The Permanent Campaign: Marketing from the Hill

by

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Like firms, legislators market themselves and their services. They research their constituents, they create and distribute programs and services tailored to the demands of their constituents, and they advertise themselves to their various constituencies. Though this chapter interprets legislators’ governing and campaign activities in terms of a marketing framework, legislators and their campaign staffs increasingly do think about governing and campaigning in terms of marketing. One reason is that professionals with marketing backgrounds play a central role in many congressional campaigns. Developments in computer, travel, and communications technologies further advance political marketing by giving politicians market research and advertising options outside the traditional party framework. The ability to extract large sums of money contributes to marketing by giving members the independence from traditional party groups to engage in their own campaigns.

Political marketing fits within a broader economic approach which views democratic representation as an exchange process between constituents and elected officials. Elected officials secure programmatic benefits and provide services for constituents in exchange for political support (e.g., votes or money). Of course, exchanges in electoral systems differ from those in a market system. In an electoral system, each voter has but one vote to offer and it is the collective vote that determines which candidate’s bundle of goods and services will be produced and distributed. Moreover, only one candidate with the most votes in a given geographic area assumes office—a steep barrier to successful market entry. The production and distribution of goods and services also differs from that of private sector firms. Legislative policies are made through collective decisions by independently elected individuals serving in separate institutions sharing power (Neustadt 1960, 33). Such a collective, yet fragmented decision-making process also makes it difficult to reliably and validly attribute credit and blame.
for outcomes, which complicates the issue of pricing in political exchanges at the congressional level.

**The Motives of Members of Congress**

Understanding how and why legislators behave the way they do requires first assessing their motives. Most legislators today are career politicians who seek to remain in office or attain higher office over the course of their professional life spans. Doing so requires winning reelection to office repeatedly, especially in the U.S. House of Representatives where members serve two year terms. Reelection thus is a central concern of incumbents seeking to maintain a career in politics (e.g., Mayhew 1974). Reelection frames legislators’ view of their responsibilities, decisions in office, and relations with their constituents.

Though other goals matter to legislators, reelection is an instrumental and proximate goal for most incumbents. Aside from reelection, members of Congress variably value making good public policy (a.k.a. satisfying philosophical goals), representing constituents, and/or gaining power in Congress (e.g., Fenno 1973). Attaining these goals usually requires reelection as an intermediary step. Changing legislative policy often requires years of effort to collect information, mobilize support, and build winning coalitions in Congress. Members usually need to get reelected several times to see their policy goals through to fruition. Even the relatively ideological Republican “Class of 1994” compromised principle for electoral expediency once it became clear that they would not accomplish their goals during the 104th Congress.³ Effective representation and the accumulation of power in Congress require attainment of a certain amount of expertise or political know-how. Learning how the system works and establishing the connections needed to operate effectively within the system requires time. Legislators need to be reelected repeatedly to satisfy these goals. Reelection thus becomes instrumental and proximate to the attainment of most members’ goals—even if they are not single-minded careerists.⁴
While members seek reelection, they are uncertain about their reelection prospects. Members of Congress fear electoral defeat even though most do not appear vulnerable by common indicators. Incumbents enjoy high reelection rates—averaging over 90% in the House and over 80% in the Senate over the last three decades, and they typically win reelection with margins exceeding 60% of the vote. Such statistics, however, belie the difficulty of maintaining a political career in Congress. Even with reelection rates of 90% every two years, the odds of maintaining a political career in the House for 12 years are less than 60% for the typical representative. Large electoral margins in a previous election do not imply safety in a volatile electorate loosely anchored by partisan loyalties (Jacobson 1992). Even apparently safe legislators can and do get defeated. As Thomas Mann (1978) observed, incumbents are “unsafe at any margin.” Finally, electoral statistics fail to capture the uncertainty that members feel about their renomination and reelection (Fenno 1978, 36). Every incumbent knows some presumably secure colleague who was defeated in a primary or general election. These personal experiences bring home the point that they themselves cannot take reelection for granted. The desire for reelection combined with uncertainty about their reelection chances motivates members of Congress to campaign incessantly. This is why political observers frequently talk about the permanent campaign in Congress. Members of Congress run scared—they act as if their chances of defeat are greater than may be the case in some objective sense, and they work hard to avoid that outcome (e.g., King 1997).

Candidate-Centered Campaigns in a Self-Help System

Legislators today bear primary responsibility for their own campaigns. The candidate is both product and primary salesperson. Politicians use candidate-centered campaigns rather than party-centered campaigns. The focus of the campaign is the candidate and the services he or she will provide if elected, rather than the political party he or she affiliates with. The image
conveyed is, “Smith, Republican for Congress” or simply “Smith for Congress” rather than “Republican Smith for Congress.” The campaign message and themes are tailored to the political and philosophical preferences of their electoral constituencies. Candidates assemble their own campaign organizations—typically staffed with a mixture of campaign professionals and volunteers recruited from local party organizations and interest groups. Most congressional campaigns employ a campaign manager to handle strategy and coordinate the campaign effort; a professional fund-raiser skilled in direct mail and other forms of financial solicitation; a pollster to develop, conduct, and interpret surveys; a media consultant and/or a press-secretary to develop a paid-media campaign and handle relations with the news media. Congressional campaigns utilize computer technologies to communicate with targeted groups of voters via direct and electronic mail. As more money becomes accessible, congressional candidates increasingly use broadcast media to reach voters their organizations and mailing lists do not.

Legislators use candidate-centered campaigns as a matter of choice and necessity. Candidates take responsibility for their campaigns in part because they cannot rely on the local political parties to deliver the vote and running their own campaigns gives candidates more control over their fate than the alternative. The decline of party loyalty and the rise of independent voters, coupled with increased split-ticket voting makes the electorate volatile. Weak partisans and independent voters can and do vote for candidates of both parties. Candidates cannot be sure that voters who identify with their party will provide a margin of victory in most districts and states. The decline of local party organizations in many parts of the country means that candidates cannot rely on their party as a mechanism for communicating with and mobilizing voters through grass-roots canvassing efforts. Candidates need to communicate with both partisan and non-partisan voters and they increasingly must do so with means outside
the traditional party framework. Legislators use their offices and their own campaign organizations to communicate with voters.

Candidate-centered campaigns allow legislators to deviate from the party line when doing so is electorally advantageous. The decentralized character of American political parties and the autonomy of individual legislators in Congress allows them to tailor their issue positions to local constituencies. For instance, a Democratic candidate in Oklahoma might adopt a pro-life position on the issue of abortion to be more electorally viable. Nationally focused congressional elections are uncommon. Such an instance did occur during the 1994 elections when Newt Gingrich sought to nationalize the focus of the congressional elections by getting all of the House Republican candidates sign a “Contract with America.” The Contract, however, excluded many of the more controversial issues on which the Republican Party is divided, so even the exceptional ‘94 elections allowed Republican candidates to adopt positions on social issues for local electoral considerations. Congressional elections typically follow Former House Speaker Tip O’Neill’s counsel that “all politics is local.”

