

Congressmen's stamp buying questioned

Washington—Eight lame-duck congressmen used taxpayers' money to buy enough stamps to paper a post office during their final months in office last year, House records show.

The purchases—which totaled nearly 400,000 stamps—were made even though retiring congressmen can use their official House franking privilege. That provides them with postage-free mailing for 90 days after they leave office.

The congressmen said they needed the nearly \$60,000 in stamps for leftover business.

None of the eight had a history of making purchases of postage. Two of them bought no postage during their previous 12 months in office and three others purchased less than \$800 in stamps during that period the records show.

Several of the former congressmen acknowledged they took some of the stamps with them when they left office but said they needed stamps to meet future requests from their former constituents.

Large-scale purchases of stamps are unusual. Most congressmen use the franking privilege to send their mail.

And of the 73 members of the House who left office in January, only the eight purchased more than \$3,000 in stamps during their last three months in office.

The largest purchaser of stamps was Rep. Robert L. Leggett, D-Calif., who bought \$13,000 worth in his final three months in office—including \$3,000 worth on Jan. 2, 1979, his final day in office.

In contrast, Leggett purchased a total of \$2,700 in stamps during the previous 12 months, according to the House records.

Rep. B.F. Sisk, D-Calif., purchased \$2,800 worth of stamps in December and \$6,000 worth of stamps on Jan. 2. He made no purchases of stamps during the previous year.

Rep. James J. Delaney, D-N.Y., purchased \$8,000 in stamps in \$2,000 increments starting on Nov. 14 and continuing through Dec. 28. He also made no purchases of stamps in the previous year.

Rep. Robert N.C. Nix, D-Pa., purchased \$6,800 in stamps in December plus \$4,300 in September and October. Nix's office bought \$5,650 worth of stamps in the previous year with the bulk—\$3,050—coming in the third quarter of 1978.

Others shown in House records as making more than \$3,000 in stamp purchases during their final months in office were Reps. Fred Rooney, D-Pa., with \$6,323 in purchases; Newton Steers, R-Md., with \$5,000; John Young, D-Texas, with \$3,999; and John J. Flynt, D-Ga., with \$3,150.

a.p. datelines

Stamp purchases are permitted for "official business" by House rules, although "official business" has never been strictly defined.

Several of the biggest purchases occurred on the last day the congressmen were in office, according to the report of the clerk of the House.

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