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The Position-taking Value of Bill Sponsorship in Congress

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What is the value of non–roll call position taking in Congress? The authors argue that non–roll call positions are used by interest groups to acquire information about the direction and intensity of legislators' preferences. Legislators, in turn, use them to attract campaign contributions from potential donors. Examining bill sponsorship in the 103rd and 104th Congresses, the authors find a relationship between campaign contributions from labor and gun control political action committees and the positions House Democrats take through bill sponsorship. These results suggest that non–roll call position taking indeed matters.

Keywords: *American politics; legislative studies; political organizations and parties*

David Mayhew (1974, 51) argues that "politicians often get rewarded for taking positions rather than achieving effects." While members of Congress (MCs) are said to have three goals (Fenno 1973)—reelection, making good public policy, and attaining influence within Congress—arguably the most important goal is getting reelected because that "must be achieved over and over if other ends are to be entertained" (Mayhew 1974, 16). Thus most research on position taking in Congress investigates the effect that positions—roll call positions, in particular—have on electoral outcomes (e.g., Johannes and McAdams 1981; Erikson and Wright 1993; Brady et al. 1996; Jacobson 1996; Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002). Much less attention has been paid to the effects of position taking outside the roll call arena.

What is the value of non–roll call position taking in Congress? This is an important question because many positions are not expressed through votes. On any given day in Congress, representatives are delivering floor speeches, sponsoring and cosponsoring legislation, and holding press conferences. As Mayhew (1974) argues, they perform these activities as if their positions matter to electoral outcomes. Thus legislators take non–roll call positions on issues that their constituents care about and deliver opinions that align with constituents' preferences (Hall 1996; Highton and Rocca 2005).

It is unclear, however, whether non–roll call positions taken in Congress actually have any political consequences. The purpose of this article is to investigate Mayhew's argument that legislators receive rewards for taking positions in Congress. We argue that while most voters remain unaware of their representative's positions, members of an attentive public pay close attention to legislators' stances. Representatives know this and use non–roll call forums to signal attentive groups that they are "on their side." Groups, in turn, reward representatives sympathetic to their causes with campaign contributions.

We test our theory by examining Democrats' propensity to sponsor labor- and gun control–related bills in the 103rd and 104th Congresses and the money they receive from labor and gun control political action committees (PACs), respectively.[1] Not only is bill sponsorship unique because it has both policy and position-taking importance, the nontrivial costs associated with writing a bill (Schiller 1995) make it a particularly credible position-taking exercise. In the end, we find a strong correlation between legislators' non–roll call position taking and campaign contributions from PACs.

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Background

David Mayhew defines position taking as "the public enunciation of a judgmental statement on anything likely to be of interest to political actors" (Mayhew 1974, 16). To date, most empirical analyses of position taking in Congress focus on roll call voting, where MCs regularly cast votes, thereby regularly taking positions. Beginning with Miller and Stokes (1963), a large literature has developed to understand the nature of the connection between legislators' roll call votes and the opinions and preferences of their constituencies.[2] Left largely unstudied has been position taking outside the domain of roll call voting. And to the extent that this has been studied, the emphasis has generally been on the determinants of position taking. In this article, we suggest that although non–roll call position taking is difficult to analyze systematically, shifting from an exclusive roll call focus is important because a large amount of MC position taking does not occur through roll call votes. Furthermore, we suggest that the time has come for students of Congress to shift their focus from the determinants of position taking to its effects.

One of the defining features of non–roll call position taking is its versatility. In contrast to roll call voting, members are not restrained to either a *yes*, *no*, or *abstain*; they have the freedom to take multidimensional positions on complicated issues. And while roll call votes require members to take positions—"there is no way for a member to avoid making a record" (Mayhew 1974, 65)—outside the roll call arena, members have greater discretion about whether they take positions on particular issues because there are no formal requirements to do so.[3] MCs may pick and choose the issues on which they take positions (indeed, members *must* choose because even if they wanted to, there are too many issues to cover them all). Thus, while roll calls effectively require that a position be taken, in other arenas, position taking has a more voluntary aspect to it.

