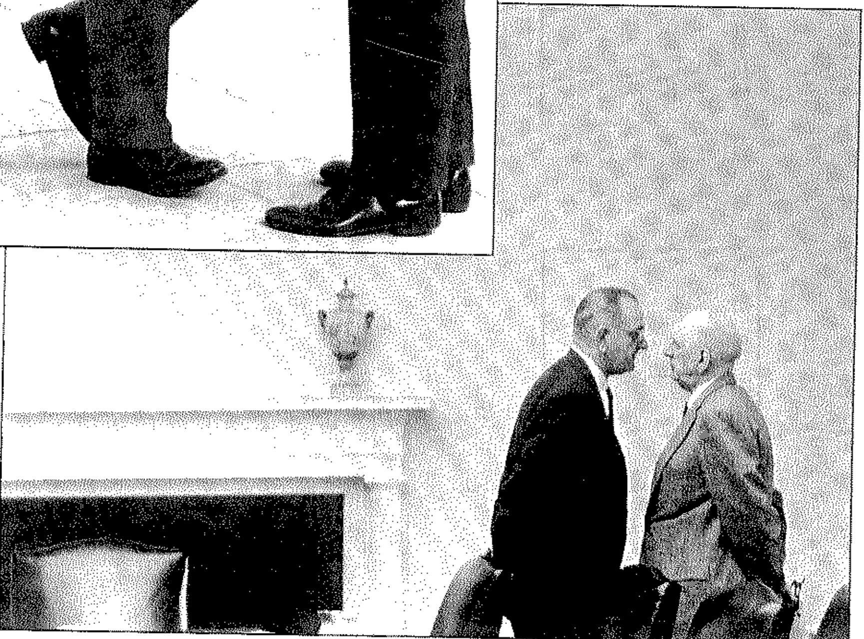

Classic moments in congressional politics. Lyndon B. Johnson, Senate majority leader (1955–1961), vice president (1961–1963), and president (1963–1969), master of one-on-one communication and what was termed "The Treatment," interacts at close range with (top to bottom) Sen. Theodore Francis Green, D-R.I., Supreme Court justice Abe Fortas, and Sen. Richard B. Russell, D-Ga.

Congress and Its Members

Ninth Edition

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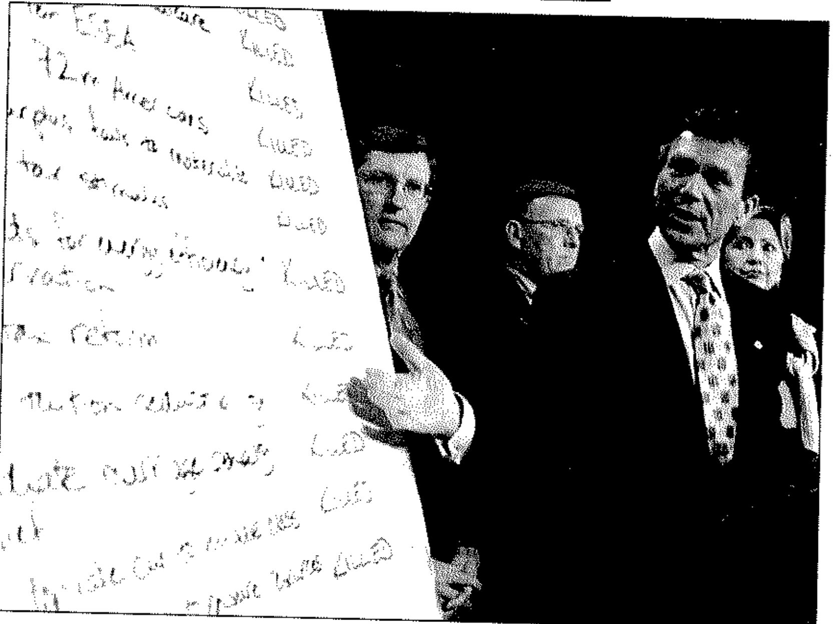

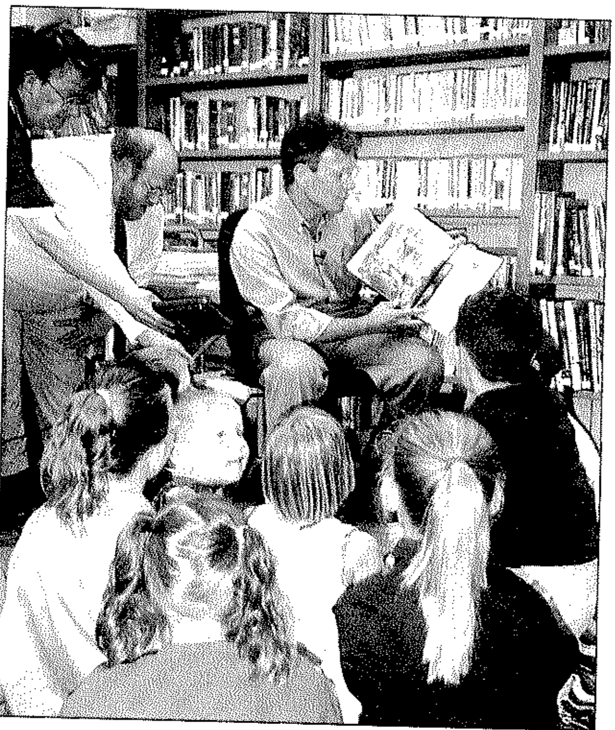

The two worlds of a congressional leader. Senate Democrat Tom Daschle reads to school children in his home state of South Dakota (above). As his party's floor leader (below), he leads a press conference with fellow Democrats to show how many amendments were defeated by supporters of President George W. Bush's tax cuts.

5

Being There: Hill Styles and Home Styles

Touring his home state of South Dakota a few years ago, Democratic senator Thomas A. Daschle found himself stranded late one night after locking himself out of his car:

> He telephoned the local locksmith. "What's your name?" asked the groggy-sounding voice on the other end of the line.
>
> "Tom Daschle," came the reply.
>
> The locksmith hung up, having concluded that the Senate Democratic Leader was a prank caller.[1]

The low-key Daschle tries to spend about seventy days a year in his home state. For three weeks every August, he drives around the small towns and rural communities of South Dakota, meeting and talking with constituents. His tours are leisurely and unscheduled. Neither press nor staff accompany him. He stops at coffee shops, health clinics, schools, civic clubs, and cattle auctions.

Daschle relishes the time he spends talking with constituents. "It energizes me," he says. "I really learn from them. I think it's awfully hard to get into a debate on the floor of the Senate without having experiences like that."

The other side of Daschle's life in centered in the U.S. Senate, where he has served since 1987. Eight years later he was chosen (by a one-vote margin) as minority leader. In 2001 the word *minority* was dropped from his title. With a fifty-fifty division, the two parties initially embarked on a precarious experiment in power sharing, which after four months was replaced by a narrow Democratic majority (when Vermont Republican James M. Jeffords switched to being an Independent and voted with the Democrats to organize the chamber). Republican gains in 2002 restored Daschle's earlier minority leader title.

Daschle's role as one of the two leading figures in the Democratic Party in the 108th Congress (House leader Nancy Pelosi of California is the other) might seem inconsistent with his representative role. South Dakota is a Republican state that went heavily for both George Bushes. But the linkages are strong. Early in his presidency, George W. Bush sought to sell his budget plan through a series of brief tours to states with Democratic senators whose constituents might be mobilized to support the administration. Before Bush arrived in Sioux Falls, Daschle alerted local newspapers that Bush's proposed tax

cuts might endanger the $273 million Lewis and Clark water project. Local officials were upset, and almost immediately Daschle's office received calls from the White House asking what the project was all about. During his Sioux Falls speech, President Bush made a point of expressing support for the Lewis and Clark project.

Local booster and Senate leader, Daschle personifies the two Congresses. All members of Congress live and work in these two worlds: one on Capitol Hill and the other back home in their states or districts.

Hill Styles

Members of Congress, as Richard F. Fenno Jr. says, spend their lives "moving between two contexts, Washington and home, and between two activities, governing and campaigning."[2] The two contexts and the two activities are interwoven. How members govern is deeply affected by their campaign experience, especially that of the most recent election. In turn, their Capitol Hill activities affect all their subsequent contacts with people back home.

Who Are the Legislators?

The Constitution names only three criteria for individuals serving in Congress: age, citizenship, and residency. However, entrance requirements are far more restrictive. Aristotle first observed that elections are essentially oligarchic affairs that involve few active participants. By almost any measure, senators and representatives constitute an economic and social elite. They are well educated. They come from a small number of prestigious occupations. The pay of senators and representatives ($150,000 in 2003) puts them in the top 1 percent of the nation's wage earners. Many possess or amass material wealth, but those who come from state or local posts boost their salaries when they arrive in Congress. And expenses are high, especially for members who maintain a residence in Washington as well as one back home. A federal pay commission reported more than a decade ago that "most members of Congress find it difficult to live on their current salaries."[3] Most of them have outside sources of income, although several such income sources have been shut down—including gifts, travel, and honoraria (fees provided by interest groups for speeches or other appearances).

