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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

WORKING IN THE 'GRAY' AREA OF A "PERMANENT CAMPAIGN":  
THE ROUTINE, POLITICAL AND CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES OF  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT STAFF.

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Stephen Kean  
Norman, Oklahoma  
2001

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A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

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## Abstract

The district staff members of incumbents in the United States House of Representatives perform vital representational and electoral functions. Nearly half of all personal staff in the United States Congress work ‘back home’ in district offices far removed from the normal designs of “beltway” politics. This dissertation seeks to address this heretofore under-studied set of political actors. It will examine the allocation and variation of district staff by incumbent members of the United States House of Representatives. It will focus on who those staff are, what they do and what impact they have on our political system. This dissertation argues that congressional district staff members have a variety of effects on the American political system. Their service on behalf of incumbents clearly worked to enhance the representative function. Yet some staff had more exclusive interactions with elite constituents. These relationships served to bias representation to select groups and to detract from the system of free, fair and competitive system of elections established by the founders. Congressional district staffs are deserving of further attention from academics, journalists, political reformers, and the citizens who finance their activities.

## **Congressional District Staff**

### **An Introduction**

#### **The Question**

The district staff members of incumbents in the United States House of Representatives perform vital representational and electoral functions. Nearly half of all personal staff in the United States Congress work ‘back home’ in district offices far removed from the normal designs of “beltway” politics. This dissertation seeks to address this heretofore under-studied set of political actors. It will examine the allocation and variation of district staff by incumbent members of the United States House of Representatives. It will focus on who those staff are, what they do and what impact they have on our political system. This dissertation argues that congressional district staff members are one of the many “increments and margins” that serve to bolster incumbency advantage in the House election after election. The regular representational functions carried out by district staff members likely have real electoral impact. Some incumbents, their staff and supporters (hereafter referred to as the district or incumbent “enterprise”) actively seek out elite constituents as a cost-effective way to fulfill their representative functions and gain access to an important class of political actors.

Ironically, by carrying out what might be described as representative functions in their interactions with elite constituents, district staff members serve to subvert free, fair and competitive elections. The staff and the overall “enterprise” accomplish this through the co-optation of elite support and the diminishment of a base for potential campaign challengers. The expansion of the district staff perquisite over the past four decades has

served to distort the preferences of the citizenry in their voting for what Madison and the founders considered to be the “People’s” body. Consequently, congressional district staff enterprises are worthy of both future academic study as well as political reform.

The paradigm guiding research on the United States Congress over the past three decades seems to accept the high rate of re-election as an objective entity with little normative consequence. Works such as Mayhew (1974) or Fiorina (1977) are uncommon in this field. They are uncommon not only because they offer larger frameworks or explanations of legislative action, but also because they spend time discussing the consequences of legislator’s behaviors and motivations. My findings on district staff suggest that the discipline needs to get beyond descriptive explanations of how incumbents get re-elected and spend more intellectual energy discussing the consequences of incumbents who are elected largely without challenge. This dissertation proposes that the discipline take a deeper look at the presence, motivations and impact of Congressional district staff.

#### The genesis of this project

There is a presumption amongst much of the literature that is echoed in the behavior of many average citizens. That presumption is that incumbents are solitary figures, passing legislation, running campaigns, and protecting the needs of their constituents. The literature affirms this stereotype with its overwhelming emphasis on the incumbent as a rational actor whose decisions, actions and motivations often seem to occur in vacuum-like settings. Constituents seem to embrace this notion of the individual legislator as well. They were observed asking district staff members to have “him” (the incumbent) pass a piece of legislation or have “her” call the IRS to resolve a tax dispute.

It seemed that constituents made these requests without realizing the many demands on the incumbent or the substantial number of staffers who are responsible for conducting activities in the name of the incumbent. Both the literature and the constituents who make these assumptions about legislative behavior fail to appreciate the significant numbers of staff who are also part of the incumbent enterprise. They fail to appreciate that the staff sometimes act independently of the incumbent, either to help the enterprise or even to promote their own self-interests. In short, the modern incumbent enterprise is built on the backs of thousands of legislative staff, some integrally involved in the machinations of the legislative process, others who rarely ever call or visit the Capitol. The literature tends to be somewhat familiar with the contributions of the Washington staff. Yet, even the bulk of the literature that appreciates the significance of the work performed by the Washington staff fails to recognize that the individuals in the district offices are also vital to the overall incumbent enterprise.