This raises a variety of questions that do not emerge in studies of roll call voting. First, under what conditions might an MC take a position on an issue? Second, once an MC decides to take a position, what is the nature of that position (i.e., liberal vs. conservative, ambiguous vs. clearly defined, etc.)? Since virtually all students of position taking contend that it is electorally motivated (Hill and Hurley 2002, 220), it is not surprising that most research finds constituency characteristics to be a primary determinant of both decisions (e.g., Canon 1999; Hall 1996; Highton and Rocca 2005). A third question deals with the types of legislative activities MCs use to take positions. In general, research has found the following non–roll call position-taking activities to reflect nonelectoral goals and motivations: bill cosponsorship (Campbell 1982; Kessler and Krehbiel 1996; Koger 2003; Rocca and Sanchez 2008); bill sponsorship (Schiller 1995; Canon 1999; Swers 2000; Rocca and Sanchez 2008); nonlegislative debate (Maltzman and Sigelman 1996; Morris 2001; Harris 2005; Rocca 2007); committee debate and markup (Hall 1996); and floor debate and markup (Smith 1989; Hall 1996).

While research has, for the most part, established the electoral, institutional, and descriptive determinants of position taking, we know surprisingly little about whether position taking actually matters. Consider roll call voting, for instance. One set of findings shows that under some conditions, roll call votes affect electoral outcomes (Erikson 1971; Erikson and Wright 1993; Jacobson 1996; Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan 2002). In contrast, another line of research discusses representatives' tendency to "shirk," that is, stray from their constituents' preferences (e.g., Wright 1993; Goff and Grier 1993). The consequences of non–roll call position taking are even less clear. One reason is that few students of Congress have investigated the issue. To the extent that it has been studied, the focus has been on whether non–roll call activities have policy implications. For instance, Kessler and Krehbiel (1996) find that bill cosponsorship can be an important intralegislative signaling device, and Schiller (1995) argues that sponsorship can be used by MCs to shape the agenda (even when bills fail). We know even less about the electoral implications of non–roll call position taking. Indeed, most studies treat electoral outcomes as a determinant of the behavior, not a consequence. For instance, Campbell (1982), Kessler and Krehbiel (1996), and Wilson and Young (1997) find electoral margins to be an insignificant determinant of bill cosponsorship. And Koger (2003) recently found an inverse relationship between the two but for freshman only. The same confusion generally holds for floor speeches. While Morris (2001) finds a relationship between electoral margin and nonlegislative debate, Maltzman and Sigelman (1996) find no such correlation.

Despite the inconclusive results, it is reasonable to believe that positions that conflict with constituency sentiment may adversely affect incumbents' electoral prospects. Even though citizens "are almost totally uninformed about legislative issues in Washington"

(Miller and Stokes 1963, 47), the chance of voter retaliation exists because there are a variety of intermediaries (e.g., the media and campaign challengers) with sufficient resources to inform constituents of a wayward representative.

But are legislators rewarded for "right" positions, as Mayhew suggests? Of course, one reward is getting reelected (Mayhew 1974). One type of position taking that has been shown to have representational consequences is the type undertaken outside of Congress. Fenno (1978) and Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina (1987) are among those who find that a more "personal" sort of position taking, advertising, and credit claiming pays electoral dividends. Emphasizing a "home style" and cultivating a "personal vote" helps MCs build bonds of trust, identification, and empathy with constituents (Fenno 1978). However, evidence that legislators are rewarded for positions taken inside Congress (especially the non–roll call type) is still inconclusive.

Theory

The goal of this article is to determine whether non–roll call position taking has any significant political consequences. Does a position, once taken, matter? We argue that the value of non–roll call position taking has less to do with communicating directly to constituents than with sending signals to a more attentive public.[4] Among the most common targets of congressional signals within the attentive public are other members of Congress (e.g., Gilligan and Krehbiel 1989; Kessler and Krehbiel 1996; Wilson and Young 1997); the White House, particularly on matters of foreign policy (e.g., Lindsay 1992–1993; Meernik 1995; Howell and Pevehouse 2007); the Supreme Court (e.g., Epstein and Knight 1998; Martin 2001; Sala and Spriggs 2004); the bureaucracy (e.g., Katzmann 1989; Ferejohn and Shipan 1990; Krause 1996); and, of course, interest groups.

To the extent that congressional signaling vis-à-vis interest groups has been studied, the focus has been on roll call voting. Two noteworthy studies, however, consider the value of non–roll call activities. First, Hall and Wayman (1990) argue that a relationship exists between contributions and members' patterns of involvement or participation, especially at the committee level.[5] And Box-Steffensmeier and Grant (1999) argue that the more effective a legislator is, the more contributions he or she attracts from PACs. They conclude that legislators can increase their campaign contributions by "being able to successfully guide legislation through Congress and into law" (p. 519).

What these and other studies show is that interest groups work hard to identify which legislators might be sympathetic to their causes. Members of Congress, in turn, work hard to attract interest groups' contributions and other types of support. We argue in this article that non–roll call position-taking forums in Congress are invaluable tools for (1) interest groups to acquire information about members' preferences and (2) for legislators to advertise the direction and intensity of their positions to potential donors.

