

**Political Science 517**  
**Legislative Politics**  
**Autumn 2008**  
**Case Study Journal Instructions**

Instructions: At the beginning of the quarter, you chose two members of Congress to learn more about throughout the quarter. After doing each day's readings, please consult the following questions associated with each day's topic. If you choose to do a journal entry for that day, you should find one or more contemporary or historical news articles (using Lexis-Nexus) related to your member(s) of Congress. Based on the content of these articles, respond to the question(s) below with a short discussion (no more than one page) of how the article's content relates to concepts in the day's reading. Also be prepared to discuss these in class, as time permits. You must have a total of six journal entries, preferably one per week, during the portion of the course related to the U.S Congress (September 30-November 13). The exact choice of days is up to you, but all students must complete an entry on September 30. **The completed journal is due, either in class or posted on Carmen, by November 20.** A grading rubric can be found at the end of these instructions.

**September 30: The two houses of Congress**

Reminder: All students must complete this entry. (If you are writing a paper this day, however, you may complete this assignment at your leisure, but preferably as soon as possible.)

The purpose of this journal entry is to help you get to know your two members of Congress, so this entry will be slightly longer than your other entries. In future assignments, you need only to write about one member or the other, but for this assignment you should look at each of them. In this and future assignments, your entry should be written in formal prose, not in the form of bullet-points, lists of facts, or conversational prose.

Questions to consider:

-Who does the member of Congress represent? What does their state or district look like, demographically, culturally, and politically? Are there any interest groups or industries that play a major role in this state or district's politics? Who are the major financial supporters of the member of Congress? (In addition to news sources, you might look at <http://www.opensecrets.org>). To what extent do these supporters reflect the dominant groups in the state or district? Are there any major donors who look "out of place" as a financial supporter of this member of Congress?

## **October 2: Congressional elections; recruitment and candidacy**

Questions to consider:

-What is the member's recent electoral history? Under what circumstances were they originally elected? Has this member been in any competitive races recently, and what are their electoral prospects for this year? (If they are up for re-election—some senators will not be.) What career path did the member follow to get to where they are today? Did they hold any previous elective offices? If the member has a challenger in this year's elections, what career path did they follow? Have professional qualifications played a major role in the member's current or previous campaigns?

## **October 7 (Tuesday): Congressional elections; electoral rules**

Special instructions: If you choose to do today's assignment, you should focus on your member of the House. If your House member was elected after 2000, or comes from a state with only one at-large district, this assignment is not suitable for you. If this is the case, and you still wish to write an entry, you may complete the October 2 assignment for today (and if you already completed a journal entry on October 2, you may repeat the assignment for your second member of Congress).

Questions: How did redistricting affect your House member? What was the nature of redistricting in the state (partisan, bipartisan, etc)? What changes were made to the district and how did these changes affect the primary and/or general election campaign in 2002? Did your member appear to have any direct influence in the redistricting process? Were there any racial representation issues in your state's redistricting process, and did they affect your member or your member's district? Were there any legal challenges to redistricting, and if so, did they affect your member's district? An excellent resource for news articles on redistricting is:

<http://www.fairvote.org/redistricting/reports/remanual/alnews.htm>

(This is for Alabama; for a different state, change the 'alnews' to the two letter abbreviation for your state, i.e. California would be 'canews', etc)

## **October 9 (Thursday): Representation**

Questions: Consider the distinction between the 'delegate' and 'trustee' views of representation, as previously discussed in class. What does your member of Congress's attitude appear to be toward public opinion and representation? Find an example of an important legislative decision in which public opinion was either embraced, or acknowledged but rejected by the member. Does the member's language tell you anything about their decision making process, or are you inferring their view of representation strictly from their actions? To what extent does the overall voting record of the member (based on NOMINATE, interest group scores, etc.) reflect the ideology and dominant interests of the district?

### **October 14 (Tuesday): Representation; descriptive and substantive representation**

Questions: Find at least two groups that your member *explicitly* purports to represent descriptively on the campaign trail. The most obvious examples of this are women, racial and ethnic minorities, religious groups, and geographic groups, but may also include professional groups (e.g. veteran, small business owner), lifestyle groups (e.g. hunter, smoker), and any group in which the member explicitly claims membership. What legislation has the member introduced or co-sponsored to support the group he/she claims membership in? Do interest group ratings support the idea that the member is supporting the wishes of this subconstituency? How large a demographic is this group in the member's district, and how vital is the group's support to winning re-election. Is this a group that would normally be inclined to support a candidate of that member's party?

### **October 16 (Thursday): Leadership in Congress**

Note: If your House or Senate member is part of the highest levels of leadership (i.e. Whip or higher), you should write about your other member of Congress on this assignment.

Questions: What is the relationship between your member of Congress and the party's leadership in that chamber? Does your member have a well-known reputation in the caucus, either as a loyal vote that the leadership can rely on, or, as a loose cannon that frequently defies the leadership? Did your member support someone other than the current leadership team in leadership elections, and if so, have there been any lasting ramifications? Does your member participate in efforts to channel money to other members of Congress' election bids, or a recipient of such efforts? Is your member part of the extended leadership team (i.e. assistant whips, etc), and if so, what is their specific role?