The bias in the literature toward Washington-based staff is easy to understand. For starters, nearly sixty percent of all congressional staff members are employed in Washington, which presents researchers with a more cost-effective research setting because all of the cases are within blocks of each other. Furthermore, Washington staff members are largely occupied with the legislative efforts of the incumbents. In simple terms, there are a lot of them there and what they do appears at first glance to be more intriguing than the stereotypical understanding of a congressional district office. The underlying premise of most of the literature seems to be that district offices are generally made up of five or six people sitting in a remote location spending their days taking calls about passports and Social Security cases. The literature has long treated the Washington



staff as being more relevant to the accomplishments of individual legislators and the entire institution. I would also accept that staff growth is a relatively recent phenomenon and that the literature has been playing catch-up just to examine the patterns and implications of staff expansion within the Capitol itself. I do not dispute the literature's focus entirely, but the absolute avoidance of a discussion of the functions of over forty percent of the incumbent's personal staff is unwarranted. Some of the authors might defend the approach suggesting that the literature has looked at relevant district affairs; from incumbent's 'home styles', to how often incumbents travel home, to the size of office budgets and the amount of casework that is performed. While this research provides useful subject matter that was previously unstudied, it has not come to grips with the full range of functions performed by district staff and it certainly has not grasped the important electoral and representative impact of district staff. My reading of the literature combined with an internship experience suggested further contextual analysis was necessary.

The impetus for this dissertation arose from my personal experience with a void in the discipline's understanding of congressional district staff. My experience interning in a congressional district office led me to an investigation of the relevant literature, which left me with a substantial body of research about congressional staff and their impact on the institution and the legislative process. Apart from one doctoral dissertation written in 1975, there was little to be found about district staff apart from aggregate analyses of the amount of casework that they performed. Furthermore, that one previous dissertation had limited itself to a comparison of state, county and federal political staff in Los Angeles County. The literature leaves one with the impression that all district staff members are

strictly engaged in limited casework and service functions. My observations during a six-month internship suggested that district staff performed other relevant tasks beyond casework. Furthermore, my subsequent political experiences suggested that district staff have electoral value beyond that which the discipline assigns to their contact and impact on the “personal vote.” In both settings, I found that district staff members performed vital representational roles in the name of the frequently absent incumbents and, on occasion, were valuable elements of their re-election campaigns.

#### What this dissertation offers

This dissertation offers four important contributions to the current literature. First, it provides a framework for understanding who district staff are and what functions they perform for the district enterprise. Contrary to the stereotypes of the literature, my observations found that district staff members have varying motivations and functions. Second, this dissertation probes why the staff enterprises vary. Based on a limited number of observations, I hypothesize about several variables that future research on district staff can test. Third, and most importantly, this dissertation suggests that district staff matter! They matter because they interact with elite constituents, a group of people who are recruited into the incumbent enterprise to assist with reelection efforts and other goals of the incumbent. It is argued that staff recruit or co-opt elite constituents to become part of the incumbent enterprise, thereby depleting the potential pool of resources that challengers have to draw upon. In this context, the behavior of district staff is well explained by Parker’s (1992) “discretion-motivated” model of incumbency. Parker found that it was difficult for the principals (constituents) to monitor their agents (incumbents) so their control or oversight of incumbent goals and motivations was limited. Because

incumbents generally do not confront substantial oversight of their goals and behaviors from all constituents, Parker suggests that their concerns tend to be more highly targeted to a select group of constituents who can impact the re-election prospects. Most interestingly, Parker believes that increased perquisite use by incumbents serves as a “barrier to entry” for potential challengers. Here my observations of district staff offer confirmation to Parker’s argument. My findings further suggest that the incumbent-staff-elite interaction is not only negatively motivated to erect “barriers to entry.” Rather, incumbents seemed to encourage staff-elite interaction for multiple purposes, ranging from the solidification of the electoral base, to the gathering of political and economic information about the district, to the simple act of collecting ideas for future legislative or representative functions. In short, the presence of district staff serves to widen the ability of incumbents to pursue their own “discretion-motivated” behaviors. A set of proactive district staff who energetically interact with the elites of the district allow the incumbent to turn his or her attention to other legislative or political goals. In many cases, the staff even act as a barrier to what Parker might consider “too much discretion,” or inattention to district affairs.