We assume that voters are uncertain about candidates' policy stances during election campaigns but that candidates can use money to advertise their positions and win support from voters. Candidates use non–roll call forums to take positions favored by interest groups in order to attract campaign contributions. They are important signaling devices that provide valuable information to interest groups looking for ways to spend their resources. What sort of new information can interest groups learn from non–roll call positions? Indeed, interest groups spend a great deal of resources tracking roll call votes and building personal relationships with legislators in order to identify allies and adversaries. But non–roll call positions have some significant advantages over both sources of information. Consider roll call votes.

First, as we discuss earlier, the versatility of non–roll call position taking allows MCs to take multidimensional positions on complicated issues. This certainly may have informational value for interest groups. But this versatility also brings to mind a second advantage. Legislators may use non–roll call positions to signal the intensity of their preferences, not just their direction. Communicating intensity is important because "the object of a rational PAC allocation strategy is not simply the *direction* of legislators' preferences but the *vigor* with which those preferences are promoted in the decision making process" (Hall and Wayman 1990, 802; emphasis in original). The act of sponsoring a bill, for instance—an activity with nontrivial opportunity costs (Schiller 1995)—signals to interest groups that the legislator is serious about the issue. And giving multiple speeches on the same issue may signal not only the vigor of their position, but how hard they are willing to work on that issue. Roll call votes, in contrast, signal only the direction of legislators' preferences.

Third, members can take non–roll call positions on issues not on the legislative agenda. These positions are especially useful when issues are on the minds of constituents but not scheduled for a vote. For instance, members of the House were delivering one-minute speeches on NAFTA in the 103rd Congress

long before any bill was scheduled for a vote (indeed, many MCs are still taking positions on the issue). More recently, members of both parties in the House have delivered one-minute speeches and special orders on judicial nominations, an issue reserved specifically to the Senate.

Now consider its advantages over interpersonal contact. Possibly the most important advantage that non–roll call position taking has over interpersonal contact is credibility. When legislators take a non–roll call position, they are making their position a matter of public record. In a sense, any commitment made to an interest group's cause via non–roll call forums is enforceable by a third party: voters. While information gained through personal contact is useful and often meaningful, it cannot match the legitimacy that the floors of the Senate and House provide.

Still, some forms of non–roll call position taking are often referred to as "cheap talk" because they are relatively costless: "It is no more difficult for a legislator ignorant of an issue to make statements about the likely effects of some bill than it is for a knowledgeable legislator" (Austen-Smith 1990, 125).[6] But most forms of non–roll call positions—bill sponsorship, in particular (Schiller 1995)—does have one important cost: time, which Fenno (1978, 34) notes is a House member's "scarcest and most precious political resource." Depending on the difficulty of the policy, saliency of the issue, or experience and knowledge of the legislator, non–roll call position taking can carry significant opportunity costs.[7] This makes it theoretically meaningful. One goal of this article is to show that non–roll call position taking is empirically meaningful as well. We will return to the costs of non–roll call position taking shortly.

In summary, members of Congress take non–roll call positions to signal not only the direction but also the intensity of their preferences to potential campaign donors. Following Hall and Wayman (1990), we suggest that the simple act of taking a non–roll call position signals an MC's preference intensity. This logic yields a straightforward hypothesis: Legislators who deliver non–roll call positions increase their campaign contributions from supportive interest groups.

Research Design

The empirical analysis examines the relationship between campaign contributions and non–roll call position taking in Congress. The dependent variable is the amount of money Democratic legislators received from labor and gun control PACs during the 1994 and 1996 election cycles. The labor data were collected from the Federal Election Commission database (www.fec.gov), and the gun control data were taken from Open Secrets (www.opensecrets.org). The unit of analysis is the individual MC by congressional term.

The key independent variables in the analysis are whether an MC sponsored a labor- or gun-related bill during the 103rd (1993–94) and 104th (1995–96) Congresses, respectively.[8] We chose bill sponsorship to measure non–roll call positions because it is the only non–roll call position-taking activity to be both important to policy and costly. First, notwithstanding Kessler and Krehbiel's (1996) study, it is the only non–roll call activity shown to have clear policy importance. A bill's author, topic, language, scope, and urgency—all of which are originally established during the sponsorship stage—are clear determinants of its success (e.g., Matthews 1960; Franzitch 1979; Hibbing 1991; Adler and Wilkerson 2005; Krutz 2005). And Schiller (1995) shows that sponsoring legislation—even bills that do not pass—shapes the legislative agenda. With the possible exception of bill cosponsorship, no other non–roll call position-taking activity matches the policy importance of bill sponsorship.