Candidate-centered campaigns also help insulate incumbents from national trends adversely affecting their party by giving them independence from their political parties. By separating themselves from their party label or distancing themselves from an unpopular president of their party, members of Congress avoid collateral damage when scandals emerge or when the party gets blamed for failing to deal with the nation’s problems. Such insulation against national trends matters because individual members have little control over the economy or the popularity of their party’s presidential candidate. Deviating from the party line also benefits incumbents by undermining the informational value of the political party labels to voters. By lessening the informational value of party labels, voters look to other cues to make their decisions. Frequently, it is an incumbents’ name recognition and image—not that of the
party or the party’s presidential candidate, that voters think of when they decide who to vote for in congressional elections (e.g., Jacobson 1992; Herrnson 1997). Incumbents gain because they can use their offices to build their name recognition and develop a favorable image.

Candidate-centered campaigns thus increase the importance of holding office and give legislators more control over their careers. Local constituencies gain because reelection-oriented legislators are responsive to local interests and concerns and they have the flexibility and the opportunities to satisfy many of these demands. Exchanges between constituents and their representatives, however, are not distributed equitably. Groups and individuals who pay attention to legislators’ activities and participate—by communicating with their legislators, contributing money or time, and voting, derive more value from political exchanges (though they also offer more to politicians). Legislators pay more attention to attentive, involved publics and tend to be more responsive to them when it comes to providing services and programmatic benefits. Legislators’ differential responsiveness to various groups in society raise several normative concerns which I will address in the conclusion to this chapter.

**Marketing from the Hill**

Members of Congress campaign continuously because they want to maintain their careers, yet cannot be sure of reelection. They must rely on their own efforts since they cannot rely on party identifiers to provide the margin of victory or on party organizations to communicate with and mobilize voters on Election Day. Legislators’ concern with their next reelection and potential primary and general election opponents affects almost everything they do in office. It shortens their time horizons for evaluating the value of policy options. It affects how they allocate their time among legislating, campaigning, raising money, meeting with lobbyists, visiting their districts or states, and so on. Reelection concerns affect the style of governing—rhetoric, symbols, and images matter to politicians performing for electoral
audiences. Reelection concerns also affect the substance of governing as legislators work for or against numerous small amendments in committees and subcommittees and on the floor. Finally, legislators’ reelection concerns affect what does not happen; legislators often are unwilling to make decisions that could cost them support in the next election cycle.

The following sections focus on how legislators use their offices to market themselves. I will begin with constituency research, followed by the production and distribution of programmatic benefits and services, and legislators’ advertising activities.

**Researching Constituency Interests and Preferences**

Acquiring information about constituents is essential to legislators’ legislative and campaign activities. Legislators use such information for deciding how to vote on issues and what services to provide constituents. Their campaign staff use constituency information in forming campaign strategy, allocating resources, developing campaign messages and images, and identifying and targeting audiences for stylized communications. Such information is also used in soliciting campaign contributions. Groups considering an endorsement or a contribution (financial or manpower) often want information about a candidates’ support, issue positions, and chances of winning before they make a public commitment.

While legislators need information, they operate in conditions of variable uncertainty and risk; uncertainty varies across issues and over time and acting contrary to constituent sentiment could cost them electoral support. Legislators need to assess continuously the concerns and opinions of their constituencies, and they increasingly must do so with methods other than traditional party organizational channels. Declining party identification and loyalty mean that geographic constituencies are less predictable and more volatile. Redistricting and changing demographics create further uncertainty for legislators. The less partisan and the more heterogeneous their districts or states, the greater legislators’ uncertainty about their reelection
chances and the more they need to engage in constituency research. Declining local and state party organizations means that legislators cannot easily ascertain, through traditional party channels, the opinions and preferences of an increasing share of the electorate.

Legislators market themselves and their services to multiple audiences with differing concerns, interests, and preferences. Each district or state is composed of numerous constituency groups that pay attention to particular issues and that are more likely to be informed about and sensitive to a legislators’ record on that issue or set of issues. People who pay attention to politics and who initiate communications with elected officials tend to be better educated, have higher incomes, hold higher status occupations, and belong to an organized group (Conway 1991). These people matter for any legislator’s reelection efforts because they are more likely to contribute money, volunteer during a campaign, and vote. Reelection-oriented legislators, therefore, need to be differentially attentive and responsive to different constituency groups on different issues. Legislators have to identify which individuals and groups are concerned with what issues, what their preferences are, and what they need to do to gain or maintain their electoral support. At the aggregate level, legislators need to be concerned with their positions on a wide range of issues, even though most individuals in their districts or states will be unaware of what their representatives are doing on any given issue.

Legislators especially need to identify the concerns and preferences of groups more central to their reelection efforts. Legislators establish different patterns of relations with their geographic constituency, their electoral constituency—the people whose support is needed to win the general election, their primary constituency—the legislators’ most ardent defenders back home, and their personal constituencies—their friends and political allies with whom they have the greatest and closest interactions (Fenno 1978). Legislators also pay attention to a number non-geographically defined constituencies. Legislators need to be attentive to the people who
comprise their campaign organizations—the professional staff and the volunteers recruited from the ranks of party and interest group activists; party notables at the national, state, and local levels; and potential campaign contributors whose support must be solicited. Finally, legislators need to be attentive to local media—newspaper, radio and television reporters and commentators who communicate with large numbers of voters.

Members of Congress use a variety of methods to gauge public opinion and monitor social, economic, and demographic changes in their districts or states. Most members, for example, keep tabs on their districts or states through traditional methods like reviewing registration lists, evaluating the voting histories of individual precincts, and assessing various sources of demographic information. Legislators also gain feedback from their networks of friends and political allies who form their personal constituencies (Fenno 1978). Representative Bill Lipinsky (D, IL), for example, occasionally meets with Chicago aldermen and precinct chairs to identify supporters and set priorities for the delivery of services to areas in the district.  

