

# Examining Constituency Service: Evidence from a Census of US Federal Agencies

Devin Judge-Lord, Justin Grimmer, Eleanor Neff Powell

University of Wisconsin, Stanford University, University of Wisconsin

September 26th, 2019

# Legislative Effort

- How do legislators' attention to district and constituency service change over their careers?
- Do constituents face a trade off between influence and constituency service?



**2020**  
**ELECTION**

***Tom  
Steyer***

"There's a widespread perception that the longer an elected official serves in Congress, the less connected they are to their constituent"

**CONGRESSIONAL TERM LIMITS****SEN. TED CRUZ**  
R-Texas

MR. CRUZ

Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution - Chair

**C-SPAN**

"...members of Congress get re-elected and the system works for everyone except the American people. This kind of self-interest builds on itself as members spend more time in office"



## Potomac Fever (Fenno 1978)

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- Cost of new representatives: start up costs for constituency service?



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- Increased power and experience  $\rightsquigarrow$  greater policy influence and district benefits

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# A Census of Federal Contacts

Table: Contacts From Members of Congress to Federal Agencies

Department	Components FOIAed	Records received	Coded	N
Agriculture	29	29	11	9641
Commerce	19	18	10	8510
Defense	49	10	7	8005
Education	1	1	1	3973
Energy	8	2	1	6119
Health and Human Services	15	8	5	29195
Homeland Security	14	12	12	35183
Housing and Urban Development	2	1	1	31852
Justice	23	3	2	2379
Labor	22	11	7	51836
State	1	0	0	0
Interior	11	7	6	5731
Treasury	7	5	5	12785
Transportation	10	6	6	20497
Veterans Affairs	6	3	2	76295
Independent Agencies	77	39	26	81817
Total	294	155	102	383818

# A Census of Federal Contacts

MAC THORNBERRY  
13TH DISTRICT  
TEXAS



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives  
June 6, 2008

OFFICE OF  
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

CP08-9-000  
PR08-1-000  
ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE  
ON INTELLIGENCE

FEDERAL ENERGY  
REGULATORY COMMISSION

The Honorable Joseph T. Kelliher  
Chairman  
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission  
888 First Street, N.E.  
Washington, DC 20426-0001

ORIGINAL

Dear Chairman Kelliher,

I am enclosing letters from Wayne Hughs, Executive Vice President of the Panhandle Producers and Royalty Owners Association, and Thomas R. Cambridge, President of Cambridge Production, Inc., regarding a pending application before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Both letters are requesting an expedited evidentiary hearing on a proposed lease of firm capacity by Enogex, Inc., to Midcontinent Express Pipeline, LLC, to fully explore the impact on existing shippers. I would appreciate your full consideration of these requests.

Many natural gas producers in my district are concerned about the negative impact the pending lease could have on the Eagle Rock low pressure gathering system in Wheeler County, Texas. Naturally, this raises many questions and concerns about the potential to shut in existing natural gas produced at lower pressures and discourage future exploration.

# A Census of Federal Contacts

## Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

### OCR INQUIRY/CORRESPONDENCE LOG

Date	Member Office	Topic/Issue	Coordinator	Date Closed Out	SP No.
10/23/16	Sen. Steve Daines	Billings Central Catholic High School	(b)(6);(b)(7)(C)		
10/24/16	Rep. Anna Adams	(b)(6);(b)(7)(C)	(b)(6);(b)(7)(C)		
10/24/16	Rep. Lamey	(b)(6);(b)(7)(C)	(b)(6);(b)(7)(C)		
10/24/16	Rep. Brad Warstrap	Ambassador Bible College	(b)(6);(b)(7)(C)		
10/24/16	Sen. Jeanne Graham	(b)(6);(b)(7)(C)	(b)(6);(b)(7)(C)		
10/24/16	Rep. Gordon Maloney	LIM College	(b)(6);(b)(7)(C)		