But bill cosponsorship cannot match sponsorship's second characteristic: its costliness. Schiller (1995, 188) discusses at length the three types of costs associated with sponsoring a bill: (1) resource costs, which consist of "the time and energy MCs and staff expend consulting with constituents, interest groups and other Senate offices about potential bills"; (2) opportunity costs, which are associated with ignoring other issues that might help establish a reputation or thwart electoral vulnerability; and (3) political costs, which consist of potential "opposition among constituents, interest groups and other senators." While it is possible for cosponsorship to have both opportunity and political costs, it has close to zero resource costs. And while the resource costs associated with some bills are effectively zero because they are written by interest groups or reintroduced in subsequent Congresses, it is reasonable to expect MCs to expend some resources on behalf of the bills they introduce; particularly if they are, as Franzitch (1979) claims, interested in seeing them passed.

The costly nature of bill sponsorship makes it a potentially valuable position-taking tool. Assuming the legislator is a rational political actor, "there must be benefits attached to bill sponsorship that can outweigh the costs" (Schiller 1995, 190). We suggest that one benefit of bill sponsorship is that it allows

MCs to express the intensity of their own preferences and to represent the intensity of those of their constituents. And as we discuss earlier, revealed intensities can be just as important a signal as revealed preferences (Hall 1996). In summary, where bill cosponsorship may have policy implications (Kessler and Krehbiel 1996), it is a relatively costless activity. And where other non–roll activities may be costly—floor debate, for instance—they tend to have little, if any, policy importance. Bill sponsorship is the only non–roll call activity that is both costly and important to policy. We collected sponsorship data using Scott E. Adler and John Wilkerson's (1993–96) Congressional Bills Project, located online at www.congressionalbills.org. Our labor-related variable, labeled *sponsored labor bill*, is coded one if an MC sponsored a bill relating to labor or employment and zero otherwise.[9] Our gun-related variable, labeled *sponsored gun control bill*, is coded one if an MC sponsored a bill seeking to increase gun control and zero otherwise.[10]

Only Democrats are included in the analysis because of the difficulty of identifying the substantive content of labor bills. Due to the Democratic Party's traditional ties to labor, we assume that bills sponsored by Democratic MCs are friendly to labor and thus expect MCs who sponsor a labor-related bill to receive more campaign contributions from labor PACs. We chose to study only Democrats in the gun control model in order to maintain consistency and ease interpretation across models. We expect MCs who sponsor a gun control bill to receive more campaign contributions from gun control PACs than those who do not sponsor such a bill.

Of course, it is also possible that those who receive money from labor and gun control PACs are more likely to sponsor labor and gun control bills, respectively. This endogeneity problem is common in studies of the relationship between campaign contributions and any form of legislative behavior. In order to keep our methodology consistent with the vast majority of past research, we utilize a system of two equations to account for this endogeneity problem.[11] The first equation, used to predict the likelihood that a Democratic MC sponsors a labor or gun control bill, sets up an instrumental measure of bill sponsorship. The predicted values from this equation are used as an independent variable in the second-stage equation, which predicts the amount of money a Democratic MC receives from labor and gun control PACs. For this system of equations to be identified, there must be at least one variable that affects a representative's likelihood of sponsoring a labor or gun control bill but not his or her level of campaign contributions. We use an MC's level of legislative activity to identify the equations, measured as the number of bills sponsored by an MC each Congress. We expect the likelihood that a legislator sponsors a labor or gun control bill to increase as his or her bill sponsorship, in general, increases. Legislative activity has not been shown by previous research to matter to either labor or gun control contributions, perhaps because both tend to emphasize legislators' ideology.

Control Variables

There are a number of control variables included in the simultaneous equation model, each shown by previous research to be important predictors of PAC contributions and bill sponsorship.[12] The first set of control variables is institutional in nature. First, a member's ideology should play a role in how much money they raise from ideological PACs as well as their sponsorship behavior. We measure ideology using DW-NOMINATE scores in both the labor and gun control models.[13] The DW-NOMINATE score ranges from –1, *most liberal*, to 1, *most conservative*.

