

The O'Neill-Jaworski Show

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AS WE WERE suggesting the other day, if anybody can save the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct from making a fiasco of its investigation into the Korean connection with assorted past and present House members, Leon Jaworski probably has the right credentials and qualifications to do it. But the more we learn about the handling of this investigation, from its inception right up to the manner of the installation of Mr. Jaworski, the more we are beginning to wonder whether the right question isn't whether, in fact, *anybody* can do it. True, the committee has given Mr. Jaworski a reasonably free hand, a measure of independence and considerable job security. And Mr. Jaworski has given back to the committee at least the aura of respectability and serious purpose that it so badly needed after the rancorous departure of Philip A. Lacovara, the previous special counsel and chief investigator.

But "aura" is the operative word. You still have to ask yourself whether the committee—and, by extension, the House itself—is even half-way serious about its work. For behind the facade supplied by the employment of Mr. Jaworski there remain structural defects in this investigation that merely begin with its narrow focus on the South Koreans among all the many big foreign spenders in town.

We don't want to be picky about this—the House investigation admittedly was inspired (if that's quite the right word) by a concurrent Justice Department investigation that centers solely on alleged Korean efforts to buy influence from House members. But it cannot have escaped your notice that on the same day that Mr. Jaworski was chosen to investigate South Korean influence-buying, the Justice Department filed a lawsuit seeking information about South African sugar-lobbying activities involving campaign contributions and free airplane rides for members and staff aides of the House Agriculture Committee. The fact is, of course, that when you get into foreign influence-buying in Congress you are opening up a large can of worms. This probably argues for a wider House investigation, at some point. But it also argues for an immediate effort by the members of the Flynt

committee to demonstrate that their own record in these matters makes them fit to sit in judgment on the Korean case. The committee's investigators have asked the full membership of the House to disclose any Korean connections and most have responded. The committee members are also said to have submitted confidential affidavits having to do with cash or gifts from *any* foreign interests. But these submissions, of course, do little to inspire public confidence—and quite a lot to invite suspicion—as long as they remain secret.

The question remains how much the committee cares about public confidence—or even about appearances. That the Speaker felt the need to intervene in what can only be seen as a heavy-handed and (for the committee) humiliating way to resolve the Lacovara crisis says something only about *his* concern for public confidence and appearances. And even then, the terms of Mr. Jaworski's employment suggest a certain insensitivity to the look of things. Unless some part of the arrangement has escaped our notice, he will be investigating the members of the House, without pay, while remaining a partner in a law firm whose practice has included, and presumably will continue to include, efforts to influence the course of legislation. It remains to be shown whether even Mr. Jaworski's solid reputation for integrity can withstand the apparent conflict here.

In the meantime, Mr. Jaworski is due in town in mid-August—when the House will be in recess. Will the committee let things slide until after Labor Day? Will it meet more regularly than the casual once-a-month that has been its custom? Will it move to develop and refine a code of penalties to go with the code of offenses drawn up by Mr. Lacovara so as to ensure that any disciplinary action it may recommend will be fair and uniform? Will it reveal whether any of its members have connections with any foreign interests of the sort that they are investigating? Not until there are answers to these questions can the public be expected to feel confident that "standards of official conduct" are something the U.S. House of Representatives takes seriously.