# A Census of Federal Contacts

## Environmental Protection Agency

CHRISTENSEN, DONNA M-U.S. House of Representatives-D/VI/DC

Total: 28

Control No.	Status	Letter Date	Received	Subject	Last Action
AL-07-000-2996	Closed	Feb 08, 2007	Feb 23, 2007	GOVERNOR JOHN DEJONGH REQUEST A MEETING TO DISCUSS HIS CONCERNS REGARDING THE PROPOSED CLEAN AIR ACT SECTION 325 EXEMPTIONS FOR THE VIRGIN ISLANDS WATER AND POWER AUTHORITY 71 FED. REG. 74886-74895 (DECEMBER 13, 2006)-	ADMIN Kathy Callahan CC aborted due to user office changed.
AL-07-000-8271	For Your Information	May 16, 2007	May 17, 2007	HEARING/SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, THURSDAY JUNE 7, 2007 AT 10:00 AM IN ROOM 1324 LONGWORTH HOB/H.R. 1075 (BORDALLO), TO ESTABLISH THE UNITED STATES TERRITORIES INFRASTRUCTURE BOND BANK AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES, (UNITED STATES TERRITORIES INFRASTRUCTURE BOND BANK AUTHORIZATION ACT)	ADMIN Pam Abraham CC aborted due to user office changed.
AL-09-000-6162	Closed	Mar 16, 2009	Apr 27, 2009	SUPPORT THE ST. CROIX ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATION (SEA) APPLICATION FOR AN EPA COMMUNITY ACTION FOR A RENEWED ENVIRONMENT (CARE) GRANT	Kathy Mims Control Closed

# A Census of Federal Contacts

## Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

Member/Committee (HOR)	Member/Committee (HOR)	Category	enfor	SUBJECT	Call Log Type
Schwartz, Allyson Y., Pennsylvania, 13th		Referral	0	Benefits issue.	Call
Schwartz, Allyson Y., Pennsylvania, 13th		Referral	0	Visa/adjustment of status issue.	Call
Schwartz, Allyson Y., Pennsylvania, 13th		Casework	0	ERO case of (b)(6);(b)(7)(C), reportedly being de	Call
Schwartz, Allyson Y., Pennsylvania, 13th		Casework	0	ERO case of (b)(6);(b)(7)(C), French national rep	Call
Schwartz, Allyson Y., Pennsylvania, 13th		Casework	0	Requests status.	Call
Schwartz, Allyson Y., Pennsylvania, 13th		Casework	0	Bond transfer case of B6, B7C on behalf of (b)(6)	Call
Schwartz, Allyson Y., Pennsylvania, 13th		Referral	1	Marriage fraud complaint by subject(b)(6);(b)(7)(C)	Call
Schwartz, Allyson Y., Pennsylvania, 13th		Other		Invitation	Email
Schwartz, Allyson Y., Pennsylvania, 13th		Referral	0	Entry/benefits issue case of (b)(6);(b)(7)(C), No	Call
Schwartz, Allyson Y., Pennsylvania, 13th		OI	1	Complaint from constituent (Philadelphia Construction Union) about illegal workers in district. ♦Congresswoman wants ICE to investigate and arrest illegal workers.	Call



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- Clean, merge with Congressional data

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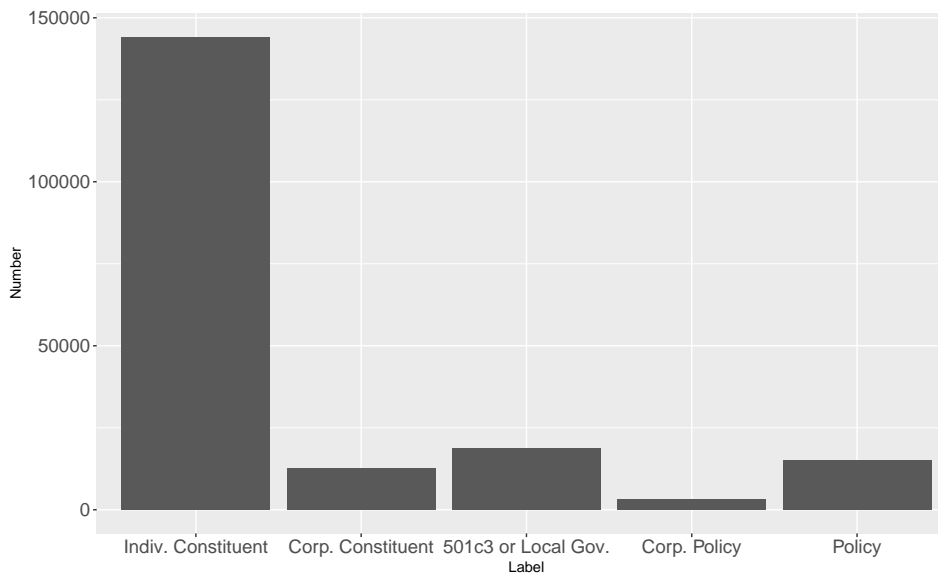
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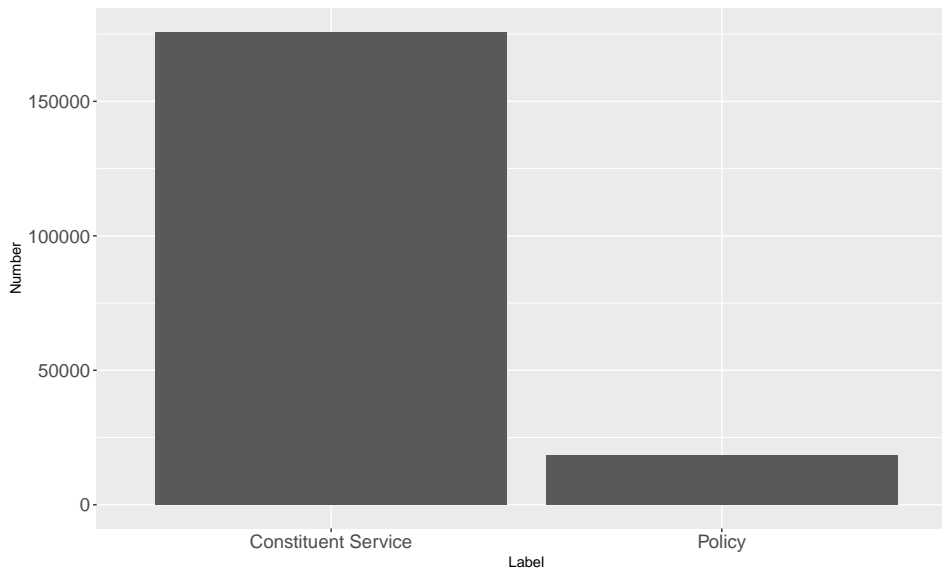
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  - Individual (constituency service)
  - Corporate (constituency service)
  - 501c3/Local Government (constituency service)
  - General policy
  - Corporate policy