Occupation. Historically, law and politics have been closely linked in this country. A humorist once quipped that the U.S. government "of laws and not men" is really "of lawyers and not men." When the 108th Congress convened in January 2003, 177 representatives and 59 senators were lawyers.[4]

Many lawyers view forays into electoral politics as a form of professional advancement. The legal profession stresses personal skills, such as verbalization, advocacy, and negotiation, that are useful in gaining and holding public office. Important, too, is lawyers' monopoly over offices that serve as steppingstones to Congress—especially elected law enforcement and judicial posts.[5]

Unlike many other high-status professionals, lawyers can move in and out of their jobs without hurting their careers.

The historical dominance of lawyers on Capitol Hill has declined in recent decades. Lawyers are now outnumbered by members with other careers. Business is the next most prevalent occupation—especially on the rise since the Republican takeover in the mid-1990s. Members of the verbalizing professions—teaching, journalism, and public service—are also well represented. A hundred members of the 108th Congress spent part or all of their early careers in education; a couple dozen were in communications. As for prior public service, the 108th Congress included fourteen former governors, two former cabinet secretaries, a federal judge, two state supreme court judges, and 275 former state legislators. No less than 125 members had once served as congressional or White House staffers.

War heroes have often found their way to Capitol Hill. Following World War II, returning veterans surged into Congress. Among them were Reps. John F. Kennedy, Richard M. Nixon, Gerald R. Ford, and Bob Dole. By the 1970s more than seven of ten members were veterans. The number of veterans, especially those with combat experience, has since dwindled. Fewer than 30 percent of the 108th Congress's members had military service.

Today's media-centered campaigns have spawned a few celebrity legislators. Several astronauts, including Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., have served. Former athletes and coaches in the 108th Congress included a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame: Sen. Jim Bunning, R-Ky., who once pitched a perfect game for the Philadelphia Phillies.

Many occupations are, and always have been, drastically underrepresented in Congress. Low-status occupations, including farm labor, service trades, manual and skilled labor, and domestic service, are rare on Capitol Hill. One blue-collar worker elected in recent years quit after one term in part because he was unhappy and self-conscious about his social status.

Education and Religion. By every measure, Congress is a highly educated body. All but a handful of members have college degrees. Three-quarters have graduate degrees, which are required in such heavily represented professions as law. Fifteen have medical degrees. Five Rhodes scholars serve in the House and three in the Senate.

Virtually every member of the 108th Congress professed a formal religious affiliation, compared with about seven of ten Americans in surveys.[6] More than one-quarter of all House and Senate members are Roman Catholics, the largest single contingent. That number is slightly above the nationwide proportion of Catholics. Most other legislators are Protestants, either from mainline denominations—Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Baptists—or from evangelical groups. Jews, who make up 2.6 percent of the total U.S. population, accounted for 7 percent of the 108th Congress. Catholics, evangelical Protestants, and Jews have enlarged their share of Congress's membership, while mainline Protestants have declined in numbers.

Sex and Sexual Orientation. Neither chamber accurately mirrors the nation in terms of sex or sexual identity. Congress historically has been a male bastion. Diversity has developed slowly.

Unable to vote until 1920, women have always been underrepresented in Congress. Beginning in 1916 with Jeannette Rankin, elected as a Republican from Montana, 199 women have been elected or appointed to Congress. In the 108th Congress a record number of women served—sixty-two representatives (sixteen of them in the California delegation) and fourteen senators. But that is only 14 percent of all members, compared with more than half of the nation's population.[7]

The presence of sizable numbers of women has changed Capitol Hill in several ways. Aside from obvious details (installing a Senate women's restroom, opening the gymnasiums to both sexes), the influx of women has brought adjustments in political agendas and ways of doing things. Policy concerns once labeled "women's issues" now receive respectful hearing. For the first time, workplace and women's health issues—gender discrimination and drive-by mastectomies, for example—had to be seriously addressed. Rep. Nita M. Lowey, D-N.Y., whose mother died of breast cancer, asked for increased funding for research on the disease. During debate over family leave policy, Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., talked about having to quit a secretarial job sixteen years earlier when she was pregnant with her first child. At a hearing on Social Security taxes for household help, Rep. Carrie P. Meek, D-Fla. (1993–2003), a granddaughter of slaves, brought her own vivid experiences to the proceedings. "I was once a domestic worker," she told her colleagues. "My mother was a domestic worker. All my sisters were domestic workers."[8] Referring to the women serving in the Senate, Senator Murray declared, "We've made it okay for men to talk about these [women's] issues, too."[9]

Gays and lesbians passed a milestone in 1998 when Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., became the first lesbian representative whose sexual orientation was known before her initial election. The two gay men who also serve in the House (and several former representatives) revealed their sexuality or were outed after they had served for some time. Baldwin, who served six years in the state legislature, did not shy away from the issue. Her campaign slogan was "A different kind of candidate." Still, as Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., observed, the hardest part of running as a gay is "convincing voters that you will not disproportionately focus on that minority's issues."[10] That lesson applies to all candidates contending in districts where they are in the minority—for example, blacks running in majority-white areas.

Race. African Americans, who make up 12 percent of the nation's population, account for 7 percent of Congress's members. In 2003, thirty-nine African Americans (including two delegates) served in the House. In all U.S. history only 109 blacks have served in Congress, four of them in the Senate and the rest in the House. Nearly half of these served during the Reconstruction era after the Civil War. All were Republicans, loyal to the party of Abraham Lincoln.

No blacks served in Congress from 1900 to 1928, when Rep. Oscar De Priest, a Republican, was elected from a heavily black district on Chicago's South Side. In the next twenty-five years only three more blacks entered Congress, but after the 1960s African American representation rose steadily. All but four of the post–Reconstruction black legislators were Democrats.

Other minorities are represented in smaller numbers. Latinos make up 12 percent of the population but only 4.5 percent of the House membership (including one delegate); no Latinos serve in the Senate. Of the twenty-four Latino representatives, most are Mexican Americans, three are Cuban Americans, and three are of Puerto Rican descent. All but four are Democrats. Asians and Pacific Islanders claim five representatives and two senators—all Democrats. There are three Native Americans, a Senate Republican and one of each party in the House.

Most minority members of the House represent majority-minority districts, a number of them created since the 1990s. The goal of boosting minority representation through redistricting succeeded. All but one of these districts elected minority lawmakers. Only a handful of African Americans and Latinos are now elected from areas with less than 50 percent minority population. The ranks of such members must grow if minorities are to gain anything approaching proportionate representation.

Age and Tenure. When the 108th Congress convened, the average age of representatives was fifty-four; for senators, it was nearly sixty.[11] Tenure as well as age has risen since the early days. "Few die, and none retire," it was said as the twentieth century began. A century later, the average representative had served nearly eleven years, more than five and a half House terms. The average senator had served nearly sixteen years, or more than two and a half Senate terms.[12]

Even today, age and tenure levels fluctuate over time. Periods of relatively low turnover (the 1980s, for example) are punctuated by dramatic changing-of-the-guard periods, as in the 1970s and the 1990s, involving both senior and junior members of Congress.[13] Electoral defeats play some role, but the majority of members leave voluntarily. During the political upheavals of the early 1990s, older members wearied of the frantic pace and occasionally were dogged by scandal. Younger members wanted to earn more money and see more of their families.

A certain balance between new blood and stable membership is undoubtedly desirable for legislative bodies. The rapid turnover of the early 1990s heightened the generational conflict. Many newly elected members had indulged in Congress bashing in their campaigns and wanted to shake up the institution; not a few of them shunned the idea of making a career of public service. "They don't regard being defeated as the end of their life, just a change of jobs," then Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., remarked of his young colleagues. "That is very different than the sort of careerist view that had dominated for a long time."[14]

As the twenty-first century began, *incumbency* was no longer a dirty word, and turnover levels declined. Some of the firebrands who entered Congress promising to get out after six years had second thoughts. One of these was Rep. George Nethercutt, R-Wash., who in 1994 ousted Democratic Speaker Thomas S. Foley, a thirty-year veteran, with a promise that "six years is enough." By 2000 Nethercutt admitted that experience had shown him that issues were so complex that six years are "probably not enough." [15] He was not alone. Some two dozen members reconsidered their original pledges over the last three elections, and most of them (including Nethercutt) were reelected.[16]

Representation. Must Congress demographically mirror the populace to be a representative institution? The question is hotly debated. Hannah Finichel Pitkin distinguishes between two types of representation: *substantive* and *descriptive*.[17] To represent a category of people substantively, a legislator must consciously act for people and their interests, whether a member of that grouping or not. Legislators from farming districts can voice farmers' concerns even though they have never plowed a field; whites can champion equal opportunities for minorities. Few Asian Americans serve in Congress, but their proportion in a district affects a member's support of issues advocated by that group.[18] Conversely, white representatives from districts that lost black voters in gerrymandering after the 1990s became more conservative and less supportive of policies preferred by African Americans.[19]

By and large, Congress is a body of local political pros for whom speaking for constituents comes naturally. Most members keep in touch with the home folks without even thinking about it. A majority of representatives in one survey agreed with the statement: "I seldom have to sound out my constituents because I think so much like them that I know how to react to almost any proposal." [20]

