background as a rancher, but also he mounted a full-scale effort to

win a seat, a move considered vital to reelection. He met Rep. Pat Roberts of Kansas, the ranking minority member on the committee. He sent out letters and made phone calls. Finally, when Rep. Wally Herger, another California Republican, decided to leave the panel, the Midwestern dominated Republican side of the committee made room for Pombo.

Next, Pombo set out to get on the Natural Resources Committee. He obtained a seat when he befriended the ranking minority member, Rep. Don Young of Alaska, and agreed that Westerners must stick together. Pombo, one of the cofounders of the San Joaquin County Citizen's Land Alliance, a grass roots property rights group, is expected to use his position to rein in government land seizures.

The whole wetlands issue is "totally polluted," he says. "I don't think government bureaucrats are really happy with wetlands regulation. I think they are tired of going into a dry field and telling a farmer it is wetlands."

"Wetlands, probably the single most contentious environmental issue during the Bush administration, promises to be a political battleground in the 103rd Congress. The legal foundation for wetlands regulation, the Clean Water Act, is up for reauthorization this term. Pombo is planning some reforms.

"We need to redefine wetlands," Pombo says. The first criterion "is that wetlands must be wet," he says, referring to federal regulations which were designed to safeguard navigable waterways but are used to regulate crop fields and irrigation ditches. "If they implemented the law the same way they did in the West, all development would stop in Washington D.C.," Pombo says. Much of Washington was a swamp in the last century.

Pombo also is wary of federal regulations that designate future park land without buying it immediately. Who can sell his home, he wonders, when everyone knows that the land will be condemned someday?

Pombo supports the efforts of Rep. Gary Condit, a California Democrat who wants to compensate farmers and other landowners when federal regulations deprive them of prudent use of their land. Farmers stand to gain if Pombo's bill passes, because federal wetland and endangered species regulation is closing off more and more profitable farmland.

Some environmentalists argue that this approach could leave the federal government holding a large bill for compensation, perhaps running into the billions of dollars. "That's the point" Pombo exclaims. "You can't take something without paying for it."

Pombo argues that Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt should concentrate on better managing existing public lands, rather than adding more acreage to federal holdings.

Pombo is also skeptical of " Wilderness Area" bills that permanently set aside undeveloped land. Their supporters always claim, he says, that a new wilderness area would increase recreation opportunities for the public. But, he says, most areas are open only to hikers, not to the camping favored by families and senior citizens.

Pombo is almost sure to give environmentalists a run for their money. He says his general approach to environmental protection is to "encourage people through economics" to do the right

thing.

One suggestion: Reward landowners for increasing the number of endangered species living on their property. Currently, discovering an endangered species is disastrous, since it usually means that the landowner faces severe restrictions on the use of his property. The restrictions are so onerous that they lead some landowners to take pre-emptive strikes. Some Montana ranchers kill endangered bears that wander onto their land -- their motto "shoot, shovel, and shut up." Near Escondido, Calif., a television news crew was given a rare opportunity to videotape an endangered bird, but they were sworn to secrecy by local government officials. Homeowners might be tempted to kill it, they were told.

Under Pombo's reward system, the landowner's incentives would be reversed in favor of the species. "The profit motive would be there," he says. "We could use economics to create more species, rather than regulation to clamp down on private property." Pombo is looking into drawing up legislation for the reward program.

Don Hamburg (D-Calif.)

Born: Oct. 6, 1948, St. Louis. Occupation: Teacher Family: Wife, Carrie; four children. Political Career: Ukiah Planning Commission, 1976-80; Mendocino County Board of Supervisors, 1981-85. Committees: Merchant Marine and Fisheries; Public Works and Transportation.

The freshman who most defies categorization is Democratic Rep. Dan Hamburg, a trendy northern Californian who talks like Alan Alda -- until politics comes up.

After discussing a South Carolina conference on storytelling he attended recently, Hamburg, a teacher, lurches into politics. "I was disgusted with the election of Ronald Reagan," he says. He considers Reagan "stupid, petty, nasty and mean," but, on the other hand, he says he can understand why people follow such "pied pipers." Why? "Government does some incredibly stupid things," he says.

Hamburg, who favors bolo ties and soft slacks over Washington power suits, says he beat incumbent Republican Rep. Frank Riggs, who was known for his aggressive conservatism, by stressing "meaning and accessibility."

His fund-raising secret? Concerts by Bonnie Raitt. His appeal to local industry? A call to decriminalize marijuana, a major cash crop in Hamburg's district. Even astronomer and author Carl Sagan supports the medicinal use of marijuana, he says.

John Linder (R-Ga.)

Born: Sept. 9, 1942, Deer River Minn. Occupation: Financial company executive. Family: Wife, Lynne; two children. Political Career: Georgia House, 1975-81; candidate for Georgia Senate, 1980; Georgia House, 1983-91; Republican nominee for U.S. House, 1990. Committees: Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs; Science, Space and Technology; Veterans' Affairs.