# New Facts About Legislator Contact with Federal Agencies

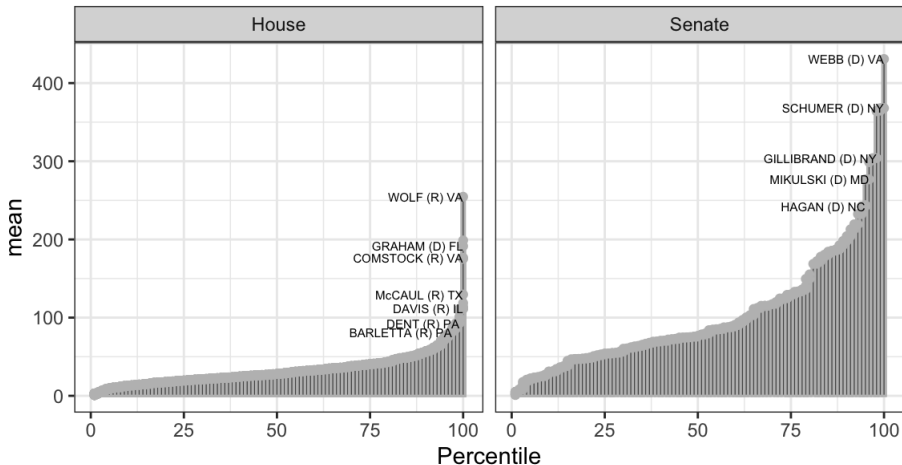


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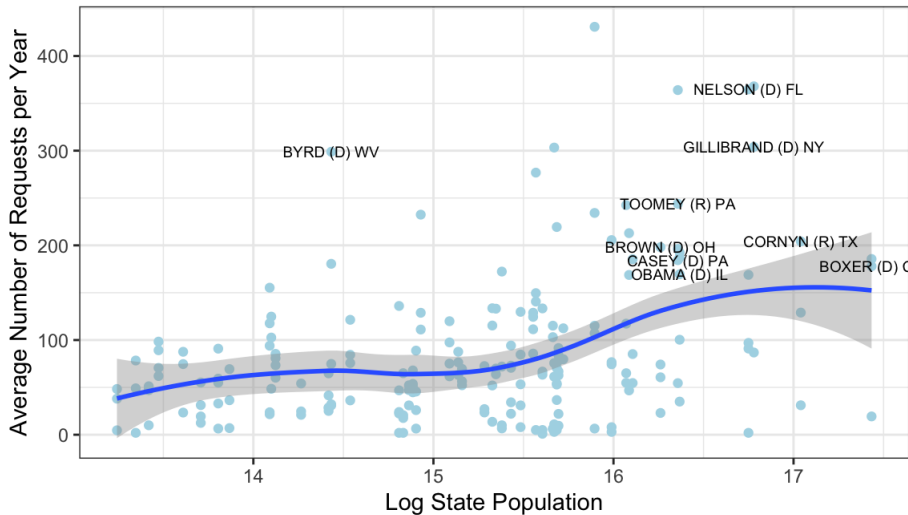
# New Facts About Legislator Contact with Federal Agencies