Second, we include committee assignments, which are typically included in models of labor contributions (for example, see Herndon 1982; Saltzman 1987; Jackson and Engel 2003), gun contributions (McGarrity and Sutter 2000),[14] and bill sponsorship (for example, see Hall 1996; Schiller 1995; Swers 2000). For the labor model, we code as one (zero otherwise) MCs serving on either the Committee on Education and Labor or the Appropriations Committee because both have been identified as committees that disproportionately affect labor interests (Wilhite and Thielmann 1987; Grier and Munger 1993; Jackson and Engel 2003).[15] For the gun control model, we code as one (zero otherwise) MCs serving on either the Judiciary Committee or Appropriations Committee because they tend to be the committees of jurisdiction on gun-related matters.

Third, we control for seniority, which previous research has found to have significant effects on campaign contributions (Denzau and Munger 1986; Grier and Munger 1991, 1993) and the propensity to sponsor bills (Schiller 1995). We use two measures of seniority, a freshman dummy variable and length of tenure in years (logged) (Snyder 1992). Fourth, we control for committee leaders. It is reasonable to expect them to be popular with contributors because of their significant agenda power, and evidence suggests that leadership

positions lead to larger contributions (Romer and Snyder 1994). And Schiller (1995) finds committee leaders to be particularly active bill sponsors. We include a leadership variable coded one if an MC is a leader—defined as a chair or ranking minority member of a full or subcommittee—of the appropriate committee of jurisdiction (zero otherwise). A second variable is coded one if he or she is a leader of a nonjurisdictional committee (i.e., a leader of a committee other than Appropriations, Judiciary, or Education, depending on the model) and zero otherwise.

Finally, we control for majority-party status. While majority-party status has been found to have no effect on how labor allocates its money (Rudolph 1999), this has not been extensively studied. Given the costs of sponsoring bills (Schiller 1995) as well as the low likelihood that members of the minority party pass legislation (Davidson 1969; Frantzich 1979), it is reasonable to expect minority-party status to deflate bill sponsorship.

The second set of control variables is electoral in nature. First, we control for an MC's electoral vulnerability. On average, marginal incumbents have been found to attract more funds than safe incumbents, most likely because they seek the help to fend off quality challengers (Jacobson 2004). Since position taking is an electorally oriented activity (Mayhew 1974), it is reasonable to expect electoral security to have at least a marginal effect on the propensity of MCs to sponsor bills. Electoral vulnerability is measured in two ways: as the challenger's percentage of the vote in the current election cycle and whether an MC ran unopposed.[16] Second, we control for district interests, which we measure using three district characteristics. For the labor model, we include the percentage of a district's population who belong to a union. The union variable was taken from Box-Steffensmeier's online data resource (Box-Steffensmeier, Arnold, and Zorn 1997).[17] We include the following variables in both the labor and gun control models: whether the district is located in the South,[18] percentage of constituents living in an urban area, and median income of the district. Finally, we include the amount of money an MC received from nonlabor and non–gun control groups in all models. For example, Saltzman (1987) and Romer and Snyder (1994) examine total nonlabor contributions to determine how aggressively a candidate seeks contributions. We do the same here. It is logged to deal with the skewed nature of the data.

Results[18]

Table 1 depicts the second-stage Tobit results for labor contributions during the 103rd and 104th Congresses.[19] The findings demonstrate a strong relationship between bill sponsorship and campaign contributions from labor groups.[20] Bill sponsorship is statistically significant at the .05 level and in the predicted direction.[21] The results show that after controlling for institutional and electoral factors, a Democratic MC receives about $67,216 if he or she sponsors a labor bill. This is strong evidence that the value of bill sponsorship—and non–roll call legislative activity more generally—extends beyond the policy process in Congress. Our findings demonstrate that there is significant electoral value in the form of campaign contributions to position taking outside the roll call arena.

Most results for the control variables in Table 1 are in line with our expectations and the findings of previous research. First, a couple of institutional factors appear to affect contributions from labor groups. While committee membership and leadership do not appear to have an effect on labor contributions, our results show that a freshman receives almost $33,000 more than a nonfreshman ($p < .05$), while tenure more generally does not reach statistical significance. Also, members of the 104th Congress received about $38,000 more than those in the 103rd Congress ($p < .05$), suggesting that labor PACs are less interested in majority-party status than business PACs (Cox and Magar 1999). Finally, and not surprisingly, there is a strong negative relationship between an MC's ideology scores and the amount of money he or she receives from labor.

