



Congressional Parties, Fundraising, and Committee Ambition

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Congressional party leaders are hypothesized to use desirable committee assignments as a selective incentive to entice incumbent members of Congress to contribute the collective good of the party's campaign efforts. Financial contributions to the party are an effective measure of party loyalty, particularly in an era of high levels of party loyalty on roll call votes. This article analyzes committee transfers in the U.S. Congress from the 102nd through the 107th Congresses. The evidence shows that the greater the amount an incumbent contributes to party committees or party candidates, the more likely he or she will transfer to prestige committees. It also demonstrates that fundraising has become more closely related to prestige committee transfers when margins of party control in the House became very close after the Republican takeover.

On June 14, 2000, the Republican leadership of the U.S. House of Representatives announced "Battle-ground 2000," a plan for incumbent members of the Republican caucus to raise \$16 million for the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) (Allen 2000). The leadership gave each member a "nonvoluntary" yellow pledge card. The amount listed was determined by a sliding scale based on the member's position in the leadership, committee, and seniority hierarchy. A United Way-style contribution thermometer, delineating each member's individual contribution, was posted outside of the suites from which members made fundraising calls. A special seventeen-member whip organization monitored progress and exerted peer pressure. Furthermore, Speaker Hastert explicitly told members that their contributions to the fundraising drive would help to determine their committee assignments and their rank within committees in the 107th Congress.

The techniques of congressional fundraising in the most recent election cycle are more coercive iterations of trends that started in the last few election cycles. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) formally initiated the practice of soliciting contributions from incumbents as "dues" during the 1991-92 election cycle, and the Republicans followed in the 1993-94 cycle (Gimpel 1996; Herrnson 2000; Sabato and Larson 2002: 87). Although a member's use of campaign contributions to colleagues to advance within the House's power structure is not unprecedented (see Baker 1989; Jackson 1988), incumbents' contributions from their own campaign accounts and/or leadership PACs to the campaign treasuries of other candidates or

and to party committees have increased substantially over the past decade (Herrnson 1997, 2000).

This article examines the extent to which funds donated by the campaign committees of incumbent members of Congress to other candidates and to party election committees affect committee transfers. In doing so, it evaluates the extent to which congressional parties channel the ambition of individual members by using such institutional resources as seats on prestige committees to reward members who assist the party in attaining its collective goals. This reward helps to explain why members vote with the party and contribute electoral funds to parties or colleagues when these activities pose some risk to own reelection efforts.

The evidence presented here shows that contributions affect transfers in the 102nd through 107th Congresses. The evidence also indicates that contributions have a greater influence on switches to prestige committees than to policy or constituency committees. The results demonstrate the importance of fundraising as an indicator of party loyalty in the contemporary partisan, high-cost electoral environment.

CONDITIONAL PARTY GOVERNMENT AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

The aim of party leaders in Congress is to accomplish the collective goals of the party through the achievement of majority party status (Jacobson 1985-86). With majority status comes the ability to structure and control the legislative process (Cox and McCubbins 1993), and thus makes it easier for members of the majority party to achieve their policy goals and to deliver benefits to constituents.

Although individual members favor majority status, they also have individual goals. These include reelection, advancement to leadership positions or another office, and good public policy (Fenno 1973). Congressional party leaders face a free rider problem in mobilizing members to achieve collective goals. Majority status is a collective good. Its benefits are available to all members of the majority party regardless of any individual member's contribution to achieving it. Even if members are willing to contribute to

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contributions to the good of the party. Members make financial contributions to colleagues or to the party because they can benefit with a better committee assignment, regardless of whether their party succeeds in reaping the collective reward of majority status. As a sign of conditional party government (Rhode 1991), it is noteworthy that members have accepted party leaders' imposition of fundraising duties on them and the allocation of valued committee assignments based on their compliance. It seems hard to imagine either of these occurring in eras when congressional parties were less united and invested less power in the leadership.

The evidence presented in this article has important implications for the committee assignment literature. In general, evidence that party loyalty voting affects committee switches has been mixed. The evidence here, consistent with the party-dominated committees thesis, supports the hypothesis that campaign contributions to the party or party candidates is a measure of party loyalty that can significantly affect the success of moving to prestige committees. Traditionally, party leaders sought to reward party loyalists with seats on prestige committees (with debatable success because of the other important concerns in the assignment process). In an era of spiraling campaign costs and razor-thin party control of the House, the ability to raise campaign funds may now be a critical measure of party loyalty. Thus, an ambitious member from a district whose constituency preferences make high levels of party voting difficult can use contributions to demonstrate his or her loyalty to attain assignments to party-controlled committees. It is also noteworthy that recent evidence (Wawro 2000: 124-26) demonstrates that legislative entrepreneurialism is not related to prestige transfers. The inference that partisan considerations dominate considerations of legislative craft is important given the centrality of committees to the development of legislation.

On the surface, the fact that larger contributions to a party's electoral effort are associated with committee assignments seems to distort republican democracy. This concern parallels the question of whether Political Action Committee contributions "buy" access, votes, and legislative activism. There has been a long, vigorous, and inconclusive debate within the interest group literature on this question (see Smith 1995 for a review). Within this context, it necessary to emphasize that contributions are one indication of party loyalty. Members of Congress are likely to measure party loyalty mainly based on personal interactions and reputation, and less so by any indicators that can be quantified such as vote scores or aggregate campaign contributions. Those who donate to colleagues and to party committees are also likely to provide other assistance and courtesies to their colleagues that gain them a positive image and respect within the caucus. This gains legislators support from members of the Steering committees for desirable committee assignments where the party must trust its members to behave responsibly with the power delegated to them. Willingness to contribute to the collective good of majority status should be an excellent indicator of one's willingness to protect the party's interests in committee.

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