

Gray's Campaign Expenses Probed

By Jack Anderson

"I'm a poor man," said Rep. Ken Gray (D-Ill.) plaintively.

He admitted, of course, that he owns a helicopter suitable for hopping over Washington traffic jams. And a luxurious, 50-foot houseboat. He also wears the fanciest clothes in Congress, selected each day from a vast wardrobe of stylized suits.

We discovered that he helps to pay for his high living out of campaign collections. Last year, he amassed a \$26,000 campaign chest, which he tapped for such unlikely campaign expenses as carpeting his houseboat and buying tickets to Washington Redskin football games.

Gray had little legitimate need for campaign funds, since no credible candidate ran against him. As evidence of this, he ran up the biggest plurality of any congressman in the country. Nevertheless, he hoarded over his campaign finances like a possessive shopkeeper. He was his own campaign treasurer.

The dapper Democrat is a power on the House Public Works Committee, which has jurisdiction over highway construction and other public works. Many of his contributors, it developed, have their hands in this particular pork barrel.

Highway builder H. H. Barter, for example, contributed \$2,500 to Gray's campaign. Barter was reluctant, however, to talk to us about it. All he would say was that he did federal contract work "once in awhile."

Another highway contractor, Eugene Simond of Carbondale, Ill., kicked in another \$2,000. He refused to answer any questions at all. Still another road builder, R. B. Potashnick of Cape Girardeau, Mo., gave Gray \$500. James Knott, who is in the asphalt business, coughed up \$450.

In addition, Gray was paid a \$300 honorarium by the American Institute of Architects and the Consulting Engineers Council for a speech on public buildings legislation.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee funneled \$1,000 to Gray. "They asked me if I had a tough race," he explained. "I said no, but if there's money left over, I do have other needs." He collected another \$1,000 as his cut from a post-election, debt-clearing dinner thrown by Illinois' Gov. Daniel Walker.

He stated repeatedly that he was "providing people-to-people service" and that the bills paid out of his campaign funds were not "for personal aggrandizement."

To pick out a few items, \$1,000 was taken out of his campaign chest to make a boat payment to the Kings Craft Company; another \$560.34 went to the Rubins Discount Carpet Center for boat carpeting, \$536 to the Anacostia Marina for boat repairs and \$411 for pleasure boat liability insurance.

These expenditures, said Gray, were essential for entertaining constituents. Referring to the insurance policy, he added fiercely: "If a Boy Scout falls overboard, I want to be covered. I don't want to be sued for what little I have."

Gray also charged off as campaign expenditures \$250 to the Washington Redskins football team, \$200 to the Baltimore Bullets basketball team and \$85 to the Ringling Brothers Circus. There were also several small expenditures, such as \$25 for Rep. Ed Boland's (D-Mass.) bachelor party, \$15 for an HEW reception and several \$8 payments to the Coca-Cola company.

He considered it a legitimate campaign expense, he said, to "give a Coke to a little kid who's been walking all over town sightseeing."

Gray also pays a lot of bills with his Bank Americard, then pays the credit card company

out of campaign funds. We traced almost \$3,000, which was diverted from his campaign funds to pay Bank Americard bills.

He admitted that a counsel to the Clerk of the House had warned him that some of his campaign expenditures might be "questionable." About the time we began our investigation, Gray also rushed off a letter to the Clerk, dated Sept. 6, 1973, acknowledging that "official campaign expenditures should be separated from legitimate operational expenses concerned with my office."

When my associate Bob Owens asked the congressman about a \$3,500 loan listed only as "accommodation for two constituents," Gray, demanding to know the source of our story, grabbed Owens by the tie, clenched his fist and threatened to strike him.

Footnote: According to the Internal Revenue Service, a congressman who uses campaign funds to defray personal expenses must list it as personal income on his tax returns. Gray told us he had done this on his 1972 tax returns. He showed my associates a \$3,800 figure, "diverted" to personal use, which he had listed as income.

(c) 1973, United Feature Syndicate