Yet descriptive, or symbolic, representation can be as important as substantive representation. Symbolically, no real substitute exists for having a member of one's own grouping in a position of influence. "Even controlling for party membership," Katherine Tate found from surveying black constituents, "black legislators received significantly higher ratings on average than their white counterparts." [21] Moreover, tangible gains can be seen in the quality of representation. Studies indicate, for example, that women members of Congress are more likely than men to introduce, sponsor, and press for bills of special concern to women and children.[22]

Nor is representation restrained by state or district boundaries. When a member of an ethnic or racial minority goes to Congress, it is a badge of legitimacy for the entire grouping. Such legislators speak for people like them throughout the nation. Other, less obvious constituencies are likewise represented. One member who suffers from epilepsy defends job rights for other sufferers of the disease; another whose grandson was born prematurely champions funds for medical research into birth defects; a third, who fled the Nazis as a child in the 1940s, has sworn to perpetuate awareness of the Holocaust;

Table 5-1 House Members' Views on the Jobs Expected of Them

Volunteered responses	Percentage[a]
Legislator	87
Constituency servant	79
Mentor or communicator	43
Representative	26
Politico	11
Overseer	9
Institutional broker	7
Office manager	6
Jack-of-all-trades	6
All other roles	4

Source: House Commission on Administrative Review, *Final Report*, 2 vols., H. Doc. 95-272, 95th Cong., 1st sess., December 31, 1977, 2:874–875.

Note: N=146.

[a] Many members mentioned two or more jobs.

members who are openly gay speak out for the rights of homosexuals. Such causes are close to members' hearts, even though they often pay scant political dividends and are rarely noticed by the press and the public.

How Do Legislators Describe Their Jobs?

In the late 1970s the House Commission on Administrative Review asked 153 representatives to list "the major kinds of jobs, duties, or functions that you feel you are expected to perform as an individual member of Congress." This question elicited not so much the members' own priorities as their diverse perceptions of what colleagues, constituents, lobbyists, and others expect of them. The responses, summarized in Table 5-1, form a snapshot of members' views of their jobs. Although this survey has not been repeated, it remains a reasonably accurate representation of members' jobs as they see them.

Legislator. The rules, procedures, and traditions of the House and Senate impose many constraints on members' behavior. To be effective, new members must learn their way through the institutional maze. Legislators therefore stress the formal aspects of Capitol Hill duties and routines: legislative work, investigation, and committee specialization. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., in elective office for more than half his life (he was elected to the state assembly at age twenty-three and served nine terms in the U.S. House), explained his commitment as a professional legislator during his successful 1998 Senate campaign:

> I love to legislate. Taking an idea—often not original with me—shaping it, molding it. Building a coalition of people who might not completely agree with it. Passing it and making the country a little bit of a better place. I love doing that.[23]

Most legislators pursue information and expertise on issues, not only because it is the way to shape public policy but also because it sways others in the chamber.

The legislator's role dovetails with that of representing constituents. Most members seek committee assignments that will serve the needs of their states or districts. One House member related how his interest in flood control and water resource development impelled him to ask for a seat on the committee responsible for those issues. "The interests of my district dictated my field of specialization," he explained, "but the decision to specialize in some legislative field is automatic for the member who wants to exercise any influence."[24]

Members soon learn the norms, or folkways, that expedite legislative bargaining and maximize productivity. Examining the post–World War II Senate, Donald R. Matthews identified six folkways governing behavior that were enforced informally. Senators should (1) serve an apprenticeship (exercising restraint and deference to elders in the early years); (2) concentrate on Senate work instead of on gaining publicity; (3) specialize in issues within their committees or affecting their home states; (4) act courteously to colleagues; (5) extend reciprocity to colleagues—that is, provide willing assistance with the expectation that it will be repaid in kind one day; and (6) loyally defend the Senate, "the greatest legislative and deliberative body in the world."[25]

In recent years certain Senate folkways have faded in importance. New senators now actively take part in most aspects of the chamber's work, ignoring the apprenticeship norm. Many senators, especially those with an eye on higher office, work tirelessly to attract national publicity and personal attention. Committee specialization, although still common, is less rigid than it once was. Senators now have many overlapping committee assignments and are expected to express views on a wide range of issues. The norms of courtesy and reciprocity are still invoked, but institutional loyalty wears thin in an era of harsh partisanship and cynicism about government.

The House relies more on formal channels of power than on informal norms. From interviews, however, Herbert B. Asher uncovered seven norms: (1) friendly relationships are desirable; (2) the important work of the House is done in committee; (3) procedural rules of the House are essential; (4) members should not personally criticize a colleague on the House floor; (5) members should be prepared to trade votes; (6) members should be specialists; and (7) freshmen should serve apprenticeships.[26]

Even this loose network of norms has come unraveled. New members, impatient to make their mark, plunge into the work of the House even before they learn their way around. Leadership comes earlier to members than it used

to. Specialization is still attractive—more so than in the Senate—but many members branch out into unrelated issues. No longer are committees the sole forums for influencing legislation. Looser norms of floor participation and voting have expanded members' chances for shaping bills outside their own committees' jurisdictions. Many ideologically driven new members, like those elected in 1994, dismissed norms such as specialization, reciprocity, and compromise. The conflict-ridden House (and Senate) reminded political scientist Eric M. Uslaner of "day care centers in which colicky babies [get] their way by screaming at the top of their lungs."[27]

Legislation-minded members reacted by reasserting the decaying norms and decrying the rancorous outbursts that have marked recent Congresses. Reassertions of the importance of civility and a spirit of reciprocity suggest that traditional institutional norms are not dead. Asked to compare the House with his earlier career (as an economics professor), retiring majority leader Dick Armey, R-Texas, remarked, "Here you're working with a more pleasant group of people. There isn't the petty meanness in Congress that you find in university politics."[28] So even in an era of high partisanship, reciprocity and compromise are acknowledged as necessary if members' disparate goals are to be reconciled into legislation that can be passed.

Constituency Servant. Nearly eight of ten respondents in the House survey mentioned the role of constituency servant. The constituency servant attempts to give voice to citizens' concerns and solve their problems. This role was cited by half the House members. Typically, the task is performed by legislators and their staffs as casework—individual cases triggered by constituent letters or visits. It is a chore that weighs heavily on members, even though most of them delegate it to staff aides. The philosophy of most legislators is expressed by one House member like this:

> Constituent work: that's something I feel very strongly about. The American people, with the growth of the bureaucracy, feel nobody cares. The only conduit a taxpayer has with the government is a congressional office.[29]

Sometimes members stress their constituency service to gain breathing room for legislative stands that stray from district norms.

Constituency servants typically make sure their states or districts get their fair share of federal money and assistance. "It's a big pie down in Washington," Michael "Ozzie" Myers, then a Democratic representative from Pennsylvania, told FBI agents posing as aides of an Arab sheik during the so-called Abscam probe of influence peddling in the late 1970s:

> Each member's sent there to bring a piece of that pie back home. And if you go down there and you don't—you come back without milkin' it after a few terms . . . you don't go . . . back.[30]

The words are inelegant and the context sleazy, but they characterize members' traditional view of constituency advocacy, even if they rail against pork barrel spending in other people's areas.

In recent years a number of candidates have publicly spurred this tradition of bringing home the bacon. Vocally committed to downsizing the federal establishment, they seek plaudits from constituents who oppose deficits, taxes, and federal bureaucrats. In times of tight budgets, fewer discretionary dollars may be available to distribute to localities. If members are unable to win earmarked funds for their constituents, however, they can nonetheless seek nonfiscal benefits—for example, favorable regulatory rules or trade concessions for local industries.[31]

There is no reason, however, to think that pork has vanished from the congressional diet. Even when budgets are lean, pork barrel advocacy will survive. Remaining government programs with highly visible local benefits—highway and mass transit grants, for example, or homeland security contracts—are smothered with attention. Particularized benefits normally trump collective benefits. An Arkansas lobbyist tells the story of going to visit one of his state's Republican members who was known for his anti-pork speeches. "I know you're anti-pork," the lobbyist began, "but I have to tell you about our needs and how to position yourself." "What do you mean?" the congressman retorted. "As far as I can tell, it's not pork if it's for Arkansas."[32]

Mentor-Communicator and Representative. The mentor-communicator role is linked both to legislating and to constituency errand running. Most members who stress this role view it in connection with issues that must be debated and voted on. Another aspect of the mentor-communicator role is the act of keeping in touch with constituents by mail, by personal appearances, and by print and electronic media. Republican Barber B. Conable Jr. conducted what he called a "dialogue of representation" by means of 254 newsletters to his Rochester, New York, constituents during his tenure in the House (1965–1985). "Conable never campaigned," a local professor explained, "he just conducted seminars every other year" (actually, a majority of his newsletters went out during nonelection years).[33]

Closely allied is the role of the issue emissary (representative), articulated by a quarter of the House members. Constituents expect their representatives to understand and express their views in Washington. This role is the essence of elective office, both in theory and in practice, and incumbents take it very seriously.

