

Chapter Twenty-Four

Senator Raymond sat before his office desk, staring angrily at the note that his wife had found the night of the feigned break-in. No question about its origin, he remarked to himself, but I'm not sure what to do about it. There's no way that I can show this to the authorities, lest they make a connection between myself and the perps. So, should I make it disappear? he wondered, while holding it above the shredder and then, deciding against it, rose and locked it into his wall safe. He walked back to the desk and pressed the intercom button. "Tammy?" he called.

"Yes, sir?"

"Bring me the Finance Committee file on the credit and banking industry."

"OK, is that all?"

"No, when is the next committee meeting?"

"Tomorrow."

"Already?"

"Yes, sir."

"Alright, bring me the credit industry draft that I've been working on, along with any copies that you have generated and, oh yes, the computer disk that contains the draft data."

"Is there a problem, sir?"

"Not any more," he replied as he hung up, thinking, lie down with pigs and you become one. If those slime balls think that they can threaten a state senator and get away with it, well, that'll be a cold day in Hell.

Senator Raymond entered the meeting room with a purposeful stride, his jaw set with an air of conviction, and took his place at the head of the oval table. "This is going to be a long night, gentlemen," he groaned, while facing the group of six.

"We had better get some more coffee," the oldest member lamented.

"Good idea but before you make the call, if there are no pressing issues left over from the last meeting, I'd like to take the floor," the senator announced.

"It's yours," another member remarked. "So, what have you got?"

"The draft of a bill that I am preparing for the next legislative session."

"Oh brother," the first man wailed, "we'd better add some sandwiches to the coffee order."

"OK, ready? Here it is. We the public, have been at the behest of the banking industry for as long as I can remember. They lured us into storing our hard earned money in their coffers under the guise of safety and in exchange promised us services and a paltry return on principal. But, I posit that their motives are anything but altruistic ..."

"What kind of revelation is that?" the coffee starved man interrupted.

"I haven't finished," the senator said, with a smile.

"Oh, then by all means, continue," the man added, with a disgusted expression.

"As I was saying, although there are innumerable instances of proof, the issue that I have chosen to address in my bill relates specifically to the enslavement of our populace by the banking industry and their indiscriminate issuance of credit vis-a-vis credit cards."

"But John," the committee's recording secretary implored, "do you really think that we should go there?"

"When you hear what I have to say, I think, nay, I know that you will agree."

"We all agree that there are problems," another added, "but our economy has grown to depend upon that system of credit."

The senator leaned back in his seat, silent, wondering if his two most vocal colleagues had been compromised, given that he had yet to present his draft. Rising from the chair, he slowly walked around the perimeter of the table. "I find it disturbing," he said, as he strutted, "that some of you have chosen to take issue with a topic that I have yet to fully disclose."

"Now, John, we just ..."

"Am I to assume," the senator interrupted, "that the banking lobbyists have already sunken their claws into the likes of this noble committee?"

"Yes and no," the secretary replied.

"Care to clarify?"

"Some of us feel that maintenance of the status quo is an acceptable compromise to the alternative."

"That being the loss of campaign contributions?"

"Well, yes."

"You're despicable," the senator hissed. "Have you forgotten about the fiduciary responsibility to your constituents?"

"No, but ..."

"You sure as hell have!" he interrupted. "I propose that we get on with the business that we have been entrusted with."

"Let's hear him out," the sole Hispanic member shouted.

"Thank you!" he said with a nod. "OK, here are my thoughts, short and sweet. I propose that the great state of California lead the nation towards a responsible credit attitude by creating a credit formulary that will curtail the industry's indiscriminate issuance of credit. By that, I mean, no more unsolicited credit card applications. In addition, there will be State oversight of the usurious finance charges and, first and foremost, civil liability for those credit issuers whose practices have led to a given class of individual's economic demise."

"That's tantamount to political suicide," the secretary remarked.

"No, it's responsible legislating," the Hispanic member interjected, "I applaud and wholly support the concept."

"John, do you have any idea who we'd be going up against?" the secretary asked, in an agitated tone.

"Yes, I do," he replied, while fending off the unwanted image of the now deceased Perry. "There is, however, one other element that must be addressed," he added.

"And that is?" the Hispanic member inquired.

"The new Federal bankruptcy legislation. I doubt that anyone will disagree when I say that it was clearly a special interest appeasement and I propose that the state of California stick it to them!"

"Are you nuts, John? You want us to sign on to a bill that negates that which congress has already agreed to?"

"Precisely."