

Rising Price of Politics

By **ROBERT WALTERS**

WASHINGTON (NEA) — When several thousand men and women gather for a mid-January dinner in Dallas, they will establish a record for the most money ever collected on behalf of a politician at a single event.

No candidate for any public office — including the presidency — has ever reaped \$1 million in gross proceeds from one fund-raising party. But Sen. John G. Tower, R-Texas, is about to surpass that mark.

Although the record Tower soon will set is a tribute to the efforts of the dinner organizer, political consultant Brad O'Leary, it typifies a disturbing trend in contemporary politics.

Each new election cycle produces increased pressure on office-seekers to start earlier, campaign longer and scramble harder for more money than ever before. "Campaigning and fund-raising," says O'Leary, "have become almost full-time jobs."

Item: In at least a half-dozen states throughout the country, candidates hoping to topple incumbents on this year's contests for Senate seats have been devoting virtually all of their time to that cause for more than a year.

They have in effect, established an extraordinary new standard for Senate races — the two-year-long campaign.

Item: Texas Gov. William P. Clements, a Republican, spent \$7.2 million in his successful 1978 campaign, with more than \$4.5 million of that total coming from loans advanced by Dallas banks and personally guaranteed by the candidate.

With 10 months remaining before Clements faces re-election, no potential challenger who has not already raised more than \$1 million is considered to be a "serious" candidate.

Item: West Virginia Gov. John D. "Jay" Rockefeller IV, a Democrat, spent more than \$11.6 million — virtually all of it his own money — on his successful 1980 campaign. That's the equivalent of almost \$30 per vote.

Item: Some members of the Senate who were elected in 1980 already have organized their 1986 re-election committees and have started fund-raising for political contests that won't be held for almost five years.

Item: In addition to uncounted millions of dollars raised and spent at the local level, Washington-based Republican committees poured an unprecedented \$4.5 million into 1979-80 GOP campaigns for seats in state legislatures.

Tower's term doesn't expire until 1984, but one of the axioms of modern politics is that accumulating a bulging campaign treasury far in advance is an especially

effective device for dissuading potential challengers.

"These days, you've got to raise money earlier and spend every dollar wisely," says O'Leary, one of the country's most creative and successful political fund-raisers.

The Dallas dinner ostensibly is being held to honor Tower after 20 years of Senate service. (He won a special election in 1961 to fill a vacancy created after Lyndon B. Johnson resigned to accept the vice presidency.)

Those attending the dinner will be reminded that Tower was the first Republican elected to a major statewide office in any Southern state since Reconstruction.

Political luminaries at the Dallas dinner will include Republican senators and a host of other notables — but behind that glittery facade is a single-minded effort to raise as much money as early as possible for Tower's campaign.

Prospective attendees were offered a choice of three ticket prices — \$200, \$400 and \$1,000 — and a trio of payment plans, two of which allowed installment payment spread over a year or more.

The seemingly endless upward spiral of raising and spending more money and devoting more time to campaigning may some day be halted, but that isn't likely to occur soon. "We could have done another \$1 million," says O'Leary with a smile.