Linder Financial Corp. is doing really well -- something that bothers the freshman congressman who owns it.

John Linder started the company in 1977 when a neighbor approached him for a loan that was too

small for a local bank to bother with -- about $ 50,000. Linder, a practicing dentist at the time, thought the man's assets made him a good credit risk and loaned him the money. Soon, his asset-based lending business took off and he left dentistry.

Now he is one of the few lenders to sit on the House Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs Committee. Still, he doesn't like the number of businesses banging on the doors of Linder Financial Corp. -- which he sees as part of a larger problem.

"Regulation is forcing businesses to come to me instead of banks," he says, sitting in his high-ceilinged Capitol Hill office. "Bankers are forced to spend one day out of every five on regulatory compliance." With such a heavy regulatory burden to bear, most banks refuse to make the kind of loans small businesses need. The regulation costs more than the profit they could earn.

Linder wants to lighten the load on banks through dramatic deregulation. "The public is getting fed up," he says.

Linder also is getting fed up with what he sees as government waste. Though he concedes that cold turkey is a tough way to go, he'd like to phase out welfare. He trots out the statistics: "From 1968 to 1993, we spent more than $ 3 trillion on welfare. That's enough to buy every share in every Fortune 500 company and every acre of farmland in America. And everything we've done is wrong."

He cites the statistics on the breakup of the family since the Great Society took effect. Increases in violent crime. Divorce. Illiteracy. "We've turned every poor area into an Indian reservation," he says, "where government replaces the influence of the breadwinner with the influence of the bureaucrat."

Linder knows about the problems of Indian reservations firsthand. He grew up near the towns of Ball Club and Inger, which are part of an Indian reservation in Minnesota. "I was the only white guy to play on the Inger baseball team," he says.

The former catcher tells the story of a talented player offered a place on a professional minor league team in Wisconsin. He left with great confidence and high hopes, but returned six weeks later. The gifted player couldn't make all the decisions required by big city life, Linder says. "Even as a 17-year-old I could see the government had stolen something from these people. It had stolen the ability to make decisions."

Linder, who worries a lot about creating a culture of dependency, says he once started to write a book called Paternalism and the Human Spirit. What would he do to make the dependent autonomous again? He has a list: Reward the father who lives with the mother of his children, instead of encouraging single parent welfare families. Provide extra, police. In short, "give them a share of equity in America."

Linder answered Clinton's challenge to "get specific" about spending cuts by submitting a list of 120 small cuts totaling $ 348 billion over five years. Most of the proposed cuts are politically safe: freezing pay for civilian government workers for one year ($ 38.S billion), prohibiting welfare and unemployment payments to illegal aliens ($ 27 billion) and lowering the target price for subsidized crops by 3 percent ($ 11.2 billion). And, of course, Linder supports privatizing the

National Helium Reserve, created when the Navy used blimps in the 1930s, to save an estimated $ 122 million a year. "That's my favorite," he says.

Sometimes Linder plays waste-busting detective. He surprised the federal Office of Civil Rights in Atlanta recently The office, which is responsible for enforcing the Americans with Disabilities Act and other laws, handles some 700 complaints per year with a staff of 103. That's a little more than 13 complaints a week.

Linder wondered how staff members kept themselves busy. Since the computers aren't linked, each complaint must be typed at least twice. The office employs 13 lawyers who simply read the responses to complaints. If the office decides to sue, the congressman was told, they hire outside counsel.

When Linder asked the director what the annual budget of the office was, he was told, "That's a good question, congressman." The director's deputy didn't know, either.

Then, Linder discovered how the office receives its 700 complaints a year. It hires advocacy groups to file complaints targeting school districts and other public agencies. "One woman called 23 school districts and filed complaints based on one phone call each," he says. Linder asked for a full investigation by the General Accounting Office.

If the Office of Civil Rights in Atlanta wants to see a model for reform, Linder says, it should look at his district office in the Atlanta suburbs. There, three full-time employees and one part-time employee handle about 700 complaints per year -- none of them manufactured.

Jay Dickey (R-Ark.)

Born: Dec. 14, 1939, Pine Bluff, Ark. Occupation: Lawyer; restaurateur Family: Divorced; four children. Political Career: Pine Bluff city attorney, 1968-70. Committees: Agriculture; Natural Resources; Small Business.

Jay Dickey's district includes Hope, Ark. -- Bill Clinton's birthplace -- making him Clinton's hometown congressman. Dickey's district also includes Hot Springs, where Clinton grew up.

