STRICTLY HARESAY

Whose Responsibility Is Accountability?

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What does it say about us as a nation that its citizens aren't particularly surprised — or even very concerned — when elected officials routinely get caught with their hands in the proverbial cookie jar?

Last week, the state Commission on Public Integrity charged New York Gov. David Paterson with violating state ethics laws when he secured free Yankees tickets to the opening game of the World Series last fall for himself and others — this after his still-current domestic abuse scandal.

We read about these things, shake our heads, take another bite of toast and turn the page to the next — often similar — story.

Professor Robert Auerbach, who served as a banking committee investigator, and as an economist at the Treasury Department and at the Federal Reserve, wrote a book entitled, "Deception And Abuse At The Fed." In it, he claims that $5.5 billion was sent to Saddam Hussein in the 1980's — money that allowed Iraq to build up its military to fight Iran prior to the first

Gulf War, and that turned against us within a few years.

Considering Auerbach's background, his contentions hold some merit, and in fact, they are solidly backed by court rulings and other evidence.

"Well," we say. "Who knew?" And "Anyway, what can be done about it now?"

Today, while nearly 10 percent of our population is unemployed and American businesses have had to streamline and cut back in order to survive, our government is on the biggest spending spree in history. Right now, the State Department is building a $1 billion embassy in London — the most expensive ever built. The plans even include surrounding the structure with a moat. (One can only surmise that in complete absence of integrity, fear and paranoia rule: Beyond this point there be dragons!) When Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was asked about this massive expenditure, she claimed the funds for this

were coming from the sale of other properties.

The reasonable solution here that would strike anyone with any common sense like a well-delivered blow upside the head with a 2x4 is: If money can be saved, then save it. Don't spend it on extravagances overseas when people back home can't find jobs or pay bills.

Thankfully, I'm one of the ones still working, still earning a living. I presently have two kids in college, and it's an expensive undertaking, but a worthwhile investment, I believe. However, they have a pretty significant role in the deal. They keep their grades up; they have part-time jobs, making their own contributions. They must do their part, and they're being held accountable.

If, for some reason, things changed and it looked like my hard-earned money was funding a fulltime party budget or loaf time, my contributions to the education-turned-funtime-fund would cease abruptly.

The current lack of accountability and transparency in our leaders on government spending is appalling. And my guess is, as long as it's allowed, it'll continue.

Maybe we the citizens of this great nation — the trusting, tax-paying patriots of the United States — need to stop feeding the federal funtime fund until our government can be more accountable.

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