Other Roles. Some members pose as outsiders who adopt a maverick posture, but others act as Capitol Hill insiders. Some stress party leadership duties, others their social obligations, still others institutional brokerage—dealing with the executive branch, interest groups, and state and local governments. And, yes, a few members of Congress focus merely on campaigning and gaining reelection. One former member placed this goal in perspective: "All members of Congress have a primary interest in being reelected. Some members have no other interest."[34]

How Do Legislators Spend Their Time?

Time is the most precious commodity for senators and representatives. The lack of it is their most frequent complaint about their jobs.[35] Allocating time requires exceedingly tough personal and political choices.

According to a 1993 congressional survey, members' daily priorities are roughly as follows: (1) meeting on legislative issues with constituents, either at home or in Washington; (2) attending committee hearings, markups, and other committee meetings; (3) meeting with government officials and lobbyists on legislative issues; (4) studying pending legislation or discussing legislation with other members or staff; (5) working with informal caucus groups of colleagues; (6) attending floor debate or watching the debate on television; (7) doing nonlegislative work (casework) for constituents in Washington; (8) managing personal office operations and staffs; (9) raising funds for the next campaign, for others' campaigns, or for the political party; (10) working with party leaders to build legislative coalitions; (11) overseeing how agencies are carrying out laws or policies; and (12) making appearances on legislation outside the state or district (see Table 5-2).[36] Staff members usually prepare daily schedules for members of Congress to refer to as they whirl through a busy day on Capitol Hill.

Scheduling is complicated by the large number of formal work groups—mainly committees and subcommittees, but also joint, party, and ad hoc panels. Despite downsizing in recent Congresses, the average senator sits on three full committees and seven subcommittees; representatives average two committees and four subcommittees.

With so many assignments, lawmakers are hard-pressed to control their crowded schedules. Committee quorums are difficult to achieve, and members' attention is often focused elsewhere. All too often working sessions are composed of the chairman, the ranking minority member, perhaps one or two colleagues, and staff aides. Recent House rules tightening quorum requirements have only made scheduling problems worse.

Repeated floor votes, which lawmakers fear to miss, are another time-consuming duty. In a typical Congress more than one thousand recorded votes may be taken in the House chamber and perhaps six hundred in the Senate. "We're like automatons," one senator complained. "We spend our time walking in tunnels to go to the floor to vote."[37]

Lawmakers' daily schedules in Washington are "long, fragmented, and unpredictable," according to a study based on time logs kept by senators' appointment secretaries.[38] "In Congress you are a total juggler," recalls former representative Patricia Schroeder, D-Colo. (1973–1979), now a trade association executive. "You have always got seventeen things pulling on your sleeve."[39] Members' schedules are splintered into so many tiny bits and pieces that effective pursuit of lawmaking, oversight, and constituent service is hampered. According to a management study of several senators' offices, an event occurs every five minutes, on average, to which the senator or the chief aide must

Table 5-2 Activities of Members of Congress: Actual and Ideal (in percentages)

Activity	Members actually spending time				Members preferring to spend more time
	Great deal	Moderate amount	A little	Almost none	
Representation					
Meet with citizens in state or district	68%	30%	1%	0%	17%
Meet in Washington with constituents	45	50	5	0	17
Manage office	6	45	39	10	13
Raise funds for next campaign, for others, for party	6	33	45	16	7
Lawmaking					
Attend committee hearings, markups, other meetings	48	46	6	0	43
Meet in Washington on legislative issues	37	56	6	0	31
Study, read, discuss pending legislation	25	56	17	2	78
Work with informal caucuses	8	43	36	13	25
Attend floor debate, follow it on television	7	37	44	12	59
Work with party leaders to build coalitions	6	33	43	18	42
Oversee how agencies are carrying out policies and programs	5	22	43	29	53
Give speeches about legislation outside state or district	5	23	49	23	16

Note: A total of 161 members of Congress (136 representatives, 25 senators) responded to this survey, conducted in early 1993 under the auspices of the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress. This series of questions elicited responses from 152 to 155 members. U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress, *Organization of Congress, Final Report*, H. Rept. 103-413, 103d Congress, 1st sess., December 1993, 2:231–232, 275–287.

respond personally.[40] Often members have scant notice that their presence is required at a meeting or a hearing. Carefully developed schedules can be disrupted by changes in meeting hours, by unforeseen events, or by sessions that run longer than expected. (After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, members were issued BlackBerry pagers so they could keep track of developments.)

Political scientists may pretend that Congress runs in harmony with members' needs, but the members know otherwise. In a survey of 114 House and Senate members, "inefficiency" was the thing that most surprised them about Congress (45 percent gave this response).[41] "[Congress] is a good job for someone with no family, no life of their own, no desire to do anything but get up, go to work, and live and die by their own press releases," quipped former representative Fred Grandy, an Iowa Republican (and TV sitcom star) who left Congress in 1995. "It is a great job for deviant human beings."[42]

Nearly half the respondents in a 1987 survey agreed that they had "no personal time after work"; a third said they had "no time for family."[43] When they came to power in 1995, Republican leaders promised a "family friendly schedule," but the frantic pace of the next two years was anything but that. Subsequent Congresses took a more leisurely pace. House members and their families even held several weekend retreats to get to know one another better.

The dilemma legislators face in allocating their time is far more than a matter of scheduling. It is a case of conflicting role expectations. Look again at Table 5-2, where lawmakers' activities are arrayed to illustrate the tensions inherent in the two Congresses, from the representative Congress (at the top of the list) to the legislative Congress (at the bottom). More members want to devote extra time to legislative duties than would choose to spend more time on constituency and political chores. According to the 1993 survey, an average of 43 percent of the members would like to spend more time on the eight legislative tasks, whereas on average only 14 percent of them would give more time to the four representation items. Eight of ten members would study more thoroughly the legislation they vote on; six of ten would follow floor debate more closely.[44] The two Congresses pull members in different directions. As a retiring House committee chairman remarked:

> One problem is that you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. If you do your work here, you're accused of neglecting your district. And if you spend too much time in your district, you're accused of neglecting your work here.[45]

The Shape of the Washington Career

Once a short-term activity, congressional service has become a career. Accompanying this careerism, or longevity, is a distinctive pattern of Washington activity: The longer members remain in office, the more they sponsor bills, deliver floor speeches, and offer amendments. Despite the democratizing trends

of the reform era (1960s and 1970s), senior lawmakers continue to lead in all these categories. "The *apprenticeship norm* may or may not be dead, but *apprenticeship* is stronger than it has been in decades," John R. Hibbing concluded from his painstaking study of four cohorts of members who entered the House between 1957 and 1971.[46]

Long tenure also pulls members toward greater legislative specialization. Members settle into their committee slots, cultivate expertise in a distinct policy field, and spend their time managing legislation and conducting oversight in that field. Seniority tends to boost legislative achievement. Veterans usually enjoy more success than do freshmen in getting their bills passed.

The correlation between members' service and effectiveness reflects the indispensable role careerists play in the legislative process. As Hibbing observed:

> Senior members are the heart and soul of the legislative side of congressional service. . . . Relatively junior members can be given a subcommittee chairmanship, but it is not nearly so easy to give them an active, focused legislative agenda and the political savvy to enact it. Some things take time and experience, and successful participation in the legislative process appears to be one of those things.[47]

The wisdom of this statement is repeatedly borne out. The newcomers elected in the 1990s brought with them zeal, energy, and fresh approaches. At the same time, many of them lacked patience, bargaining skills, institutional memory, and respect for the lawmaking process. Not a few of them demanded overnight reversals of long-standing policies and practices and vowed to retire voluntarily after a few terms.

Looking Homeward

Not all of a representative's or a senator's duties lie in Washington, D.C. Legislators not only fashion policy for the nation's welfare, but they also act as emissaries from their home states or districts.

What Is Representation?

Although found in virtually all political systems, representation is the hallmark of democratic regimes dedicated to sharing power among citizens. In small communities decisions can be reached by face-to-face discussion, but in populous societies this sort of personalized consultation is impossible. Thus, according to traditional democratic theory, citizens can exert control by choosing "fiduciary agents" to act on their behalf, deliberating on legislation just as their principals, the voters, would do if they could be on hand themselves.[48] Pitkin puts it this way:

> The representative must act in such a way that, although he is independent, and his constituents are capable of action and judgment, no conflict arises between them. He must act in their interest, and this means he must not normally come into conflict with their wishes.[49]

The arrangement does not always work out precisely as democratic theory specifies. Unless it works fairly well most of the time, however, the system is defective.

Incumbent legislators give high priority to representation. Four of five House members interviewed in 1977 saw themselves as constituency servants. Many were mentor-communicators, others issue spokespersons. In an earlier survey of eighty-seven members, the role most often expressed was called the tribune: the discoverer, reflector, or advocate of popular needs and wants.[50]

Although legislators agree on the importance of representation, they interpret it differently. One point of departure is Edmund Burke's dictum that legislators should voice the "general reason of the whole," not speak merely for "local purposes" and "local prejudices."[51] This conception of the legislator as Burkean trustee has always had its admirers. Speaking to a group of newly elected House members, Rep. Henry J. Hyde, R-Ill., voiced the Burkean ideal:

> If you are here simply as a tote board registering the current state of opinion in your district, you are not going to serve either your constituents or the Congress well. . . . You must take, at times, a national view, even if you risk the displeasure of your neighbors and friends back home. . . . If you don't know the principle, or the policy, for which you are willing to lose your office, then you are going to do damage here.[52]

Representative Hyde followed his own precepts as chairman of the Judiciary Committee that in 1998 voted to impeach President Bill Clinton. Defying the weight of expert opinion, national opinion polls, and even some within his own party, he carried his committee's articles of impeachment to the full House, which adopted two of them, and then to the Senate, which rejected them.