The final contribution, found in the concluding chapter, takes a normative tract that most Congressional research seems to avoid. I suggest that the discipline more fully wrestle with the implications and consequences of the interaction of incumbency advantage and perquisite use. Taxpayer-financed perquisite use by incumbents distorts the election process by failing to offer constituents adequate choices in election contests. The Constitution established that the House of Representatives was to be the ‘people’s body’ and that frequent (biennial), fair and open elections were vital to the expression of

the people's voice.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Madison and the founder's believed that the "habitual dependence" of regular and competitive elections would keep the Representatives close to their constituents. What has been lost over the past two centuries, however, is that the "dependence" of that relationship also demands that incumbents have a "real possibility" of being removed from office.<sup>2</sup> Given an average re-election rate of 93% over the past three decades, most voters are not truly offered accountability or electoral choice. It is well-established the money, name recognition, advertising, etc, have a substantial impact on the outcome of contemporary House elections. Additionally, this dissertation argues that the interaction of incumbents, district staff and elite constituent further diminishes the potential pool of campaign challengers and the quality of campaigns that they will mobilize.

Given this electoral impact, congressional district staff members also have an impact on American political parties. Because staff members contribute to the secure electoral positions of individual incumbents, they further weaken collective accountability within Congress and cloud the ability of individual voter's to hold their representatives accountable at the ballot box. Furthermore, the incumbent enterprise competes with, and usually bests, the parties in a competition for volunteers and financial contributions. In both ways, district staff contribute to the already weak position of American political parties.

Not only do staff contribute to the demise of electoral choice and the weakening of the party system, their presence also assists in further demands for the creation and maintenance of particularistic programs that come at the expense of broader national

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<sup>1</sup> See especially Madison's Federalist Papers 52, 53, and 57 for this discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Eulau, Wahlke, Buchanan & Ferguson, 1959, p.753.

interests. District staff members work with local elites to fund projects ranging from city sewers, to industrial plant relocations, to the building of international airports or military bases. Madison did desire “masters of the public business” who lingered in Congress awhile to make sure that the public was well served. Yet, it is a reach to suggest that the founders desired the setting of the current Congress with its high rate of re-election, a staff of thousands, and the annual maintenance of hundreds of billions of dollars of particularized programs that benefit the legislators’ constituencies.<sup>3</sup> At some point in the past four decades, Congress became too “masterful” in serving the public and this proficiency in serving the local has come at a cost to the collective. Given the staff connection to incumbency advantage, decline of parties and maintenance of particularistic programs, there is a solid foundation to discuss not only future study and academic implications, but also the need for political reform.

In focusing on district staff and their interaction with elite constituents I am not so much refuting other methods or explanations so much as I am improving them by adding in-depth contextual analysis. Four approaches within the literature might profit from the findings of this dissertation. First, I add my voice to those that question re-election as the sole motivation for congressional incumbents. Clearly incumbents have other motivations beyond being ‘self-interested seekers’ of reelection. I found incumbents early in their legislative careers who were less than willing to sacrifice personal and policy goals simply to attain re-election. The manner in which some incumbents utilize staff and interact with elite constituents seemed to confirm the presence of other motives beyond the simple desire to attain re-election. Along those lines, I make a second suggestion that the framework of incumbent behavior needs to include the ‘rational’

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<sup>3</sup> See Federalist Paper 53

calculations of those actors around them. In this case elite constituents and staff members in particular have personal goals that impact the size, shape and direction of the overall incumbent enterprise. Third, I suggest to those who study congressional staff that roughly half of their subjects work outside of Washington and many perform interesting, important and electorally relevant tasks. Finally, I would suggest that because there is so much variation in the types of behaviors that district staff members perform and the ways in which they conduct them that the literature would benefit from more contextual analysis. Previous studies based on aggregate analysis of budget figures and annual reports fail to capture the spirit of the tasks performed by a proactive district enterprise. Furthermore, because many of these tasks are politically sensitive behaviors, I would suggest that survey instruments would not accurately capture the importance of some staff behavior.

### Methods

I was able to uncover staff functions, their variation and the impact on elections and representation because I spent time with the incumbents, staff and elite constituents. I spent time with them while I interned in a congressional district office, gaining an understanding of the types of things that district staff did and what they legally could and could not do. I also observed the types of people that they regularly interacted with. I spent time with them when I watched them do their jobs. In each of the primary case studies I spent a day or two observing each incumbent and any district staff member whose responsibilities had them interacting with constituents outside the confines of the office. I spent time with them as I conducted intensive interviews with the incumbents and interacting staff members. These interviews were conducted to let them elaborate on

the behaviors that I had observed and provide rationales for what they did or did not do. And finally, I spent time with them when I talked to elite constituents. To verify the claims of incumbents and staff in each of the primary case studies I interviewed at least twenty elite constituents, some referred by the office, some who had contributed to their opponent, and some simply because they worked on “main street.” When all was said and done, I had a collection of roughly thirty opinions about each of the four incumbent enterprises. To acquire additional anecdotal information and provide further variables for contrast, I conducted an intensive interview with the senior district staff person in nine other district offices.

