

## **An Infuriating Effectiveness**

**May 2, 1998**

### **CQ Weekly**

By Jackie Koszczuk

Move over President Clinton. Republicans have a new Democrat they want to put in the stocks.

Although the nearly bald, five-and-a-half foot Californian is probably safe from accusations of wantonly exploiting his sex appeal, members of the GOP have no shortage of complaints about him, chief among which is his infuriating effectiveness in some of Capitol Hill's highest-profile political battles.

Take the GOP's campaign finance probe. By most accounts, Henry A. Waxman, 58, who is the senior Democrat on the House government Reform and Oversight Committee, has so consistently outmaneuvered Committee Chairman Dan Burton, R-Ind., that GOP leaders want to transfer the probe to the House Oversight Committee, which has proportionally more Republicans and -- perhaps most importantly -- no Henry Waxman. (CQ Weekly, p. 1062)

In the ongoing struggle over tobacco legislation, GOP leaders concluded that Waxman had managed to negotiate too sweet a deal with Commerce Committee Chairman Thomas J. Bliley Jr., R-Va, who was ordered back to the drawing board after GOP small-business supporters objected to a proposed smoking ban in restaurants.

"Waxman is sharp," said Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., who has been on the opposing side of arguments in the Commerce Committee. "He promotes a strong liberal agenda with all of his heart, and you can't just push him over. He's a scrapper."

Although a rabid partisan, Waxman, after 24 years in the House, is willing to compromise from time to time, even if that means achieving his ends incrementally. That gives him more credibility among Republicans than other, more intransigent liberals.

He is also unflappable in the heat of battle, which serves to amplify the tactical weaknesses of more temperamental adversaries, such as Burton.

"Even when Henry Waxman is being unreasonable, he comes across as reasonable," said Rep. Mark Souder, R-Ind., a conservative on Government Reform who has tangled with Waxman.

His attributes are not universally appreciated, however. GOP Rep. Christopher Cox, a fellow Californian on Government Reform, accused Waxman of strong-arm tactics in withholding the Democratic votes the committee Republicans needed to grant immunity to some witnesses.

"I think it's an embarrassment to him. And it's not an effective strategy for the ranking member," Cox said.

As the leadership probe threatens to move the probe to House Oversight, Waxman characteristically shrugs and smiles. "It makes no difference to me," he says.