Nearly every member can point to conscience votes cast on deeply felt issues. A few, such as Rep. Mike Synar, D-Okla. (1979–1995), compile a contrarian record, challenging voters to admire their independence if not their policies. Synar was an unabashed liberal Democrat from a state that now elects mostly conservative Republicans. "I want to be a U.S. congressman from Oklahoma, not an Oklahoman congressman," Synar declared when he arrived in the capital.[53] If turned out of office by hostile sentiment (as Synar later was), the Burkean can at least hope for history's vindication.

Electoral realities imperil the Burkean ideal. Burke himself was ousted from office for his candor. Modern electorates, motivated by self-interest and schooled in democratic norms, prefer instructed delegates—lawmakers who follow instructions rather than exercise independent judgments. In a recent survey 63 percent of those polled said they wanted members of Congress to

"stick closely to American public opinion . . . including results of polls" when making legislative decisions. Only 34 percent thought members should "do what they think is best."[54]

In practice, legislators assume different representational styles according to the occasion. They ponder factors such as the nation's welfare, their personal convictions, and constituency opinions. "The weight assigned to each factor," writes Thomas E. Cavanagh, "varies according to the nature of the issue at hand, the availability of the information necessary for a decision, and the intensity of preference of the people concerned about the issue."[55]

Respondents in the 1977 House survey cited two categories of issues they reserved for personal conscience or discretion: grave national issues, such as foreign policy and national defense, and issues that tap deep-seated convictions, such as abortion, gun control, or constitutional questions. In contrast, members said they deferred to districts on bread-and-butter issues, such as public works, social needs, military projects, and farm programs. They give unqualified support to local needs because, as they see it, no other member is likely to do so.

Members of Congress are called upon to explain their choices to constituents—no matter how many or how few people truly care about the matter.[56] The anticipated need to explain oneself shapes a member's choices and in fact is part of the dilemma of choice. A cynical saying among lawmakers asserts that "a vote on anything [is] a wrong vote if you cannot explain it in a 30-second TV ad."[57] Votes to increase congressional pay and perquisites, for example, often fail simply because members fear having to defend their stand in front of skeptical constituents.

What Are Constituencies?

No senator or representative is elected by, interacts with, or responds to all the people in a given state or district. The constituencies fixed in lawmakers' minds as they campaign or vote may be quite different from the boundaries found on maps. Fenno describes a "nest" of constituencies, ranging from the widest (geographic constituency) to the narrowest (personal constituency), which is made up of supporters, loyalists, and intimates.[58]

Geographic and Demographic Constituencies. The average House district today numbers more than 650,000 people. As for senators, fourteen represent states with only one House district; the rest represent multidistrict states with as many as thirty-four million people.[59] Such constituencies differ sharply from one another. More than half the people in Manhattan's Upper East Side (New York's Fourteenth Congressional District) have college degrees, compared with only 5 percent in south Los Angeles (California's Thirty-fourth District). Average per capita income in these same two districts is, respectively, $41,000 and less than $7,000. You can buy an average home for $23,200 in Democratic representative Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick's central Detroit district (Michigan's Thirteenth); in Democratic representative Henry A. Waxman's Beverly Hills district (California's Thirtieth), you would pay well over $500,000.[60] Such disparities among districts animate their representatives' outlooks.

There is also the political equivalent of microclimates. Democrat Nita Lowey's Eighteenth District of New York snakes southward from the upscale suburbs of Westchester County through a working-class sliver of the Bronx, jumps across Long Island Sound to an immigrant corridor in Flushing, and continues toward the tidy homes of southern Queens. Republican Mary Bono's sprawling southern California Forty-fifth District embraces smog-ridden suburbs east of Riverside, irrigated farmland of the Coachella Valley, and wealthy desert oases of Palm Springs and Palm Desert, where retired Hollywood stars reside. Even these geographical distinctions grossly simplify the complex and subtle mixtures of ethnic, economic, and social categories that make up these communities.

Demographically, constituencies may be homogeneous or heterogeneous.[61] Some constituencies, even a few whole states, remain uniform and one-dimensional—mostly wheat farmers or urban ghetto dwellers or small-town citizens. Because of increasing size, economic complexity, and educational levels, however, virtually all constituencies, House as well as Senate, have become more heterogeneous than they used to be. The more heterogeneous a constituency, the more challenging is the representative's task.

Another attribute of constituencies is electoral balance, especially as manifested in the incumbent's reelection chances. Heterogeneous districts tend to be more competitive than uniform ones. Incumbents predictably prefer safe districts—those with a high proportion of groups sympathetic to their partisan or ideological stance. Not only do safe districts favor reelection, but they also imply that voters will be easier to please.[62]

Truly competitive districts are not the norm, especially in the House of Representatives. Four out of five House victors in 2002 boasted margins of 60 percent or more; nearly one in five faced no major-party foe. A mere 10 percent of the seats were truly competitive (won by 55 percent or less). As Table 5-3 shows, competitiveness varies over time. The mid-1990s elections, for example, were unusually competitive because short-term factors (retirements, scandals, and voter unrest) put more seats into play. Since then, competition has plummeted. Senate seats are more likely to be closely contested than House races, but many senators still win in a walk.

Whatever the numbers show, few incumbents regard themselves as truly safe. The threat of losing is very real. Most lawmakers have a close call at some time in their congressional careers, and a third of them eventually suffer defeat.[63] Incumbents worry not only about winning or losing but also about their margins of safety. Downturns in normal electoral support narrow the member's breathing space in the job, may invite challengers for future contests, and could block chances for advancement.[64]

Political and Personal Constituencies. As candidates or incumbents analyze their electoral base, three narrower constituencies can be discerned:

Table 5-3 House and Senate Margins of Victory, 1974–2002

Chamber and election year	Percentage of vote				
	Under 55	55–59.9	60 plus	Unopposed	(N)
House					
1974	24%	16%	46%	14%	(435)
1976	17	14	56	12	(435)
1978	17	14	53	16	(435)
1980	18	14	60	8	(435)
1982	16	16	63	6	(435)
1984	12	13	61	14	(435)
1986	9	10	64	17	(435)
1988	6	9	67	18	(435)
1990	11	16	58	15	(435)
1992	20	18	58	3	(435)
1994	22	17	52	9	(435)
1996	22	18	57	3	(435)
1998	10	17	63	10	(435)
2000	23	12	59	15	(435)
2002	10	10	80	18	(435)
Senate					
1974	41	18	35	6	(34)
1976	30	33	30	6	(33)
1978	24	33	36	6	(33)
1980	58	18	21	3	(34)
1982	30	27	43	—	(33)
1984	18	21	58	3	(33)
1986	38	15	47	—	(34)
1988	33	15	52	—	(33)
1990	26	11	49	14	(34)
1992	34	34	32	—	(35)
1994	32	34	34	—	(35)
1996	59	18	24	—	(34)
1998	29	9	62	—	(34)
2000	29	15	55	—	(34)
2002	38	18	44	4	(34)

Source: *CQ Weekly* and authors' calculations.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding. "Unopposed" includes districts or states where only one major-party candidate was on the ballot.

supporters (the reelection constituency), loyalists (the primary constituency), and intimates (the personal constituency).[65] Supporters are expected to vote for them on election day, but some do not. Candidates and their advisers repeatedly monitor these voters, reassessing precinct-level political demography—registration figures, survey data, and recent electoral trends. The more elections incumbents have survived, the more precisely they can identify supporters. Areas and groups with the biggest payoff are usually targeted.

Loyalists are the politician's staunchest supporters. They may be from preelectoral ventures—civil rights, environmental, or anti-abortion activism, for example. They may be concentrated in religious or ethnic groups, or political or civic clubs. They may be friends and neighbors. They are willing volunteers who can be counted on to lend a hand in reelection campaigns.

Candidates dare not ignore these loyalists. A favorite story of House Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr., D-Mass., came from his first, losing, campaign for city council. A neighbor supposedly told him, "Tom, I'm going to vote for you even though you didn't ask me." "Mrs. O'Brien," replied a surprised O'Neill, "I've lived across the street from you for 18 years. I shovel your walk in the winter. I cut your grass in the summer. I didn't think I had to ask you for your vote." To this the lady replied, "Tom, I want you to know something: people like to be asked."[66] Expressions of gratitude are equally important. The Bush family, for example, is noted for personal thank-you notes to supporters. George Bush reportedly "always carried a box of note cards with him on the campaign trail and penned a personal note immediately following each event to the volunteers and hosts."[67] Such catering to core supporters helped send both Bushes, father and son, to the White House.