Table 1 also shows that electoral factors affect labor contributions. First, consistent with Grenzke (1989), there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between district union membership and contributions from labor ($p < .05$). Specifically, an MC receives over $200,000 more from labor for every 1 percent increase in his or her district's union membership.[22] South, percentage urban, and median income, however, do not reach statistical significance. Furthermore, consistent with previous research, electoral vulnerability has a statistically significant ($p < .05$) and positive effect on labor contributions. The results show that a 1 percent increase in a challenger's vote share leads to a $2,140 increase in contributions from labor. Finally, consistent with Saltzman (1987), the amount of nonlabor contributions

Table 1
Tobit Results; Labor Contributions

Variable	Coefficient (Original *SE*)	Coefficient (Correct *SE*)
Bill sponsorship	67216.700* (35875.920)	67216.700* (28272.110)
District union membership	208630.400* (73474.710)	208630.400* (63981.130)
District median income ($1,000s)	–490.716 (492.675)	–490.716 (372.984)
Percentage urban in district	–4.591 (140.288)	–4.591 (104.102)
South	9537.285 (11022.620)	9537.285 (8845.831)
Freshman	32680.930* (17627.190)	32680.930* (13831.720)
Tenure (logged)	–5610.273 (7728.370)	–5610.273 (5968.486)
Education/Labor or Appropriations member	14108.210 (9072.273)	14108.210 (7442.094)
Education/Labor or Appropriations leader	6398.469 (15382.010)	6398.469 (13089.630)
Committee leader	–16580.210 (10051.660)	–16580.210 (7774.042)
104th Congress	38462.130* (8775.648)	38462.130* (6721.799)
DW-NOMINATE	–103072.200* (24233.280)	–103072.200* (20196.330)
Electoral vulnerability	2140.329* (329.912)	2140.329* (259.250)
No challenger	–16211.050 (19867.100)	–16211.050 (16806.390)
Nonlabor receipts (logged)	39013.630* (6731.845)	39013.630* (4806.570)
Constant	–4494588* (914454.900)	–4494588* (692762.300)
Observations	388	
LR χ^2	241.74*	

Note: The dependent variable is the amount of campaign contributions legislators received from labor political action committees during the 1994 and 1996 election cycles. All significance levels are based on percentile and bias-corrected confidence intervals. LR = *$p < .05$.

an MC receives is also positively related to how much he or she receives from labor ($p < .05$). Specifically, MCs receive about $39,000 for every $1 increase in logged receipts from nonlabor PACs.

While the sizes of the coefficients differ as expected, given the different financial situations of the two types of groups, the results in Table 2 are remarkably consistent with those labor results just discussed. Clearly, sponsorship of gun control legislation leads to larger contributions from gun control groups, an additional $10,559 to be exact ($p < .05$).

The same or similar control variables are significant in this model as well. Freshman is not significant in this model, but tenure, electoral vulnerability, and DW-NOMINATE are significant and in the expected directions, suggesting that gun control groups, too, contribute to their ideological supporters, especially those who are most vulnerable. Democrats also received, on average, $2,000 more in the 104th Congress than in the 103rd. Finally, for every additional percentage of the district that is urban, a legislator receives an additional $30 from gun control groups.

The results of these analyses are amazingly robust across the two groups, and in both cases, bill sponsorship has a nontrivial influence on the amount of contributions a legislator receives from related interest groups.

Conclusion

The goal of this project was to determine the value of non–roll call position taking in Congress. We argued that interest groups use MCs' non–roll call positions to acquire information about the direction and intensity of their preferences. Legislators, in turn, use them to attract campaign contributions from potential donors. The results showed a strong relationship between one form of non–roll call behavior in Congress, bill sponsorship, and contributions from ideological PACs. Specifically, sponsoring labor and gun control bills increases contributions from labor and gun control PACs, respectively. In all, the results suggest that bill sponsorship specifically and non–roll call position taking more generally have significant political consequences.

In closing, this article sheds new light on why legislators take positions in Congress. By showing a direct and robust relationship between MCs' position-taking behavior and interest group contributions, it substantiates the claim that non–roll call position taking in Congress matters. It also suggests that legislators spend their time wisely. This would be a difficult claim to make under the assumption that members engage in symbolic action in Congress in order to send signals directly to constituents. The reason is

