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WHEN Westchester voters sent Joseph DioGuardi to the House of Representatives in 1985, he was the first practicing certified public accountant ever elected to Congress. What he discovered shook him to his ledgers.

He found that Congress, supposedly the world's great deliberative body, continually, systematically and shamelessly deceives the American people by failing to disclose the true cost and financial condition of the federal government. It cheats on everything. It cooks the books. It hides and disguises its excesses. In a word, it's a thoroughly dishonest fiscal institution.

DioGuardi has put it all down on paper, in a book titled "Unaccountable Congress: It Doesn't Add Up," published by Regnery Gateway (\$17.95). It explains why the check-kiting scandal was inevitable, why the savings-and-loan debacle blew into one of

the biggest ballouts in U.S. history — and why our kids and grandkids are going to be left with debt up to their ears.

One of the remedies Joe recommends: Throw 'em out. Clean house from top to bottom. And if you need an incentive, think about Jim Wright, the speaker forced out of Congress for ethical improprieties, who is pulling down an annual pension of \$83,000, topping \$2 million if he lives a normal life span.

Joe recalls attending his first House Republican Conference meeting with 175 colleagues. The discussion quickly moved to money and budgets. An accountant with 22 years experience and a partner in Arthur Andersen & Co., one of the Big Eight international accounting firms, Joe was shocked at what he heard. He told them: "The real deficit is much larger than you think and the smoke-and-mirrors budgeting you're talking about would get corporate officials sent to jail. How can the people have confidence in their Congress when it promotes this kind of deceit in something as important as an \$800 billion national budget?"

Joe noted that Democrats played fiscal games all the time and they should be made to pay for it. He said: "We Republicans ought to stand for truth in gov-

ernment, truth in budgeting and fiscal responsibility." At that point, Joe says, a senior Republican got up and said: "Joe, you're in Washington now and it's time you put away those green eyeshades of yours."

Joe DioGuardi's education had begun, and it did not stop for two terms. His book is only a sampler, he says, because bad budgeting, accounting and reporting practices are so pervasive that it would be im-

possible to expose them in one volume. The cover of his book tells the whole story. It shows a gold congressional credit card boasting an unlimited credit line, no expiration date and the bill to be sent to future generations.

According to Joe, the average American taxpayer owes the federal government \$31,174.89. The debt keeps rising at alarming rates. The last time the federal government balanced its budget was in 1969. Since then, we've had 22 straight years of deficits, which now total \$2.4 trillion. In 1969, the total national debt was \$365 billion. Today, it is \$3.6 trillion.

How could this happen? Says Joe: "Because the American people unwittingly gave an unlimited credit card to the wrong people — their representatives in Congress."

The politicians resort to every "sleazy gimmick" imaginable to run up debt and hide it from voters. Joe rattles them off, most of them using phony accounting principles. Trying to get to the bottom of the deceit is no easy task. He says: "Exploring the financial management of the U.S. government is like being blindfolded and lost in the New York subway system — you don't know where you are, have no idea where you are going, and you could fall off the edge at any moment."

Joe says that one reason New York City collapsed in 1975 was because its books were a shambles. Those that had not been rigged to give false impressions were so disorganized that no one could work out what the city was doing with its money. Now the federal government is doing the same thing in Washington.

Joe calls the House of Representatives a "house of ill repute," a bastion of privilege and comfort that exempts its members from a whole package of laws the rest of us are required to uphold. It makes pretty scary reading.

Book bares Shame of Congress