Even entrenched officeholders worry about keeping their core supporters energized. Loyalists are also a politician's defenders in times of adversity. "There's a big difference between the people who are for you and the people who are excitedly for you," an Iowa politician told Fenno, "between those who will vote if they feel like it and those for whom the only election is [your] election. You need as many of that group as you can get." An inadequate base of core support, the informant explained, spelled the downfall of two one-term Democratic senators elected from Iowa in the 1970s. One had a base that was a mile wide and an inch deep; the other's support was an inch wide and a mile deep.[68]

Intimates are close friends who supply political advice and emotional support. Nearly every candidate or incumbent knows a few of them. They may be members of the candidate's family, trusted staff members, political mentors, or individuals who shared decisive experiences early in the candidate's career. The setting and the players differ from state to state and from district to district. Tip O'Neill's inner circle was the "boys" of Barry's Corner, a local clubhouse in Cambridge, Massachusetts, whose families O'Neill had known intimately over more than fifty years of political life. When Rep. David E. Price, D-N.C., first decided to run for Congress, he relied on what he called the

"Wednesday night group," which he described as "an inner circle without whom the effort would never have gotten off the ground."[69] Such intimates play an indispensable role. They provide unvarnished advice on political matters and serve as sounding boards for ideas and strategies.

Politicians confront the constant dilemma of deciding which advisers to trust. More than most, they pay a public price for those who let them down. The danger is that intimates may give faulty advice or inaccurately assess the larger constituencies. Long-term incumbents run a special risk if their intimates lose touch with constituency shifts.

Home Styles

Legislators evolve distinctive ways of presenting or projecting themselves and their records to their constituents—what Fenno calls their home styles. These styles are exhibited in members' personal appearances, mailings, newsletters, press releases, telephone conversations, radio or television spots, and home pages on the Internet. Little is known about how home styles arise, but they are linked to members' personalities, backgrounds, constituency features, and resources. The concept of home style shifts the focus of constituency linkage from representation to presentation. As Fenno states, "It is the style, not the issue content, that counts most in the reelection constituency."[70]

Presentation of Self. The core ingredient of a successful home style is trust—constituents' faith that legislators are what they claim to be and will do what they promise.[71] Winning voters' trust does not happen overnight; it takes time. Three major ingredients of trust are qualification, the belief that legislators are capable of handling the job, a critical threshold that nonincumbents especially must cross; identification, the impression that legislators resemble their constituents, that they are part of the state or region; and empathy, the sense that legislators understand constituents' problems and care about them.

Given variations among legislators and constituencies, countless available home styles can effectively build the trust relationship. The legendary Speaker "Mr. Sam" Rayburn represented his East Texas district for nearly fifty years (1913–1961) as a plain dirt farmer. Once back in his hometown of Bonham, his drawl thickened; his tailored suits were exchanged for khakis, an old shirt, and slouch hat; and he traveled not in the Speaker's limousine but in a well-dented pickup truck. A biographer relates:

> If Rayburn ever chewed tobacco in Washington, a long-time aide could not recall it, but in Bonham he always seemed to have a plug in his cheek. He made certain always to spit in the fireplace at his home when constituents were visiting, so that if nothing else, they would take away the idea that Mr. Sam was just a plain fellow.[72]

Today's legislators are no less inventive in fashioning home styles. Congressman A's direct style features face-to-face contacts with people in his primary constituency. He rarely mentions issues because most people in his district agree on them. Congressman B, a popular local athlete, uses the national defense issue to symbolize his oneness with a district supportive of the military. Congresswoman C, articulate and personable, comes across as "everybody's sister." Congressman D displays himself as an issue-oriented and verbal activist, an outsider ill at ease with conventional politicians. And so on. The repertoire of home styles is limitless.

Voters are likely to remember style long after they forget issue pronouncements or voting records. Even so, legislators know full well that they must explain their decisions to others.[73]

Explaining Washington Activity. Explaining is an integral part of decision making. In home district forums, constituents expect members to be able to describe, interpret, and justify their actions. If they do not agree with the member's conclusions, they may at least respect the decision-making style:

> They don't know much about my votes. Most of what they know is what I tell them. They know more of what kind of a guy I am. It comes through in my letters: "You care about the little guy."[74]

Although few incumbents fear that a single vote can defeat them, all realize that voters' disenchantment with their total record can be fatal. Members therefore stockpile reasons for virtually every position they take—often more than are needed. Facing especially thorny choices (for example, on abortion policy or Medicare reform), they may find an independent stance to be the best defense. Inconsistency is not only mentally costly, but it can be politically costly as well. Thus, while subject matter may vary, politicians give much the same account of themselves, no matter what group they are talking to (contrary to the popular belief that politicians talk out of both sides of their mouths).

Legislators' accounts of Congress to constituents rarely convey any of the chummy comfort they may enjoy as part of the institution. Often members defend their own voting record by belittling Congress—portraying themselves as knights-errant battling sinister forces and feckless colleagues.

Constituency Careers. Constituency ties evolve over the course of a senator's or representative's career. Constituency careers have at least two recognizable stages: expansionism and protectionism. In the first stage the member constructs a reelection constituency by solidifying the help of hard-core supporters and reaching out to attract added blocs of support. This aggressive expansionism—plus exploitation of the perquisites of incumbency, such as fund-raising and an election-year avalanche of communications to constituents—accounts for the "sophomore surge," in which newcomers typically boost their margin in their first reelection bid.[75] In the second stage the member ceases to expand the base of support, content with protecting already won support. Once established, a successful style is rarely altered.

Certain developments, however, can lead to a change in a member's constituency style. One is a contextual change in the constituency, as a population

shift or redistricting forces a member to cope with unfamiliar voters or territory. A second cause is a strategic reaction, as a fresh challenger or a novel issue threatens established voting patterns. Because coalitions may shift over time, members and their advisers scrutinize the results of the past election (and, whenever available, survey findings).

Finally, home styles may change with new personal goals and ambitions. A member may seek higher office or may lose touch with voters and reject the reelection goal entirely. Growing responsibilities in Washington can divert attention from home state business, from family responsibilities, and, frankly, from amassing wealth. For Sen. William S. Cohen, R-Maine (1979–1997), the epiphany came with the death of his father and a heightened sense that "tomorrow is not promised to any of us."

> I really asked myself, is this what I want to do for the next six years? . . . Waiting to answer a senseless quorum call for no other reason than to have a quorum call? The endless back and forth and waste of time? The sense that rather than painting the broad landscape we're engaged in a pointillist approach—each little aspect of the dots?[76]

Cohen retired after eighteen years in the Senate. (Far from leaving public life, he became President Clinton's third secretary of defense.) His sentiments are echoed by many veteran legislators. Faced with new aspirations or shifting constituency demands, not a few members decide to retire. Others struggle ineffectively and are defeated. Still others rejuvenate their constituency base and survive.

Office of the Member Inc.

Home style is more than a philosophy for weighing constituents' claims. It affects the way a member answers day-to-day questions: How much attention should I devote to state or district needs? How much time should I spend in the state or district? How should I maintain contact with my constituents? How should I deploy my staff aides to deal with constituents' concerns? One of the most vexing problems is how to balance demands for being in Washington with the need to be back home with constituents.

Road Tripping

During the nineteenth century legislators spent much of their time at home, traveling to Washington only when Congress was in session. After World War II, however, congressional sessions lengthened until they spanned virtually the entire year. Legislators began to set up permanent residence in the nation's capital, a practice that in earlier times would have struck citizens as arrogant. By the 1970s both houses had adopted parallel schedules of sessions punctuated with brief district work periods (House) or nonlegislative periods (Senate).

At the same time, the two houses authorized members to make more paid trips to states or districts. In the early 1960s senators and representatives were allowed three government-paid trips home each year. Today they are allowed as many trips home as they want, subject to the limits of their official expense allowances.

Currently fashionable home styles entail frequent commutes. Although travel has increased for all members, the more time-consuming the trip home, the less often it is made. (Members from Alaska and Hawaii make about a dozen round trips a year—each requiring an elapsed twenty-four hours and spanning four or five time zones.)[77] When their families remain at home, members are more inclined to travel. They tend to avoid their districts during periods of congressional unpopularity, but they spend more time there during periods of adverse economic conditions. As election day approaches, representatives stay close to their districts.[78]

Seniority is also a factor. Senior members tend to make fewer trips to their districts than do junior members—perhaps reflecting junior members' greater attentiveness to their districts. Finally, members' decisions to retire voluntarily are usually accompanied by large drops in trips home. "There was no reason to go back," one member told Hibbing. "My engagement calendar used to be booked up for seven or eight months in advance; after I announced, no one seemed anxious to have me. I stayed in town and found out that Washington was not as bad as I had thought all those years."[79]

Constituency Casework

"All God's chillun got problems," exclaimed Rep. Billy Matthews, D-Fla. (1953–1967), as he pondered mail from his constituents.[80] In the early days lawmakers lacked staff aides and wrote personally to executive agencies for help in such matters as pension or land claims and appointments to military academies. The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 provided de facto authority for hiring caseworkers, first in Senate offices and later in the House.