Another common way legislators gather information is by traveling to their districts or states and meeting with constituents individually or in groups. Congress as an institution accommodates members’ desire to visit their constituencies by providing them with ample travel budgets, and by scheduling most legislative business between Tuesday and Thursday. Visiting ones’ district or state serves multiple purposes. Legislators solicit requests for assistance; listen to complaints; get constituent input on policy; shore up support among loyalists; consult with their friends and allies; advertise and claim credit for programs for the district or state; cultivate an image of “competence, empathy, and identification as being “one of us;” and explain or justify their activities in Washington, (Fenno 1978; King 1997). Legislators are able to engage in direct, interactive communication with their constituents to gain first-hand information about their concerns, complaints, and preferences. The particular topics and the types of information
gained through personal interactions with constituent groups vary, depending on the preferences of an individual legislator and the political culture of a given district or state (Fenno 1978). Issues and policies tend to not be major topics in legislators’ personal interactions with constituents (Fenno 1978, 153). Rather, legislators emphasize their accessibility and solicit requests for assistance from constituent groups and individuals (King 1995).

Members of Congress have given themselves considerable resources to gather and process information about their constituencies. Legislators’ personal staffs in the Washington office and in the various district or state offices keep tallies of letters and phone calls by constituents. Though only a fraction of the voters communicate with their legislators (e.g., Conway 1991), letters and phone calls are an important source of information. Monitoring letters and phone calls allows the staff to gain information about groups of people who matter for their legislator’s reelection chances. People who call or write their legislator tend to be more knowledgeable about politics, are more likely to vote in elections, and are sufficiently motivated to act on their concerns and preferences. Such people are often willing to spend their time and money in campaigns and vote, so pleasing them is important for legislators seeking reelection (Arnold 1990, 64-68). Moreover, writing letters and making phone calls are active expressions of one’s preferences and opinions. Polls, in contrast, reflect passive expressions of opinion which indicate breadth of opinion but not the intensity of opinion.7

Many legislators use the congressional frank to generate constituency responses which staff members record and process for use in future communications. Brief questionnaires are attractive to legislators because they are cheap—they can be sent out at taxpayer’s expense, and they can be worded to frame the legislators’ positions in a positive light. The downside of such questionnaires is that the information generated may not be reliable because of biased wording and response rates (Rieselbach 1995, 394). Still they can be useful as a probe to identify groups
within a geographic area for targeted communications. Representative Steny Hoyer (D, MD), for example, uses the frank to mail a postcard questionnaire to every household in his district to give constituents an opportunity to request further information on various topics. Hoyer’s staff keep records of the people making particular requests and then use the information to create a database for more targeted mailings to specific groups within the district (King 1997, 23).

As legislators raise larger sums of money, an increasing number of them are using polls to keep track of constituency sentiment. Surveys are used to identify constituency concerns, demographics, interests, and preferences, and to gauge an incumbent’s strengths and weaknesses. Such information is then used for setting campaign strategy, allocating campaign resources, developing messages and presenting an image, and targeting specific groups within the district or state (Hamilton 1996). Polls are often supplemented with focus groups to develop a more in depth picture of constituent sentiment or mood. Focus groups are particularly important for assessing voter priorities among a number of different competing arguments and messages (Hamilton 1996, 172). Pollsters and consultants use focus groups both to research constituency opinions and to assess voters emotional and psychological reactions to messages, symbols, and candidate personality to maximize the effectiveness of advertising messages.

Finally, lobbying deserves mention as part of legislators’ efforts to gain information about constituent preferences. Legislators are the target of numerous attempts to contact and persuade them on matters of policy. Providing information to legislators about client concerns, interests and preferences is a key part of the lobbying effort (e.g., Cigler and Loomis 1995). Such political information is desired by politicians yet tends to be in short supply (e.g., Kingdon 1989; Mathews and Stimson 1975). In this sense, lobbyists act as an extension of a legislator’s staff, helping to fill the “information vacuum” (Davidson and Oleszek 1996, 346). Lobbyists are a legitimate part of the legislative process even though political and representational asymmetries
Constituency groups are differentially attentive to and affected by events in the political realm. These “special interests” also vary in their political participation and hence in their impact on legislators’ reelection chances. Legislators’ attentiveness to lobbyists and interest groups is especially keen if clientele groups have a presence in their geographic constituency and/or contribute to their war chest. Legislators concerned with reelection need to be differentially attentive and responsive to such groups—both as a matter of representation and for maximizing their reelection chances.

**Production and Delivery of Services**

The decentralized structure and operation of Congress give legislators ample opportunity to claim credit for providing programs and services to their constituencies. The pervasive careerism among legislators has influenced the evolution of Congress’ organizational and procedural structures in ways that facilitate their reelection efforts (Polsby 1968; Cooper and Brady 1981). Legislators have established organizational structures and operational procedures to suit the needs of individual members as well as that of Congress as a whole. First, legislators have created institutional structures, procedures, and norms that allow them to obtain programmatic benefits, often referred to as pork-barrel legislation, for their constituencies through mutually beneficial logrolls (e.g., Fenno 1973; Shepsle and Weingast 1981). Second, the legislative process has structural biases that allow legislators the opportunity to block policy changes adverse to their constituency interests. Third, the collective nature of congressional decision-making gives legislators opportunities to avoid blame for policies adversely affecting their constituencies. Finally, legislators have provided themselves with resources for providing constituents with assistance with their requests for service (e.g., Johannes 1984; Fiorina 1989). I will focus on each point in turn.
Securing Programmatic Benefits for Constituencies

Legislators have several methods of directing federal money toward their constituencies. Most directly and overtly, members can earmark programs or projects for a specific constituency (i.e., a state, district, group or company) during the authorization process, or they can set aside some of the funds for a program during the appropriations process. Less visibly, legislators can fix distribution formulas for grants or programs so that a given constituency has a better chance of qualifying for the program or project. By manipulating program criteria or qualifications, a legislator can direct funds to a constituency even though the program is, prima facie, open to applications from anyone. Members can also pressure bureaucrats—who typically have some discretion for deciding who qualifies for a program or a grant, through their oversight activities or by direct intervention (i.e., making inquiries or recommendations).

Legislators also seek benefits for constituents by securing targeted tax breaks in the House Ways and Means Committee or in the Senate Finance Committee. Such tax breaks have become increasingly attractive as a result of the growing priority on balancing the budget and “pay as you go” agreements. Robert Shapiro, of the Progressive Policy Institute, estimates that tax expenditures accounted for $47.7 billion in 1997 (Dowd 1997, 128). Tax policies also can be manipulated to give particular corporations or industries an advantage relative to competitors. For instance, the 1997 tax act included a gradual reduction in the airline ticket tax from 10% to 7.5% which was offset by a new levy on passengers on each leg of a flight between take-off and final landing. Big carriers like United stand to gain from the shift in taxes while regional and discount carriers will see their taxes increase (Dowd 1997).