Table 2
Tobit Results; Gun Control Contributions

Variable	Coefficient (Original SE)	Coefficient (Correct SE)
Bill sponsorship	10559.520* (3785.816)	10559.520* (3131.168)
District median income ($1,000s)	–38.678 (34.322)	–38.678 (28.875)
Percentage urban in district	29.993* (12.555)	29.993* (11.396)
South	356.859 (696.153)	356.859 (578.043)
Freshman	–1201.961 (1023.822)	–1201.961 (877.261)
Tenure (logged)	–1309.830* (557.590)	–1309.830* (524.139)
Judiciary or Appropriations member	128.411 (891.022)	128.411 (679.824)
Judiciary or Appropriations leader	–690.908 (3346.032)	–690.908 (1301.611)
Committee leader	–210.645 (797.677)	–210.645 (701.421)
104th Congress	2080.991* (674.943)	2080.991* (587.128)
DW-NOMINATE	–6418.254* (2169.854)	–6418.254* (1846.911)
Electoral vulnerability	157.724* (38.096)	157.724* (31.036)
No challenger	–3511.528 (5208.277)	–3511.528 (1792.414)
Non–gun control receipts (logged)	2336.576* (585.670)	2336.576* (483.397)
Constant	–256399.500* (69366.350)	–256399.500* (61366.480)
Observations	388	
LR χ^2	132.67*	

Note: The dependent variable is the amount of campaign contributions legislators received from gun control political action committees during the 1994 and 1996 election cycles. All significance levels are based on percentile and bias-corrected confidence intervals. LR = Loglikelihood Ratio.
*$p < .05$.

straightforward: prima facie, the costs of sponsoring a bill (e.g., the time it takes to research the issue, prepare the bill, and network on behalf of the bill) would seem to outweigh the potential benefits (the off chance that voters would be aware of the bill or that it would make it out of committee). Instead, the results presented in this article present a more realistic account of symbolic behavior in Congress. Simply stated, members of Congress seem to be receiving a considerable wage for their bill sponsorship, and that wage provides ample incentive to engage in non–roll call position taking.

This study also has implications for the study of interest groups' influence in Congress. Students of Congress and interest groups have long held that money buys access, not votes (Sorauf 1992; Wittenberg and Wittenberg 1989; Wolpe 1990). The results presented here reaffirm the idea that a relationship between position taking in Congress and money does exist. It is also consistent with Hall and Wayman's (1990) conclusion that legislative effort and money are related. Though our project focuses on bill sponsorship, the hypothesis tested here applies to any non–roll call position-taking activity. Just as Hall and Wayman found for committee participation, we would expect similar results for position taking through one-minute speeches, special order addresses, general debate, or bill cosponsorship. Indeed, fleshing out the relationship between interest groups and non–roll call position taking would be a good avenue for future research. The versatility of non–roll call position taking gives legislators the opportunity to send more complex signals to interest groups than they otherwise can through roll call votes. These communications are worth studying further.

Notes

1. Our focus on only two issue areas is not unique in the literature. Different types of political action committees (PACs) (e.g., unions, corporations, single-issue groups) use different strategies when allocating donations (Box-Steffensmeier and Dow 1992), so scholars often focus their studies on only one type of group, whether it be labor (Endersby and Munger 1992; Jackson and Engel 2003; Saltzman 1987), corporations (Grier, Munger, and Roberts 1994) or gun control (Langbein and Lotwis 1990; McGarrity and Sutter 2000).

2. See, for example, Fiorina (1974); Achen (1978); Erikson (1981); Bartels (1991); Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (2001); and many others.

3. This is obviously somewhat overstated because members may choose abstention on roll call votes. But, given that absenteeism may become a campaign issue in its own right, there are strong electoral incentives to cast votes rather than skip them. Indeed, as Cohen and Noll (1991) have shown, most members vote on most measures most of the time.

4. Arnold (1990, 65) identifies attentive publics as "those citizens who are aware that a specific issue is on the congressional agenda, know what alternatives are under consideration, and have

relatively firm preferences about what Congress should do" and inattentive publics as those who "have neither firm policy preferences about an issue nor knowledge of what Congress is considering."

5. Their work is grounded in persuasive theoretical explanations offered by Denzau and Munger (1986) and Grier and Munger (1991, 1993). These studies consider the market for legislative services and argue that PACs contribute money to members of Congress (MCs) in return for various legislative favors (see also Snyder 1990, 1992).

6. As applied in contemporary game theory (Farrell and Gibbons 1989), cheap talk is essentially a cost-free signal (Morrow 1994).

7. Position taking is also *potentially* costly because it is risky. Every time a representative takes to the floor to deliver a speech or sponsors or cosponsors a bill, he or she risks alienating a bloc of voters in the future. Again, this occurs not because voters pay attention to the floor speeches or sponsorships of their representatives, but because interest groups and challengers work hard to hold incumbents' feet to the fire.

8. We used these two Congresses because they allow us to include both a Democratic-controlled and a Republican-controlled Congress in the analysis. In addition, the union data we use in the labor model were prepared for the 103rd congressional districts as defined by the 1990 redistricting process and the Current Population Study for that year.