## Average Legislator Requests per Year by Percentile



# New Facts About Legislator Contact with Federal Agencies

## Senator Requests per Year by State Population



# New Facts About Legislator Contact with Federal Agencies

District demographics are correlated with types of requests legislators make

- Higher proportion of veterans  $\rightsquigarrow$  more requests to VA
- Higher proportion of residents over 65  $\rightsquigarrow$  more requests to SSA



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- Include time-varying characteristics

# Estimating Effect of Increasing Committee Prestige on Contacts

$$Y_{ijt} = \beta \text{Committee Position}_{it} + \gamma_{ij} + \delta_t + \sum_{s=1}^S \eta_s \text{tenure}_{s[it]} + m_{it} + p_{it} + \epsilon_{ijt}$$

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Standard errors clustered at legislator-agency level

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Committee Chair	0.522 (0.0826)	0.243 (0.0747)	0.243 (0.0747)	0.0377 (0.00658)
Ranking Member	0.652 (0.0887)	0.137 (0.0683)	0.137 (0.0683)	0.0289 (0.00641)
Prestige Committee	0.425 (0.0324)	0.0798 (0.0269)	0.0798 (0.0269)	0.0188 (0.00467)
Oversight Committee	0.420 (0.0296)	0.161 (0.0190)	0.160 (0.0192)	0.0565 (0.00324)
Tenure	✓	✓	✓	✓
Majority, President's Party	✓	✓	✓	✓
Legislator × Agency Fixed Effects		✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effects		✓	✓	✓
All Legislators	✓	✓		
Serve At Least Second Term			✓	
Dependent Variable	Count	Count	Count	Log(Count + 1)
Observations	337610	337610	330215	337610



# Within-Legislator Comparison of Tenure Effects

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Standard errors clustered at legislator-agency level

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
First Year	-0.478 (0.0349)	-0.179 (0.0347)	-0.183 (0.0351)	-0.0317 (0.00527)
Second Year	-0.344 (0.0375)	-0.0665 (0.0335)	-0.0630 (0.0337)	-0.000440 (0.00510)
Third Year	-0.274 (0.0376)	-0.00694 (0.0328)	-0.00697 (0.0328)	0.00662 (0.00482)
Fourth Year	-0.237 (0.0409)	0.0200 (0.0310)	0.0200 (0.0310)	0.0126 (0.00470)
Fifth Year	-0.238 (0.0388)	0.000539 (0.0296)	0.000506 (0.0296)	-0.000442 (0.00434)
Sixth Year	-0.220 (0.0401)	0.0204 (0.0278)	0.0204 (0.0278)	0.00242 (0.00414)
Majority, President's Party	✓	✓	✓	✓
Legislator × Agency Fixed Effects		✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effects		✓	✓	✓
All Legislators	✓	✓		✓
Serve At Least Second Term			✓	
Dependent Variable	Count	Count	Count	Log(Count + 1)
Observations	337610	337610	330215	337610

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at legislator × agency level

# Within-District Comparison of Tenure Effects

$$Y_{it} = \beta_1 \text{New Member}_{it} + \sum_{s=2}^6 \beta_s \text{tenure}_{s[it]} + \overbrace{\gamma_i}^{\text{District}} + \underbrace{\delta_t}_{\text{Year}} + \epsilon_{it}$$

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- Assess differences on committee assignment, tenure

# Dependent Variable: Proportion of Contacts Constituency Service

	(1)	(2)
First Year	0.0286 (0.00888)	0.0714 (0.0128)
Second Year	0.0326 (0.00785)	0.0591 (0.0123)
Third Year	0.0315 (0.00775)	0.0567 (0.0116)
Fourth Year	0.0124 (0.00876)	0.0354 (0.0121)
Fifth Year	0.0101 (0.0100)	0.0270 (0.0135)
Sixth Year	0.0233 (0.00920)	0.0303 (0.0103)
Intercept	0.857 (0.00418)	0.829 (0.00655)
Majority		✓
Legislator Fixed Effects		✓
Year Fixed Effects		✓
Observations	5902	5876