Though most research on political marketing focuses on distributive programs, legislators can secure benefits for their constituencies through regulatory policy. Governments can create regulations that help or harm an industry or trade sector. Businesses may seek government
regulations to gain an advantage relative to competitors (Stigler 1971). For instance, Congress could create a regulation (e.g., an import quota) that restricts competition and results in higher profits for a particular producer(s) at the expense of other producers and even consumers. According to Gary Hufbauer of the Council on Foreign Relations, import quotas for sugar, textiles, and other goods are estimated to raise consumer prices about $110 billion annually (Dowd 1997, 128). Corporations, industries and trade associations are quite willing to offer politicians financial support in return for potentially beneficial regulatory policies. It is not an accident that corporate, trade association, and labor union PACs consistently rank among the largest contributors to congressional campaigns.

Politics plays a key role in congressional decisions to spend money. Often it is who wants what and who is in a position to demand it, rather than some other criteria like merit or need that determines spending priorities. Committee assignments, leadership positions, and seniority increase a legislator’s ability to specify the allocation and distribution of federal funds to particular districts or states. The primary positions for steering money toward a district or state are memberships on committees and subcommittees—the policy committees which authorize programs, the appropriations subcommittees which allocate funds for programs, or the tax committees as noted above. The assignment process allows legislators to gain a seat on a committee or subcommittee with jurisdiction over policy affecting their state or district (Fenno 1973; Smith and Deering 1990). Since most legislative work occurs in committees and subcommittees, panel members have the most direct and most extensive opportunity and ability to steer money, for specific programs falling within the jurisdiction of the committee or subcommittee, to their states or districts. Non-committee members have less direct access to decisions distributing such projects. The asymmetries in influence over the substance of bills can be seen in the disparities in funds earmarked for committee and non-committee member
districts. In the 1998 transportation bill, for example, members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee received about $40 million apiece for road projects in their districts, with senior members on the panel getting even more, and Committee chair Bud Shuster’s (R, PA) district received about $110 million (Ota 1998c, 1595). Shuster’s district will receive about eight times the amount received by most representatives’ districts (Ota 1998c, 1595).13

Committee members ultimately need the support of non-committee members to enact their bills into law. Norms of deference, reciprocity, and universalism operate to allow most members to benefit from committee power to distribute benefits (e.g., Fenno 1973; Ferejohn 1974). Committees often distribute programmatic benefits widely enough to attract the support of a winning coalition on the floor.14 For instance, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee’s 1998 transportation bill included almost $9 billion in earmarked funds for 1506 highway projects and another $9 billion for 167 mass transit and 149 busing projects and (Ota 1998a, 1036). If all members reciprocate—mutually deferring to each other in their respective areas of jurisdiction, then legislators collectively create a system in which virtually every member has opportunities to steer money to their district or state. The system works best when the costs of projects are diffused while the benefits are concentrated, and when different issues and policies are salient to different constituencies (Lowi 1972). Legislators can make mutually beneficial exchanges of support without alienating substantial segments of their own constituencies.15 Members agree to support other legislators’ pet projects—to which their own constituents are either indifferent or only mildly disadvantaged by, in return for other legislators’ support of their own pet projects that concentrate benefits in their own district or state.

Whether individually and in groups, legislators bargain and compromise to secure benefits for their constituents. The decentralized character of congressional decision-making and the lack of strong political parties allow individual legislators to secure benefits for their districts
and states. Senators are particularly potent bargainers because of rules that accentuate the power of individual legislators. Senators, for example, can threaten to filibuster a bill unless the managers of the bill accommodate them. Ending a filibuster formally requires a vote of 60 Senators, which is a high hurdle in an institution comprised of independently-elected individuals representing heterogeneous and often conflicting interests. Most often, filibusters are avoided or overcome through bargaining and compromising prior to formal debate and voting on a bill. The more restrictive rules of the House limit individual representatives’ ability to hold out for projects benefiting their constituencies. Building winning coalitions in the House tends to be about mobilizing blocs of representatives (Oleszek 1989, 23-4). House members have developed informal alliances—called caucuses, in which legislators with similar constituency interests band together to increase their bargaining leverage.16

Though it is often observed that the norms of deference and comity are declining (e.g., Uslander, 1994), the bargaining process may be changing form rather than declining. Legislators increasingly seek to earmark projects or funds in the pending bill in return for their immediate support of the committee bill on the floor, rather than wait for repayment in kind on another bill at some future time.17 The practice of earmarking projects or funds for specific districts or states has increased dramatically since the 1980s as federal funds have become more scarce and as legislators put a greater priority on deficit reduction.18 Moreover, the decline of reciprocity should not be overstated. As former Representative Tim Penny asserted, that is “how the system works. You help me; I help you. I don’t blow the whistle on your pork; you don’t blow the whistle on mine” (Pound and Pasternak 1994, p. 36).

Bills passed in Congress typically incorporate numerous compromises and deals; few bills move through the House and Senate without additions and subtractions. The process of building winning legislative coalitions is messy, which helps explain why people who pay more
attention to legislative politics are more likely to be mistrustful of politicians and disdainful of Congress (Hibbings and Theiss-Morse 1995). Though the process is unsavory, the end products are marketable to a wide range of interests. The compromises and deals needed to build winning coalitions throughout the legislative process effectively give large numbers of legislators in both chambers something that they can sell to their constituents. Citizens reap the benefits be it a grain subsidy, park, post-office, university building, weapons contract, or other program. Legislators reap the benefits of votes, money, and other forms of political support.¹⁹

*Blocking Policy Actions Adverse to Constituency Interests*

Legislators also seek to block proposals that would adversely affect their constituencies. Blocking actions typically take one of two forms. First, legislators can block or dilute new proposals adverse to the interests of a constituency. For instance, senators from tobacco-producing states joined with senators philosophically opposed to government regulation of the economy to defeat the McCain bill, which would have dramatically increased federal taxes on cigarettes and imposed other regulations on the production and sale of tobacco products.

Second, legislators can block or scale back proposals to cut existing programs currently enjoyed by constituents. Legislators on the Defense committees, for example, have been quite successful limiting post-Cold War cuts in weapons systems built in their districts or states (e.g., Isaacs 1994; Wright 1996). When it comes to cutting current programs, most legislators—including many self-described budget hawks, take the “not in my district” approach.

The legislative process has several structural biases which advantage those defending the status quo. The sequential nature of the legislative process coupled with decentralized decision-making creates numerous opportunities to stop a bill. To enact a bill, proponents need to assemble winning coalitions throughout the legislative process—in committees and subcommittees in both chambers, in the Rules committee in the House, on the floors of both
chambers, in conference committee, again on the floors of both chambers, and finally the president must approve or at least acquiesce to the bill. Opponents of a bill, by contrast, need a winning coalition against the bill in only one of these forums to defeat it. Also, committees’ ability to block legislative policy is greater than their ability to enact changes in legislative policy (Shepsle and Weingast 1987; Smith and Deering 1989). Committees often have to accommodate the interests of numerous non-committee members to enact a bill. To prevent policy changes, they simply do nothing. Finally, individual legislators—especially senators, can use their bargaining leverage to block policy changes that would adversely affect their constituencies.