He's one of two freshman Republicans who won in Arkansas this past November. Dickey's election marks the first time ever that a Republican has represented this district. Republicans had been in the habit of running sacrificial lambs in that part of Arkansas. Roy Ruude, the 1990 Republican nominee for the seat, spent only $ 1,600 and, for the most part, only wrote letters to the editor of the local paper. The folks in the 26 counties in Arkansas's southernmost congressional district are mostly "yellow-dog" Democrats -- they say they'd rather vote for a yellow dog than a member of Lincoln's party.

Even Dickey was a Democrat until he decided to run for Congress. He says he could have run as a Democrat but that if he had, he'd be voting the opposite of most Democrats.

Unlike most new congressmen, Dickey has little experience in politics. And, he says, he is hoping for a tough reelection fight. He'll probably get his wish. President Clinton is still popular in the mostly conservative Democratic district. Dickey is willing but hesitant to attack some of Clinton's policies. "Not many states get a president," Dickey observes.

Still, Dickey opposes Clinton's plan to open the military to homosexuals and is skeptical of first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's plans to reform the nation's health care system. "I just hope we actually reform health care," he says, and don't use it to promote a hidden agenda.

Why is he hoping for a knock-down reelection fight? "I'm not a professional politician," he says. "If I have a tough reelection, it will be a good scorecard on me and this office."

Though he may be hoping for a real election scrap, Dickey's certainly taking stands designed to play well at home. He discussed his ideas for shrinking the budget deficit with Ross Perot, and a photograph of the meeting appeared in newspapers in his district. Perhaps his most populist proposal is a 2S percent cut in the $ 1.8 billion that Congress spends on itself each year. The Rules Committee declined to allow a vote on Dickey's amendment.

Congress eventually adopted a 1.5 percent cut. Still, Dickey got a lot of mileage out of lawmaker profligacy "The legislature has asked the American people to sacrifice $ 322 billion to reduce the deficit and only themselves a pitiful $ 27 million."

In another populist reform, Dickey is pressing the House leadership to allow a vote on the Congressional Accountability Act, which has the support of some 225 members on both sides of the aisle. The act would eliminate clauses that exempt Congress from laws such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Freedom of information Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Social Security Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Dickey is at his best criticizing the institution he recently joined. He says there is "no desire to cut expenses" in the House of Representatives, refers to "this imperial Congress" and attacks its "lavish perks." "Reelection is the sole goal of members of Congress, and cutting spending might interfere with that goal," Dickey says. He recalls attending a parade in the town of Warren in his district, in which pedestrians shouted at him from the sidelines, "Cut spending! " Come 1994, this Republican on Clinton's soil might do all right.

Maurice Hinchey (D-N.Y.)

Born: Oct. 27,1938, New York. Occupation: State employee. Family: Wife, Ilene Marder; three children. Political Career: New York State Assembly, 1975-93. Committees: Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs; Natural Resources.

Maurice Hinchey doesn't think Congress needs much in the way of reform -- and if it did, the people would elect more Republicans who support "gimmicks" like the line-item veto and term limits.

Though term limits passed in 15 states, Hinchey considers them "undemocratic" because they interfere with the right of voters to choose their representatives. Term limits for committee chairmen, as proposed by Republican John Linder? "Not a good idea," he says.

And the much vaunted line-item veto, he says, is just another "fairy tale." After spending 18 years in the New York State Assembly, Hinchey says he can tell that Gov. Mario Cuomo's item veto "didn't make a lot of difference." In fact, research by the Milken Institute for Job and Capital Formation -- which is funded by junk bond king Michael Milken -- shows that Hinchey is right -- states with line-item vetoes spend more per person than states without it. But it ignores the

chicken-egg problem: Which happened first, the call for the line-item veto or the increases in spending?

One thing Hinchey does want to reform is the "revolving door between the executive branch or legislative branch and lobbying." Lobbyists ought to be more strictly regulated, he says. They should have to file more reports, and there should be a three year waiting period before officials can lobby their old office. Has Hinchey been barraged by lobbyists? No, he admits, putting on his jacket to make a close vote in the Capitol. "It is about same as in Albany."

The new congressman, who is considered liberal by the standards of upstate New York, favors "careful deregulation" of the banking system. He supports a technical change in the way savings and loan assets that are acquired by the Resolution Dust Corporation can be sold off.

Under the Bush administration, those assets were sold off in large bundles, knitting together a housing project in Chicago, a hotel in Palm Springs and a dog track in Miami. Hinchey thinks they ought to be sold off on an individual basis, which may provide a greater return for the government.

But Hinchey's "careful deregulation" does not include breaking down the remnants of the Glass-Steagal Act, a Depression-era law that limits the ability of banks to offer investment services to depositors. "It might lead us back to the excesses of Reagan-Bush" and force taxpayers to absorb another multibillion dollar bailout. The problem with the last 12 years, he says, "is that we swung widely from complete deregulation to reregulation."

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