What are these cases all about? As respondents in a nationwide survey reported, the most frequent reason for contacting a member's office (16 percent of all cases) is to express views or obtain information on legislative issues. Requests for help in finding government jobs form the next largest category, followed by cases dealing with government services such as Social Security, veterans benefits, or unemployment compensation. Military cases (for example, transfers, discharges, personal hardships) are numerous, as are tax, legal, and immigration problems. Constituents often ask for government publications: copies of legislative bills and reports, executive branch regulations, agricultural yearbooks, infant care booklets, and tourist information about the nation's capital. And there are requests for flags that have flown over the U.S. Capitol.

Most cases come to legislators' offices by letter, although phone calls, e-mails, faxes, or walk-ins at district or mobile offices are not uncommon.

Occasionally, members themselves pick up cases from talking to constituents. Many hold office hours in their districts for this purpose. When a constituent's request is received, it is usually acknowledged immediately by a letter that either fills the request or promises that an answer will be forthcoming.

If the request requires contacting a federal agency, caseworkers communicate by e-mail, phone, letter, or buckslip (a preprinted referral form).[81] Usually, the contact in the executive agency is a liaison officer, although some caseworkers prefer to deal directly with line officers or regional officials. Once the problem has been conveyed, it is a matter of time before a decision is reached and a reply forwarded to the congressional office. The reply is then sent along to the constituent, perhaps with a cover letter signed by the member. If the agency's reply is deemed faulty, the caseworker may challenge it and ask for reconsideration, and in some cases the member may intervene in person to lend weight to the appeal.

Although not all members are eager to handle casework personally, they all concede that prompt and effective casework pays off at election time. This principle applies to senators no less than to representatives. "Many freshmen view their role differently than twenty-five years ago, when a senator was only a legislator," Sen. Richard C. Shelby, R-Ala., observed as early as 1987. "Now a senator is also a grantsman, an ombudsman, and a caseworker, and cannot ignore those other roles. When we are asked by our constituents to help, we can't say we don't have time because we are focusing on national and international issues."[82]

Keeping up with incoming communications is a priority for all congressional offices. During fiscal 1998, representatives received some forty million pieces of mail; senators, thirty-five million. Low-cost phone calls, faxes, and e-mail messages, often prompted by concerted group efforts, have boosted constituents' communications to unprecedented (and uncounted) levels. All representatives and senators now have Internet e-mail addresses and home pages, some of them interactive.

The volume of Internet communications has, to all accounts, swamped congressional offices. House and Senate offices received an estimated eighty million messages in 2000, and the rate is rising by a million messages each month.[83] Representatives' offices may receive as many as eight thousand e-mails a month; for senators the figure is fifty-five thousand or more. The number of messages skyrocketed during the Clinton impeachment deliberations and then subsided, but at higher levels than before. The controversial nomination of former senator John Ashcroft, R-Mo. (1995–2001), as attorney general early in 2001 generated so much mail that the Senate's computer system was brought to a near standstill.

Casework loads vary from state to state and from district to district. In both chambers senior legislators apparently receive proportionately more casework requests than do junior members.[84] Perhaps senior legislators are considered more powerful and better equipped to resolve constituents' problems.

Legislators themselves certainly cultivate this image in seeking reelection. Demographic variations among electorates can affect casework volume. Some citizens simply are more likely than others to have contact with government agencies.

Comparing senators and representatives, casework loads depend mainly on constituency size. Frances E. Lee and Bruce I. Oppenheimer found that

> [s]enators as a group are not different from House members in the amount of contact they have with constituents. Instead, senators who represent constituencies that are similar in size to House districts have contact levels that mirror or exceed those of House members.[85]

Thus large-state senators would draw proportionately fewer requests than small-state senators. "As state population decreases . . . House members and senators look increasingly similar in accessibility and responsiveness."[86] As for clout, however, senators win hands down (they are 1 out of 100 instead of 1 out of 435). So constituents in small states are more than twice as likely to contact their senator than people in larger states, who tend to rely on their House member.

From all accounts, casework pays off in citizens' support for individual legislators. In one National Election Study (NES) survey, 17 percent of all adults reported that they or members of their families had requested help from their own representatives. Eighty-five percent of them said they were satisfied with the response they received; seven in ten felt the representative would be helpful if asked in the future.[87] "Casework is all profit," contends Morris P. Fiorina. If so, the profit statements may be written in disappearing ink. Only 16 percent of all citizens in the NES survey could remember anything specific the representative had done for the people of the district while in office.[88] A sensible middle-ground view holds that "service responsiveness has an electoral payoff for incumbents regardless of issue positions or other factors. Casework does not operate to supplant issue positions, however."[89]

Some criticize constituency casework as unfair or biased in practice. Citizens may not enjoy equal access to senators' or representatives' offices. Political supporters or cronies may get favored treatment at others' expense. But in the great bulk of cases, help is universally dispensed.

Personal Staff

Legislators head sizable office enterprises that reflect their two Congresses responsibilities within the institution and toward their constituents. In 2003 each House member was entitled to an annual staff allowance covering no more than eighteen full-time and four part-time employees. The average House member's full-time staff numbers about fourteen. Representatives also are entitled to an annual office allowance, used for travel, telecommunications, district office rental, office equipment, stationery, computer services, and mail.[90]

Senators' personal staffs range in size from thirteen to seventy-one; the average is about thirty-four full-time employees. Unlike the House, the Senate places no limits on the number of staff a senator may employ from their two personnel accounts: an administrative and clerical account (which varies according to a state's population) and an account for hiring legislative assistants. A senator's office expense account depends upon factors such as the state's population and its distance from Washington, D.C. Separate categories for mailing, stationery, local offices, and furniture can be shifted within the overall financial allotments.

Members' offices always seem crowded and overburdened, but the freezing of staff size has been partially offset by computerization, shifting to state and district offices, and use of volunteers. These offices depend heavily on unpaid help, mainly college-age interns. On average, each House and Senate office uses about nine interns every year (see Appendix B for information on internships).

Staff Organization. No two congressional offices are exactly alike. Each is shaped by the personality, interests, constituency, and politics of the individual legislator. State and district needs also influence staff composition. A senator from a farm state likely will employ at least one specialist in agricultural problems; an urban representative might hire a consumer affairs or housing expert. Traditions are important. If a legislator's predecessor had an enviable reputation for a certain kind of service, the new incumbent will dare not let it lapse.

The member's institutional position also affects staff organization. Committee and subcommittee chairmen have committee staff at their disposal. Members without such aides rely heavily on personal staff for committee work.

Staff Functions. Most personal aides in the House and Senate are young, well educated, and transient. Senate and House aides have served on average less than four years in their posts. Their salaries, although somewhat above the average for full-time workers in the United States, fall well below those for comparably educated workers.[91]

The mix of personal staff functions is decided by each member. Most hire administrative assistants, legislative assistants, caseworkers, and press aides as well as a few people from the home state or district. The administrative assistant supervises the office and imparts political and legislative advice. Often he or she functions as the legislator's alter ego, negotiating with colleagues, constituents, and lobbyists. Legislative assistants work with members in committees, draft bills, write speeches, suggest policy initiatives, analyze legislation, and prepare position papers. They also monitor committee sessions that the member is unable to attend.

To emphasize the personal touch, many members have moved casework staff to their home districts or states. Virtually all House and Senate members have home district offices in post offices or federal buildings. Some members

have as many as five or six. With the decline of party workers to assist local citizens, members' district staffs fill this need and, simultaneously, enhance members' reelection prospects. Senators have an average of four home state offices and deploy a third of their staff there. Representatives have an average of 2.3 offices and deploy almost half of their aides in their districts.[92]

Other reasons are cited for decentralizing constituent functions. Congressional office buildings on Capitol Hill are crowded. Field offices have lower staff salaries and lower overhead. They also are more convenient for constituents, local and state officials, and regional federal officers. Computers and fax machines make it easy for Washington offices and district offices to communicate. This decentralizing trend, which is likely to persist, implies a heightened division between legislative functions based on Capitol Hill and constituency functions based in field offices. In other words, "Office of the Member Inc." is increasingly split into headquarters and branch divisions—with the Capitol Hill office dealing with legislative duties and the state or district office dealing with constituents.

Members and the Media

Office allowances in both chambers amply support lawmakers' unceasing struggle for media attention. A member's office bears some resemblance to the communications division of a medium-size business. Nearly every day, stacks of printed matter and electronic messages are released for wide distribution. In addition to turning out press releases, newsletters, and individual and mass mailings, members communicate through telephone calls, interviews, radio and TV programs, and videotapes. Most of the time, these publicity barrages are aimed not at the national media but at individual media outlets back in the home state or district.

Direct Mail

The traditional cornerstone of congressional publicity is the franking privilege—the right of members to send out mail at no cost to them with their signature (the frank) instead of a stamp. The practice, which in this country dates from the First Continental Congress in 1775, is intended to facilitate official communication between elected officials and the people they represent (a rationale accepted by federal courts in upholding the practice). In recent times members found that aggressive use of the frank could aid reelection. Rep. Bill Frenzel, R-Minn. (1971–1991), noted that both parties teach newcomers three rules for getting reelected: "Use the frank. Use the frank. Use the frank."[93]

Critics point out that franked mail is largely unsolicited and politically motivated. First, outgoing mail costs are much higher in election years than in nonelection years. Second, most items are mass mailings, not individual letters. These mass mailings are either general-purpose newsletters blanketing home states or districts, or special messages targeted to certain categories of voters. Recipients are urged to share their views or contact local offices for

help. Sometimes the newsletter may feature an opinion poll asking for citizens' views on selected issues. Whatever the results, the underlying message is that the legislator cares what folks back home think.