### **October 21 (Tuesday): Political parties in Congress**

Note: For this assignment, you should choose a member who has been in Congress since at least 2005. As far as I know, every student has at least one such member.

Questions: What role does the "party brand" play in your member's re-election efforts? Find evidence from the current election, and at least one pre-2006 election and compare the strategies. Has the shift toward a more Democrat-friendly landscape changed their re-election strategies? Do you find evidence that the member proudly announces his/her party affiliation? Does he/she ever stress independence from the party or party leadership, or cite votes or issue where they disagree with their party? Does it depend on the audience? In addition to newspaper sources, campaign websites and other similar sources are also fair game.

### **October 23 (Thursday): Congressional committees**

Questions: What committees does the member belong to? Can you ascertain any reasons, electoral or professional, why this member might have chosen to serve on these particular committees? On which committee does the member hold the highest rank? If they are not the chair or ranking member, what are their prospects for becoming the chair or ranking member, based on their seniority and the members who outrank them? Can you find instances where the member speaks on behalf of the committee, or at least is cited as being a member of the committee in the media report of his/her remarks? Does the member appear to tout their membership on the committee during the campaign? If so, do they ever cite their committee position as a reason to re-elect them?

### **October 28 (Tuesday): Pork barrel politics**

Questions: Find an instance of an earmark or a pork-barrel project that your House member claimed to have gotten for their district. Investigate the legislative history of the bill it was a part of: does the bill show trademarks of being a logroll or a time logroll, or is there another explanation? What was the project's geographic scope: was it specific to the district or could other members claim credit for it as well? Was the member's credit-claiming for the project legitimate, or did other members deserve more credit for its inclusion? Was there any backlash in the local or national media for the project's funding?

### **October 30 (Thursday): Congressional-executive relations**

Questions: Find at least one example of a prominent vote in which your member faced difficulties arising from procedural complexities. For example, the member supported an amendment, but had to vote 'no' because the amendment would have killed the bill. Issues related to motions to recommit, alternative versions of the same bill, etc, are also good examples. How did the member explain, or attempt to explain his/her vote in the media or to constituents? Did the vote come back to haunt the member during a re-election campaign? If so, how was the issue used by the opponent, and how did the member respond?

### **November 4-6 (Thursday): Post-election wrap-up**

Special instructions: If you choose to do this assignment, you should post the first half of the assignment on Carmen by Midnight the night before class. In addition, you should only choose to do this assignment if you have a member of Congress in a competitive or at least somewhat competitive re-election campaign.

First half (pre-election): Predict the percentage of the vote that your member will receive on Election Day. How does this compare to previous recent elections? Why do you think they will do better or worse, and what specific parts of the district or demographic groups do you think they will do better among? You may cite public opinion polling if there is

any, but you should also give substantive reasons relating to their actions in Congress, their campaign, their opponent, and other themes discussed in class.

Second half (post-election): How did you do? If your guess was off, can you come up with any reasons why? (Or can you find any reasons in media stories?)

### **November 13 (Thursday): Congress and the judiciary**

What role has your Senator played in the last three Supreme Court nominations (Roberts, Miers, Alito)? Did your member vote the same way on both the successful nominations, and if so, how did they vote on key procedural votes (i.e. cloture votes)? What role, if any, has your member played in battles over judicial nominees for lower court positions? Has your member, for personal or geographical reasons, taken an active role in leading the fight for or against a specific appellate or circuit court nominee? Has your member ever placed an anonymous “hold” on a nominee that was later exposed? Based on public statements from your Senator, including speeches on the Senate floor, how much relative importance does your Senator appear to give to ideology, nominee competence, and Senate traditions and decorum, respectively, when it comes to judicial nominations?

### **Case Study Journal: Grading Rubric**

Each of the six entries will be graded based on the following standards:

#### **Article Selection**

Chosen article is highly appropriate for day's topic (3 points)

Chosen article is relevant for the day's topic, but provides insufficient relevant material ( 2 points)

Chosen article is barely, if at all, relevant to the day's topic (1 point)

#### **Addressing questions posed in the assignment**

Discussion successfully and completely answers many or most of topic questions (4 points)

Discussion somewhat successfully answers many of the topic questions (3 points)

Discussion addresses only a small subset of the questions, and/or addresses them incompletely (2 points)

Discussion is very brief and tangential to the questions posed in the assignment (1 point)

#### **Synthesizing class material**

Discussion successfully incorporates class material and shows mastery of class concepts (3 points)

Discussion touches on relevant concepts, but shows an incomplete understanding or incorrect application (2 points)

Discussion largely fails to tie the news material to theoretically relevant concepts (1 points)

Each entry will receive a score between 3 and 10 (the first journal entry will count double.) This score will then be translated to a letter grade by the following formula:

58-70 points	A
46-57 points	B
34-45 points	C
22-33 points	D
Less than 22 points	E