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at legislator level

# Dependent Variable: Proportion of Contacts Constituency Service

	(1)	(2)
Prestige	0.0313 (0.00614)	0.00445 (0.0110)
Chair	-0.0498 (0.0105)	-0.0662 (0.0144)
Ranking Minority	-0.0231 (0.00942)	-0.0268 (0.0135)
Oversight Committee	0.00385 (0.00979)	0.00160 (0.0110)
Intercept	0.852 (0.0102)	0.848 (0.0125)
Majority		✓
Legislator Fixed Effects		✓
Year Fixed Effects		✓
Observations	5876	5876
Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at legislator level		

# Summary of Results

- Increased power in Congress  $\rightsquigarrow$  More contacts
- More experience in Congress  $\rightsquigarrow$  More contacts
- Increased contacts  $\rightsquigarrow$  more constituency service

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- 2) Does name recognition increase with prestige and power?

# Who Do Constituents Ask for Help

Where do constituents redirect constituency service requests?

- New legislators make fewer contacts with federal agencies
- Demand interpretation: fewer request from constituents
- If constituents still need help: may direct requests to incumbent legislators
- Legislators with new colleagues should see **increase** in contacts

Assess how new members in state affect representative and senator contacting behavior

# Little Evidence of Spillover

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Proportion New Legislators	-3.032 (5.753)		-24.56 (14.33)	
At Least One New Legislator		-0.0522 (1.307)		-3.826 (3.719)
District Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Senators Only			✓	✓
Observations	5507	5507	1076	1076
Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at district level				

# Assessing Name Recognition

Constituents could direct attention at better known legislators

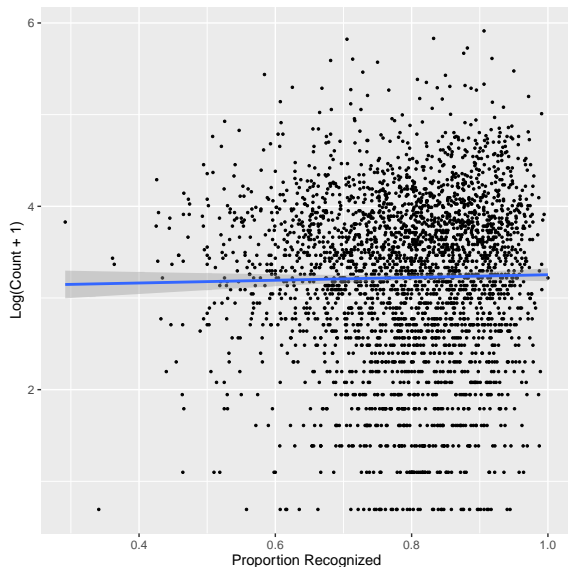
- 1) Does name recognition increase with prestige and tenure?
- 2) Do better recognized legislators receive more constituency service requests ?

Measuring name recognition:

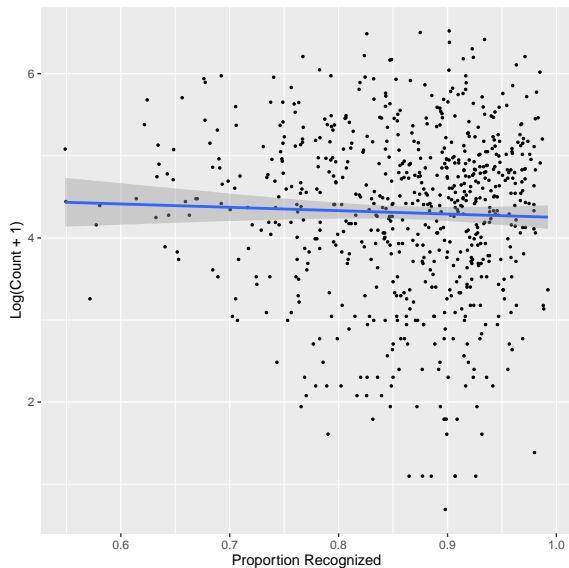
- CCES cumulative file (2006-2018)
- Use approval question: "Never Heard/Not Sure" (Don't Recognize), Otherwise (Recognize)



# Weak Relationship Between Name Recognition and Constituent Service Requests: House



# Weak Relationship Between Name Recognition and Constituent Service Requests: Senate



# Conclusion

More Experience, More Power  $\rightsquigarrow$  More constituency service

- No tradeoff: As legislators acquire power, also “deliver the goods” to district
- **Costs** of electing new legislators
- Little evidence for Potomac Fever

Broad set of projects

- Lettermarking and earmark bans
- Company donations and constituent service requests
- Ideological nature of federal contacts
- Content analysis of what legislators ask for