The current franking law confers wide mailing privileges but forbids use of the frank for mail "unrelated to the official business, activities, and duties of members." It also bars the frank for a "matter which specifically solicits political support for the sender or any other person or any political party, or a vote or financial assistance for any candidate for any political office." In addition, chamber rules forbid mass mailings (five hundred or more pieces) sixty days (Senate) or ninety days (House) before a primary, runoff, or general election. In the two months before the beginning of each cutoff period, streams of Postal Service trucks are seen pulling away from loading docks of the congressional office buildings. During the period, moreover, many members skirt the requirement by sending out similar letters in batches of 499 or fewer.

Criticisms of such abuses led both houses to impose new franking restrictions in the 1990s. Most important, mailing costs have been integrated into members' office allowances, which forces trade-offs between mail and other expenditures, such as travel or staff. Caps have been placed on newsletters and on total outgoing mail—one piece for each address in the state for senators, three pieces for each address in the district for representatives. Rules governing newsletters curb their advertising features—for example, personal references or pictures of the member.

The recent reforms have reversed the upward spiral of congressional mail costs, from $113.4 million in fiscal 1988 to $30.8 million in fiscal 2002.[94] Members have turned toward discounted bulk mailings and away from mass newsletters and first-class letters. Although it can still be abused, the franking privilege is essential to sustain communications between lawmakers and their constituents. A former chairman of a House oversight commission posed the issue: "How do you write rules and regulations that distinguish between a thoughtful discussion of some important public issue and a self-promoting thing with the photograph of a member on every other page?"[95]

The advent of e-mail poses the problem of whether, or how, the much-debated franking restrictions should apply. The Senate has generally applied the franking rules to electronic mail. The House, however, has declined to adopt such strict rules. As Vernon J. Ehlers, R-Mich., says,

> It is not partisan, it is just simply an informational summary of these bills that were taken up, this is the result of the bills. My constituents are finding that useful, the e-mail list is growing. I think my constituents . . . will find it a bit strange to suddenly, three months before the election, they are not allowed to hear from me about what the Congress has done in a non-partisan way.[96]

Feeding the Local Press

News outlets in this country are highly decentralized and dispersed. About 1,500 daily newspapers and 6,500 weeklies are published in the United States. There are also more than 13,000 radio stations, 1,700 TV stations, and 11,800 cable systems throughout the country.[97] Virtually all these media outlets are locally based because of the vitality of local issues and local advertising.

Taken as a whole, local media outlets have inadequate resources for covering what their congressional delegations are doing in the nation's capital. Few of them have their own Washington reporters. Most rely on syndicated or chain services that rarely follow individual members consistently. "If they report national news it is usually because it involves local personalities, affects local outcomes, or relates directly to local concerns," stated a Senate report.[98]

Relations with the press receive careful attention from members. Most legislators have at least one staffer who serves as a press aide; some have two or three. Their job is to generate coverage highlighting the member's work. Executive agencies often help by letting incumbents announce federal grants or contracts awarded in the state or district. Even if the member had nothing to do with procuring the funds, the press statement proclaims, "Senator So-and-So announced today that a federal contract has been awarded to XYZ Company in Jonesville." Many offices also prepare weekly or biweekly columns that small-town newspapers can reprint under the lawmaker's byline.

The House, the Senate, and the four Capitol Hill parties have fully equipped studios and satellite links where audio or video programs or excerpted statements (called actualities) can be produced for a fraction of the commercial cost.[99] Some incumbents produce regular programs that are picked up by local radio or television outlets. More often, these outlets insert brief audio or TV clips on current issues into regular news broadcasts—to give the impression that their reporters have gone out and obtained the story. Members also create their own news reports and beam them directly to hometown stations, often without ever talking to a reporter. With direct satellite feeds to local stations, members regularly go "live at five" before local audiences.

Rep. Kenny Hulshof, R-Mo., typifies today's media-savvy lawmakers. Each week he holds a telephone conference with radio stations in his central Missouri district. Each month he hosts a half-hour television show in Columbia, his hometown and his district's largest city. Periodically he talks about the day's issues in links with local television outlets. A reporter described one such session:

> On the afternoon he appeared on satellite, from a GOP studio with red, white and blue drapes and a mural of the Capitol, Hulshof was questioned, in turn, by reporters from television stations in Quincy and Jefferson City about a bill to restructure the Internal Revenue Service (H.R. 2676) that Republicans had just passed.[100]

Aggressive media outreach was a logical strategy for Hulshof. In 1996 he ousted, by a 2 percent margin, a twenty-year Democratic incumbent who was widely perceived as being out of touch with his constituency. Hulshof's strategy seemed to have worked. He has won reelection handily ever since.

Some members invite controversy as a way of showing their accessibility. For example, Rep. Mark Souder, R-Ind., tapes five-minute reports every weekday for local airing and hosts an hour-long call-in show every Sunday—unofficially dubbed "Bark at Mark"—on a popular talk radio station in Fort Wayne.[101]

Like printed communications, radio and TV broadcasts pose ethical questions. House and Senate recording studios are supposed to be used only for communicating about legislation and other policy issues, but the distinction between legitimate constituent outreach and political advertising remains blurred. (Political party facilities, such as the one used by Representative Hulshof, have no such limits.) Some radio and television news editors have qualms about using members' programs. "It's just this side of self-serving," said one television editor of the biweekly "Alaska Delegation Report."[102] Others claim to see little difference between these electronic communications and old-fashioned press releases. Local editors and producers still have to decide whether to use the material, edit it, or toss it.

Local Press Boosterism?

In the eyes of home district media outlets, incumbents fare splendidly. Michael J. Robinson cited the case of "Congressman Press," a midlevel House member, untouched by scandal, who had an average press operation. One year Congressman Press issued 144 press releases, about three a week. That year the major paper in his district ran 120 stories featuring or mentioning him. More than half the stories drew heavily on the press releases. "On average, every other week, Congressman Press was featured in a story virtually written in his own office."[103]

Even when local stories are not drawn from press releases, they tend to be respectful if not downright laudatory. Hometown stories during one of the reelection campaigns of Rep. William Steiger, R-Wis. (1967–1978), were so fulsome in their praise, his press aide confessed, that no self-respecting press secretary would have dared put them out.[104] A detailed study of the local press corps in eighty-two contested races highlighted the journalists' tendency toward "safety and timidity." Incumbents were rendered respectful coverage based on their experience; in contested open seats, journalists tended to keep their distance.[105]

Electronic media are even more benign than print media. As one legislator said, "TV people need thirty seconds of sound and video at the airport when I arrive—that's all they want."[106] Most local reporters for radio and TV are on general assignment and do little preparation for interviews. Their primary goal is to get the newsmaker on tape. This is especially true of outlets in smaller markets, few of which have access to a Washington bureau. As a Jefferson City, Missouri, TV editor explained his station's handling of an appearance initiated by Representative Hulshof's office:

> He's trying to manage the information aspect of all of this [the Internal Revenue Service reform issue]. But we get the information we need, so we don't mind it too much. . . . We're in TV. We want to see him talk to us. We don't want phone calls.[107]

Local radio and television's weakness for congressionally initiated communications magnifies the advantages incumbents enjoy. ABC-TV correspondent Cokie Roberts concludes, "The emergence of local TV has made some members media stars in the home towns and, I would argue, done more to protect incumbency than any franking privilege or newsletter ever could, simply because television is a more pervasive medium than print."[108] Representative Hulshof states blandly: "I've been treated very fairly back home by the media, who have been content to just report the facts."[109]

Reports on Congress from the national press corps are far more critical than those from local news organizations. Following the canons of investigative journalism, many national reporters are on the lookout for scandals or evidence of wrongdoing. The national press reports primarily on the institution of Congress, whereas the local press is interested mostly in local senators and representatives. Individual members tend to be reported far more favorably than the institution. The content and quality of press coverage underscore the two Congresses. Congress as collective policy maker, covered mainly by the national press, appears in a different light from the politicians who make up the Congress covered mainly by local news outlets.

Conclusion

How members of Congress manage the two Congresses dilemma is reflected in their daily tasks on Capitol Hill and in their home states or districts. Election is a prerequisite to congressional service. Incumbent legislators allocate much of their time and energy, and even more of their staff and office resources, to the care and cultivation of voters. Their Hill styles and home styles are adopted with this end in mind. Yet senators and representatives do not live by reelection alone. Not a few turn their backs on reelection to pursue other careers or interests. For those who remain in office, reelection usually is not viewed as an end in itself but as a lever for pursuing other goals—policy making or career advancement, for example. Fenno challenged one of the representatives whose constituency career he had followed, remarking that "sometimes it must be hard to connect what you do here with what you do in Washington." "Oh no," the lawmaker replied, "I do what I do here so I can do what I want to do there."[110]