The capacity to block policy changes creates opportunities for legislators to gain from political exchanges with constituency groups—especially in the corporate world. Legislators can engage in rent-seeking by threatening to enact policy changes in order to extract political supports from groups opposed to a change in such policies. For instance, the threat of government regulation of tobacco products and advertising has motivated tobacco interests to contribute large sums of money to legislators who might be willing to oppose such regulatory legislation. According to the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP), Philip Morris was the largest single contributor to congressional races in the ‘95-‘96 election cycle with $4.2 million in donations. Collectively, the tobacco industry combined contributed about $10.3 million for the ’96 elections. Similarly, proposed changes in product liability laws have led the Association of Trial Lawyers of America to invest heavily in lobbying and contributions to legislators (Gettinger 1997). According to the CRP, lawyers and lobbyists more generally contributed $51.7 million in the 1996 election cycle. The list goes on and on. In the last several years, we have seen agricultural, banking, communications, defense, electronics, financial, healthcare, insurance, labor, pharmaceutical, real estate, and transportation corporations, industries, trade associations and unions contribute enormous sums of money to legislators and to the Democratic
and Republican congressional campaign committees. Whether enacting or blocking policy changes, legislators secure immense sums of money from the private sector.

Blame Avoidance and Displacement of Costs

Legislators also seek to avoid blame for congressional decisions that could undermine their chances of reelection. Incumbent legislators have already established a winning electoral coalition in a previous election. Much of their reelection task involves maintaining their primary and general election coalitions. As such, legislators often avoid activities or issue positions that could alienate segments of their electoral and primary constituencies. Legislators also seek to avoid blame to deny potential opponents issues with which they can be criticized.

The collective-action problems inherent in a system of separated institutions sharing power allow legislators to avoid blame for policies adversely affecting their constituencies. Legislators can avoid blame for the collective performance of Congress by disassociating themselves from the institution. Many legislators, for example, run for Congress by campaigning against Congress. Congress’ collective decision-making processes coupled with its weak political parties allow individual members to take positions tailored to their local constituencies. Legislators can take positions that distance themselves from a president, party leader, or policy that is unpopular with their primary and electoral constituencies. Legislators also avoid personal accountability by side-stepping substantive policy decisions. Congressional leaders often use procedural devices that allow legislators, in certain circumstances, to make decisions without directly or overtly appearing to do so. Motions to table (kill) an amendment, for example, allow legislators to avoid direct responsibility for controversial decisions. Legislators may also avoid blame by delegating authority to someone else for making the “tough decisions.” The line-item veto can be viewed as an example of such a blame-avoidance mechanism. By giving Bill Clinton the authority to eliminate funds for specific lines in
appropriations bills, legislators increased Clinton’s responsibility for budget discipline. This
freed legislators to pursue credit via pork-barrel projects while blaming the president for killing
such projects or for ballooning deficits if he did not.

If hard decisions must be made, legislators opt for alternatives that displace the costs of
their decisions on groups less central to their reelection efforts.\textsuperscript{23} The political parties’ strategies
for balancing the budget are enlightening in this respect. Raising taxes and/or cutting existing
programs are the primary proactive alternatives for cutting large deficits.\textsuperscript{24} Since the 1980s, both
political parties have proposed raising taxes and cutting expenditures. These proposals have
distinct political biases. Republican tax increases and spending cuts have tended to affect
adversely lower socioeconomic groups who are less likely to vote Republican. For instance, the
pain of the 1981 social security tax increase, pushed by Bob Dole, fell disproportionately on
lower and middle-income wage earners since the FICA tax is both regressive and capped at
$65,000 in taxable wages. The income tax increases in Clinton’s 1993 deficit reduction package,
in contrast, fell disproportionately on upper-income Americans since the bill increased the top
rate from 31\% to 36\% with an additional 10\% surtax for individuals making more than $250,000
in taxable income. The previously mentioned 1998 transportation bill illustrates how legislators
displace the costs of spending cuts. The $216 billion transportation bill was about $20 billion
over budget allowances according to CBO projections (Ota 1998b, 1385). Because of
Congress’s “pay as you go” rules, this spending over-run had to be offset with cuts in other
programs or tax increases. Rather than give up some of the pork in the bill or raise taxes, the
Republican-controlled Congress cut programs benefiting constituency groups that either tend to
vote Democratic or that have lower voter turnout--$15.4 billion from Veterans’ medical benefits
for smoking-related illnesses, $2.3 billion in social service block grants, about $2 billion in
public housing programs, $2 billion for state costs for administering Medicaid, and lesser amounts from programs like food stamps (Ota 1996b).

Constituent Services

The development of a large federal government has meant increased constituent demand for available government programs and services, and increased demand for help dealing with agency officials responsible for delivering these programs (Fiorina 1989). Members have provided themselves with ample staff support, both in their Washington office and in their district or state offices, to provide services to constituents. Legislators and their staffs act in an ombudsman-type role—intervening on constituents’ behalf with federal agencies to facilitate the provision of government goods and services (Johannes 1984). Typically staff members contact an agency (many federal agencies have a congressional liaison office to handle such requests) to request information, make recommendations for a constituent, expedite processing of constituent paperwork and other forms of cutting red tape. The services conducted by legislators staff are extensive. Requests for help finding government jobs are the most common type of constituent service request, followed closely by requests for help dealing with problems relating to social security, veterans benefits, unemployment compensation, taxation, immigration, and miscellaneous legal problems (Davidson and Oleszek 1996, 146; Johannes 1984). Staff also frequently respond to constituent requests for government documents like copies of bills, legislative reports, executive branch regulations, tourist information, and so forth (Davidson and Oleszek 1996, 146-7). Assisting constituents applying for government grants or contracts is another type of service where legislators get involved in bureaucratic decisions, even when the relevant agency is at the state or local level (Rich 1989, 197-8). In general, legislators or their staff get involved whenever and wherever constituents interact with federal agencies.
The relations between legislators and federal agencies are conducive to ombudsman activities. Bureaucrats often feel compelled to respond to the inquiries or interventions of legislators. Congress controls several things agencies want—budgets, personnel, organizational structure and procedural operations. Bureaucrats face the potential imposition of sanctions—smaller budgets, fewer personnel, and less operation discretion if they fail to accommodate legislators’ requests (Wildavsky 1988, ch. 3; Johannes 1984). If legislators are not accommodated, they can restrict bureaucratic discretion by writing into law specific guidelines dictating how bureaucrats will implement policies. These practices are known variously as micro-management or procedural oversight (e.g., McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast 1987). The threats of sanction—implicit or explicit, real or perceived, are especially credible if a legislator sits on an authorizing or appropriations subcommittee with jurisdiction over an agency.