9. We exclude immigration bills that do not directly relate to labor.

10. Our decision to utilize a dichotomous measure for bill sponsorship (as opposed to, say, a count variable) was both empirically and theoretically driven. First, a vast majority of MCs who sponsored either labor or gun control bills in the 103rd and 104th Congresses sponsored only one bill. Specifically, 78 out of 129 MCs sponsored only one labor bill, and 35 out of 46 MCs sponsored only one gun control bill. Second, we expect there to be diminishing returns on the signaling value of bill sponsorship. Similar to any costly legislative activity, we expect the informational value of writing legislation to decline rapidly following initial efforts.

11. Examples of such research and a full discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach are available with the supplemental materials in the electronic version of this article at http://prq.sagepub.com.

12. Two variables typically included in models of labor contributions and bill sponsorship are excluded from our models. First, since we include only Democrats in our model, a party variable is not necessary here. Nor do we include party leadership, a factor shown to affect both contributions (Jackson and Engel 2003; Saltzman 1987) and sponsorship (Hall 1996; Schiller 1996). We do not include leadership because even when we include a dummy variable for leadership and a variable for the total amount of nonlabor contributions, Democratic Party leaders continue to be significant outliers with regard to contributions. We therefore exclude the three party leaders for each congress.

13. Another option would have been to measure ideology with the appropriate interest group rating score. But since the scores are not comparable across congresses (Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder 1999), we chose not to include them. Still, COPE and NRA scores are highly correlated with our DW-NOMINATE measure ($r = -.71$ and .79 for labor and gun control, respectively), and substituting them into the model does not change the substance of our results.

14. Not all studies of gun contributions include committee as a variable (Langbein and Lotwis 1990). We do so here because there is theoretical reason to believe that committee assignment influences contributions and bill sponsorship regardless of issue area and inclusion of a committee variable keeps the two models (labor and guns) comparable.

15. Endersby and Munger (1992) argue that labor interests do not constitute a monolithic group and, therefore, it is important to separate labor groups according to interest and connect them to specific committees and subcommittees. However, this goes beyond the scope of our study, and the two committees included are those that are likely to affect labor interests on a regular basis.

16. While challenger vote is clearly an ex post measure of the concept of interest, we believe it is important to identify whether the MC is electorally vulnerable in the *current* election cycle; therefore a lagged measure is inappropriate. Just because an incumbent was safe in previous elections does not mean that a strong challenger did not materialize in the current cycle. We believe that interest groups, party members, and candidates are able to predict quite well (both immediately prior to and during a campaign) which races are likely to be closely contested and that this is the best proxy measure of competition.

17. Available at http://psweb.sbs.ohio-state.edu/faculty/jbox/Data/datamain.html (as of January 2008).

18. While recent research has suggested that regional distinctions have been overstated (Chang 2003, 55), scholars—and conventional wisdom—historically have argued that unions have had less electoral/political power in the southern states. Given that the debate continues, we have included the South dummy variable to control for this differential in Democratic support for unions by region. Southern states include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

19. There are multiple ways to use the information provided by a Tobit analysis (Roncek 1992). Because we are interested in the effect of bill sponsorship on the underlying latent propensity of interest groups to make campaign contributions, we interpret the resulting Tobit coefficients similarly (but not identically) to ordinary least squares coefficients—the effect of a one-unit change in X on the underlying latent dependent variable (Roncek 1992; Breen 1996). This choice keeps our methodology and interpretation consistent with much past research on contributions (e.g., Box-Steffensmeier and Dow 1992; Larson 2004).

20. The first-stage probit results are available with the supplemental materials in the electronic version of this article at http://prq.sagepub.com.

21. In most Tobit analyses, the contributions variable is transformed (either with a square root or log transformation) in order to make the distribution more consistent with the assumptions of the Tobit model. For ease of interpretation, we run our analyses with the raw data. However, when the dependent variable is transformed appropriately, our substantive results do not change. All variables retain the significance and direction identified in Table 1.

22. The standard errors from the model presented in Table 1, column 1, are approximations of the true standard errors (Nelson and Olson 1978). In order to obtain the true standard errors, the model was bootstrapped and the results presented in column 2 in Table 1. See the supplemental materials in the electronic version of this article (http://prq.sagepub.com) for a discussion of the standard errors.

23. The mean district union membership for Democrats is 22 percent with a standard deviation of 8 percent. This suggests that Democrats with the average union membership in their district

receive approximately $4.4 million more from labor groups than those with no union members in their district.

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