Empirically, studies have shown that constituent service has significant electoral benefit for legislators, even though the number of people serviced varies considerably across districts and states (Johannes 1984; Fiorina 1989; Serra and Moon 1994). Casework or constituency service is mostly profit for legislators; they make many more friends than enemies when their staffs provide services for their constituents (Fiorina 1989, 180). Members gain goodwill among constituents, for example, when their staff help a senior citizen receive a missing or delayed social security check or Medicare benefit; or help some constituency group apply for a federal grant for some program. Legislators act as if the electoral effects, even if marginal, matter simply because securing benefits for their constituents and providing them with services are factors affecting their re-elections that they can control.

**Advertising: Letting the constituencies know what members have done for them lately.**

Legislators invest heavily in advertising and constituent communications because they need to promote themselves continuously. They advertise in a culture heavily influenced by
Madison avenue. They compete for voters’ attention with advertisements from corporate America as well as from other politicians. They need to counter-act and separate themselves from the continuous stream of cynical media stories of corruption, impropriety, and dubious deals obtained by this special interest or that. Legislators’ advertising is aimed at establishing a high level of name-recognition among their constituents, developing a favorable image or impression in the minds of their constituents, cultivating a sense of trust among their constituents for both proactive and defensive reasons, and deterring or weakening potential challengers.

Legislators seek to define the terms on which their constituents think of them. Most of the people back home are poorly informed about their legislators’ activities (Stokes and Miller 1962; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987). Many policy matters do not directly affect constituents and most people pay little attention to politics—especially political events not readily visible on television. Since much of what legislators do is below their constituents’ radar screens, constituent opinions and evaluations of their representatives tend to be poorly informed. Though constituents are not well informed about their actions, legislators fear that they will become so around election time and in ways that work against them. All legislators face potential opponents who will seek to undermine an incumbent’s image with negative advertising. The opinions of a poorly informed electorate are susceptible to influence by whatever information they do receive, so negative advertising can potentially be quite harmful to an incumbent’s reelection chances (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1997, ch. 4). Legislators seek to define the terms on which constituents evaluate them before their next opponent has the opportunity.

Legislators market themselves and their services to multiple audiences with differing concerns, interests, and preferences. The decline of party membership among voters has made legislators marketing task more difficult in this respect. As party membership declines, legislators’ primary constituencies shrink relative to their electoral constituencies. The issue
positions, messages, and symbols that play well with primary constituencies may not be as attractive to independent voters whose support is needed to win general elections. Legislators have responded by developing a multi-level approach using multiple media to appeal to voters generally and to narrower groups with messages tailored to their specific interests and concerns. First, they use ambiguous and vacuous slogans to appeal to voters more generally. Such slogans allow constituents to read what they want into them. Such slogans also deny opponents a specific target to attack. Who can argue with a candidate who promises to “bring <insert state name here> values to Washington” or “promote a strong America” or to “improve education” or “reduce crime.” By positioning themselves on the right side of “valence” issues, they appeal to the majority of voters and deny opponents a popular issue. Legislators then target specific audiences with stylized appeals communicated through focused media such as direct and electronic mail or radio and cable television programs with specific demographic audiences.

Members of Congress have given themselves ample resources to advertise themselves and their activities to their constituents. Legislators use the congressional frank—official mail sent free of charge, to send newsletters to every household in their districts. According to a congressional research service report, legislators sent out approximately 363 million letters at a cost of the at $53 million during fiscal year 1994, the most recent year from which information is available (Pontius 1997, 2; as quoted in Davidson and Oleszek 1998, 147). Members also have provided themselves with ample budgets for communicating with their constituents by phone, email and the internet. Email and web sites are useful because the people who use them tend to be better educated, wealthier, more politically aware, and hence more likely to participate in elections. Since the 1970s, members have televised sessions in which members make speeches to the viewing audience—the chamber is nearly always empty during these speeches, save for a few pages, staff, tourists, and watchdog members. Members also use the radio and television
production studios provided by the political parties’ congressional campaign committees to create news clips for local broadcast media and for their campaign commercials.

Members also use extensive travel budgets to visit their districts or states. Traveling to the district serves the dual purposes of market research and promotion. Members spend time in their districts meeting with various constituency groups—local business leaders, and representatives of civic groups, interest groups, and so on. During this time members gain first hand knowledge of constituents’ concerns, interests, preferences, and requests for assistance. Members also use these trips to present themselves to their constituents, gain the trust of their constituents, and explain their activities in Washington—essentially providing constituents with a rationale for their actions (Fenno 1978). Legislators cultivate personal relations with their constituents that emphasize competence, identification with constituents, empathy and trust (Fenno 1978; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1988). Establishing personal relations with constituents, characterized by trust and empathy, facilitate a legislator’s reelection efforts by disposing constituents to accept the legislator’s self-portrayal and explanation of his or her actions in Washington.

In addition to tax-payer subsidized communications, legislators have advantages in generating free publicity on television and radio and in the print media. One reason legislators are successful generating free media coverage is that they are in a position to make news. Another reason is that legislators make themselves available to the media and they hire staffers to facilitate the media’s coverage of themselves. All senators and virtually all representatives employ a full time press secretary who manages relations with the media and who tries to control the flow of information to constituents. Press secretaries routinely distribute news releases to local news broadcast and print media. Some press secretaries use satellite feeds to get their legislator on local TV and radio news programs.
Gaining access to the media is less problematic than is controlling the image conveyed in the news media. Controlling the image conveyed in free media is important because advertising messages and images need to be consistent to be effective. Legislators can ill-afford to say one thing and the media something else. Image control has become more difficult because the news media have become more cynical about politics and politicians (e.g., Patterson 1994). Legislators can affect their coverage—though it falls short of control. First, media coverage of politics is predictable. It is well known that the media seek stories that will attract readers and viewers. The media pay more attention to political competition, strategy, conflict, and scandals than to substantive policy issues or candidate qualifications (e.g., Robinson and Sheehan 1983). Second, most coverage relates to what legislators say and do. Journalists rarely report on what goes unspoken or undone—or at least done but not visibly so. Legislators can manage their media coverage by scripting their actions and speeches for media coverage, and then staying on script; by setting the location and timing of their speeches, meetings, and other events for maximum media coverage; and by cultivating the media by providing services for reporters and producers. Finally, legislators need to adopt a preventative approach to their public image, avoiding the appearance of impropriety by knowing where, when, how, and with whom they can make which deals and bargains.

Beyond their tax-payer subsidized communications and free media, legislators engage in extensive paid advertising through multiple media. The most common method of paid advertising used by legislators is direct mail, which can be sent to targeted groups with messages tailored to group preferences and interests. As legislators raise more money, they are increasingly turning to television because more people obtain their political information from TV than any other medium and because television is a great medium for conveying images and emotional content. Herrnson (1997, 182), for example, found that about 90% of senators and
over 70% of representatives used television advertising during their campaigns. The main reasons legislators opt not to use TV is its high cost and its inefficiency when the media market and a district are dissimilar—mainly in urban districts where television markets encompass multiple districts. More often, legislators advertise on the radio where they can target specific demographic audiences on particular radio programs. Nearly all senators and over 90% of representatives use radio advertising, largely because of its lower cost compared to television advertising (Herrnson 1997, 187). Newspapers are used less frequently by legislators—about 70% of House races and 80% of Senate races, because such advertising is less effective for communicating imagery and personalized messages (Herrnson 1997, 188).

By almost every indication, legislators’ advertising efforts are successful. Over 90% of all voters recognize the name of their representative, and over 95% of voters could recognize the names of their Senator (Jacobson 1992, 116-121). By contrast, legislators’ challengers’ have much lower rates of name recognition—especially in House races where most challengers lack much political experience and have great difficulty raising the money needed to afford the advertising needed to build name recognition. Given a low level of political awareness by most voters, being a known commodity is extremely important to getting reelected. Indeed, name recognition has become an increasingly important factor in voting decisions as the political parties have declined (Herrnson 1997, 159-160). Not only do constituents recognize their representative or senator’s name, but about two-thirds of them have favorable perceptions of their legislator (e.g., Jacobson 1992, 121-123). That two-thirds of voters view their representative favorably is remarkable given the media’s highly cynical view of politicians and generally high levels of voter disapproval of Congress (Hibbings and Theiss-Morse 1996). That legislators receive more favorable than unfavorable evaluations from their constituents matters
because voters are more likely to vote for their legislator the more positive their perception of him or her (Jacobson 1992, 136-141).

**A Final Note on Money: the mother’s milk of a marketing campaign**

Conducting a continuous campaign is expensive. Campaign costs have been increasing as campaigns become more professionally managed, technologically sophisticated, and reliant on mass media. Legislators need large sums of money to hire pollsters, campaign and media consultants, and to pay for the various forms of advertising not picked up on the tax-payers’ tab. Computers, polls, mailing lists, direct mail, and media campaigns all require considerable outlays of money. These things are increasingly considered necessary in congressional campaigns since candidates are less and less able to rely on state and local party organizations to communicate with and mobilize large numbers of voters on election day.

Incumbents have a number of inherent advantages in absorbing the costs of continuous congressional campaigns. First, a large part of their marketing effort is subsidized by taxpayers. Legislators have given themselves ample travel and communications budgets. They have access to television and radio studios in the House and Senate press galleries. They have press secretaries and other personal staffs to research their constituencies’ preferences, provide services to constituents, and help advertise their own services and accomplishments. Legislators have many of things money can buy by virtue of holding office in an institution structured by and for the benefit of its membership. Incumbents need less money to compete because they already have much of what money can buy, which is why incumbents face diminishing returns to their campaign spending. They start off with high name recognition and often have established a favorable image among their constituents. Additional increments of paid advertising cannot dramatically increase their name recognition and improve their image (unless they need to repair their image with the help of professional handlers). Money matters far more for challengers who
typically begin their campaigns with low levels of name recognition. Challengers have to raise money to establish campaign organizations and to buy the advertising needed to build name recognition, establish a favorable image, and undermine the image of the incumbent. Their problem is that they often cannot raise the requisite funds, and thus must climb an incredibly steep hill to defeat incumbents.

The second advantage that incumbents enjoy when it comes to raising campaign funds is that they have greater access to and receptivity from the primary financial contributors—the congressional party campaign committees, political action committees (PACs), and wealthy individuals. PACs in particular want access to make their case for or against a particular piece of legislation. Incumbents are in a position to grant or deny access and, since most incumbents win reelection, they are likely to be in such a position after the next election. Incumbents substantially out-fundraise their opponents by wide margins. The disparity matters because the winner of congressional elections almost always outspends the loser. According to a study by the Center for Responsive Politics, the average winner in the 1996 House elections spent over two-and-half times the average amount spent by the loser, while the average winner in 1996 Senate elections spent over one-and-two-thirds more than the average loser.

Money is perhaps most valuable to legislators for its deterrent effect on potential challengers. Challengers typically face an up-hill battle in running against an incumbent member of Congress. Challengers need to dramatically expand their name recognition, cultivate a favorable image, give voters a reason to support them, and give voters a reason to reject the incumbent. Unless a challenger is already well known and beloved to voters in a state or district, or has an existing office from which to develop these things, he or she needs to obtain these things during the campaign. Doing so is expensive. The problem for challengers is that they generally cannot raise the large sums of money to buy the advertising needed to increase name
recognition, build a favorable image, and attack the incumbent. The Catch-22 is that most challengers cannot raise enough funds unless and until Washington insiders estimate that they have a good chance of beating an incumbent. So most of the time, the strongest potential challengers opt not to challenge incumbent members of Congress, preferring to wait until a legislator dies or retires before running for office (e.g., Jacobson 1989; Squire 1992).

Conclusions

Legislators are highly successful political marketers. They develop high levels of name recognition, cultivate favorable evaluations among their constituencies, raise large sums of money, and usually deter strong challengers. The vast majority of legislators go on to win reelection and do so by large margins. The very success of incumbent legislators raises several questions about the health of representative democracy in congressional elections. Are congressional elections fair, or do the biases favoring incumbents make them noncompetitive affairs. Do we have democratic governance for all the people, or just those who pay attention, participate, and contribute large sums of money? How much choice do we as voters really have when our electoral decision often is between a well-known, well-promoted commodity and an unknown, inexperienced commodity?

One downside of a Congress increasingly concerned with marketing themselves and their services is that representation of the American public becomes more utilitarian, a by-product of legislators’ efforts to maintain their careers. In an economic approach, politicians—like everyone else, are assumed to be motivated mainly by their desire to advance their personal interests. In this view, politicians seek programs and provide services for those who have something to offer toward their reelection. The resulting picture of democratic governance is one in which politicians are differentially responsive to different segments of the society depending on their relative contributions (literally and figuratively) to their reelection
aspirations. Representation of the “public interest” more generally occurs as a side effect of or externality to the exchanges between politicians and their constituencies. In a sense, representation of the “public interest” is literally a public good (or a public bad depending on one’s own philosophical tastes).

It seems problematic, from the standpoint of normative democratic theory with its ideals of political egalitarianism, that legislators are disproportionately attentive and responsive to those subsets of society that contribute most heavily to their reelections. Organized groups with professional staff and lobbyists and moneyed interests gain representation to the detriment of those who do not participate or otherwise contribute to politicians’ reelections. A downside of the increasing costs of congressional campaigns is that most incumbents spend considerable time and energy soliciting funds and, of course, granting the expected access to contributors. Legislators concerned with marketing themselves may be spending less time and energy becoming informed about issues and making “rational” policy choices. Perhaps even more worrisome than the time and energy devoted to campaign contributors are the policy consequences of such a system of exchange. The potential for moneyed interests to distort the representative functions of Congress are considerable. Is the American Congress for sale?

There is, however, no consensus that the constitutional founders intended to have an egalitarian political system. It can be argued that the founders recognized social and political inequalities and created a political system that operates in the context of that reality. Ours may well be a pluralistic political system in which groups compete, albeit with unequal capacities, for political power and for favorable disposition of political issues. I shall defer to another time further thoughts on the juxtaposition of normative ideals and the positivist world we live in.

1 On this point, see also Newman (1994, p. 10).
2. Citizens and groups may also register their differential valuation of candidates by contributing time and money to a candidate’s campaign.

3. Republican leaders became more willing to compromise with Bill Clinton when polls showed increasing public dissatisfaction with the government shutdowns during the winter of 1995-1996, which were increasingly blamed on congressional Republicans.

4. Political marketing does not require the assumption that legislators be single-minded seekers of reelection. The assumption merely simplifies the logic. Legislators, for example, could seek the trust of their constituents to gain discretion in office which could then be used to satisfy ideological goals shared with their constituents. The minimal assumption being made is that legislators provide programmatic benefits and services to constituents in return for political supports of some kind.

5. The disjuncture between the issue positions of candidates of the same party has consequences for governance. Political parties become less stable as bases for coalition-building in Congress.

6. Interview with a participant in such a meeting, June 1998.

7. Politicians sometimes discount polls for this reason. Relying solely on polls can be hazardous given an uninformed public, divided opinion on issues, and so on. The American publics are notoriously ill-informed about politics, yet will offer responses to surveys. For instance, in 1995, a Washington Post survey included a question asking people whether they thought the 1975 Public Affairs Act should be repealed. Twenty-four percent of the respondents answered yes while 19% said no—even though no such act exists (Squire, et al. 1997, 171-172).

8. Lobbyists and organized interest groups generally represent the better educated and wealthier segments of society (e.g., Cigler and Loomis 1995).
The organization of Congress at a given point in time is a function of the current mixture of members’ goals and the residual structures from previous congresses. Changes in the mixture of goals and preferences leads to changes in organizational structures and procedures (Swift 1989).

There are two theoretical frameworks for understanding the institutional structure and operation of Congress. Political marketing fits with the distributive theory of congressional organization which holds that Congress is organized and structured to facilitate collective logrolls (e.g., Shepsle and Weingast 1981). The alternative, informational theory of congressional organization holds that Congress is structured to promote the collection and dissemination of information rather than the production and distribution of goods and services to particular geographic constituencies (e.g., Krehbiel 1991). These theories are not necessarily incompatible. Congress could organize to generate information, but information could be used for self-interested ends by committees, parties, caucuses, or individuals that gather information.

Normative judgments about the value of such projects or programs depends on the eye of the beholder. We tend to view programs that benefit a select group—with whom we do not associate, as pork while viewing more favorably those programs that benefit ourselves or groups we associate with.

The 1990 budget deal included an agreement that new programs could not be created without coming up with funding for those programs. Given the difficulty of finding funding sources—either money allocated to existing programs which have defenders or raising taxes, it has become increasingly attractive for members seek targeted tax breaks for their constituencies.

Ironically, the bill was renamed the “Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century.”

Committees’ high level of success in enacting their bills is also attributed to: a) committee members’ procedural prerogatives and privileges that advantage them in defending their bills
against modifications by non-committee members (e.g., Shepsle and Weingast 1987); b) information asymmetries between committee and non-committee members that advantage committee members’ efforts to defend their handiwork on the floor (e.g., Krehbiel 1991); and c) committee members’ anticipation of potential sources of opposition and incorporation of accommodations in their bills to minimize opposition on the floor (e.g., Evans 1989).

15 Legislators of both parties have electoral incentives to engage in pork-barrel politics. Most Republicans are as eager as Democrats to earmark federally funded projects for their states and districts (e.g., Niedowski 1997; Tumulty 1995). Though most Republicans are avid pork-barrelers when it comes to their districts or states, there is a minority contingent of Republicans who vocally oppose such pork-barreling (e.g., Cohn 1998). But even many of these self-proclaimed fiscal conservatives, including Newt Gingrich, Phil Gramm, and Trent Lott, conveniently ignore principle when it comes to projects for their own districts and states.

16 Congressional caucuses basically operate as cartels on specific issues, aggregating individuals’ voting power to increase their bargaining leverage with those pushing the bill.

17 It is worth noting that the trend toward more explicit bargaining is less efficient than a system of tacit exchanges of support across policy areas because of the higher transaction costs inherent in extensive coalition-building negotiations. Legislators may be willing to absorb additional transaction costs in the present to reduce uncertainty about their own payoffs.


19 Note that new programs and money matter more than continuation of previous projects or awards (e.g., Stein and Bickers 1994; Alvarez and Saving 1997). Legislators need to seek continuously benefits for their constituents to reap electoral rewards.
Though non-committee members can circumvent obstructionist committees, these options are costly to use (e.g., Oleszek 1989; Davidson and Oleszek 1998, ch. 7, 8).


22 Of course, legislators’ efforts cannot be too transparent if they seek to claim credibly that they could not prevent adverse policies from occurring.

23 Legislators’ understanding of their various constituencies becomes important in this respect because they need to know who they can and cannot afford to offend if push comes to shove.

24 The other strategies governments have used to get rid of red ink are inflation and economic growth such that revenues exceed expenditures. Neither strategy is feasible for politicians at this time. Investors do not approve of inflationary strategies and Alan Greenspan would likely counter-act political efforts to produce it; and economic growth or contraction is largely beyond the government’s control as Bush learned to his chagrin and Clinton to his good fortune.

25 Fiorina (1989) also argues that the relationship is reciprocal: members’ desire for bureaucratic assistance in the delivery of services to constituents contributes to the growth of government over the last several decades. Legislators gain opportunities to claim credit both when they create programs and when they cut red tape as agencies implement programs.

26 This point is more relevant in House elections. Challengers in Senate elections are more likely to have held prior office, have better name recognition than the typical House challenger, and are more capable of raising large sums of money.

27 The average winner in House elections spent $673,739 while the average winner in Senate elections spent $4,692,110. Note that these numbers do no account for whether the winner was an incumbent, a challenger, or an open-seat candidate.
References