Because of limited time and resources, I was unable to examine more than four primary cases. And while these four (and nine) cases are geographically limited to the middle of the country, I was able to include enough other variables to propose some basic hypotheses, not to mention uncover relevant variation between the cases. The most significant justification for the in-depth contextual analysis lays in the finding of the elite interaction, a behavior heretofore uncovered by the literature.

#### What's next

Because this dissertation raises significant questions about the publicly-financed resources that incumbents use to maintain their electoral advantage and the appropriateness of the types of relationships that some staff establish, this dissertation demands future research. From an academic perspective, it demands a wider study to test the hypotheses tested within this work. Is personality the most relevant indicator of office differences? Or do age, gender, or region have something further to say? But the larger questions to be asked are ones that are important for the health of American

democracy. Congress itself might want to wrestle with the issue of whether having thousands of paid professionals conducting ‘permanent campaigns’ is conducive to the practice of free, fair, and competitive elections. Might Congress want to remove this perquisite in order that voters be given a frequent and fair choice in elections? While the prospects of this type of reform are unlikely, it does not reduce the importance of the issue at hand. And having dealt with campaign finance and other ethical dilemmas, one might hold out hope that Congress might also want to address the appropriateness of staff participating in campaign activities, raising money and interacting with a special class of constituents.

### Contents

Chapter One sets the tone for this dissertation by looking at the literature on the behavior and motivations of congressional incumbents. What are their attitudes about reelection? And what kinds of resources do they have at their disposal to assist them with their representative functions? How and why do they utilize staff? The review will also look comprehensively at the literature’s understanding of legislative staff as a whole, but with a particular focus on the district staff. A review of the methods and case studies will be undertaken in Chapter Two. While there are shortcomings to a study based on such a small number of cases, this chapter will also make the case for the value of contextual research. With the literature and methodology reviewed, Chapter Three will turn to a basic examination of the staff themselves. Who are they? What kinds of functions do they perform? Do all staff do the same things? The answers to these questions all suggested that there was no single norm or ideal type. Consequently, Chapter Three explains district staff operations from two different perspectives; one of a “routine” office



doing just what it takes to get by, and another more “aggressive” enterprise that feels more vulnerable and is more proactive in its behaviors. Chapter Three will also look at the district staff members themselves as relevant political actors. It will address their individual motivations and the manner in which many of them come to work for the incumbents. The fact that some offices were different than others is the central focus of Chapter Four. While the data gathered in the dissertation emphasizes the value of small-scale contextual analysis, Chapter Four switches gears and offers a number of variables for future large-n comparisons. Based upon my limited case set, I offer a number of variables that seem to explain some of the variation that exists between offices. I include a mixture of demographic (age, race, gender), political (seniority, party), and personal variables (personality, philosophy) to explain some of the variation from Chapter Three. Chapter Five will return to a contextual analysis of staff functions with an examination of a particular form of staff behavior: their interactions with elite constituents. My observations suggested that this was the one staff behavior that had the greatest impact on the incumbent’s electoral position, as well as the one behavior that had the greatest consequences for the act of representation. This chapter asks “why elites?” What is it about this particular group of constituents that attracts such interest from the incumbent enterprise, and why are elites part of the enterprise? Chapter Five will conclude by examining the potential benefits that this service provides. In the conclusion, Chapter Six, I will address several of the most relevant questions that district staff and elite interaction beg. The utilization of district staff has myriad consequences. Their presence should impact how the discipline sees the legislature. More importantly, the presence of district staff impacts the quality of representation that incumbents provide as well the

ability of said incumbents to attain re-election. Consequently, district staff members contribute greatly to the individual incumbents' impact on the strength of the political parties and the overall direction of government policies and programs. The consequences for the staff and incumbents, the discipline and the health of our democracy are examined in the concluding chapter. This dissertation argues that a large part of incumbency advantage can be traced to their service to elite constituents, which engenders future support and decreased opposition at the polls. So what does the literature say about all this?

## **Chapter One**

### **Literature Review**

The American public holds low levels of trust for politicians. Popular support for government has dwindled to the point where improper, incompetent, or immoral behavior is often expected from government officials. In fact, recent opinion polls have shown the lowest levels of trust and confidence in Congress in the postwar era and demonstrated that many Americans perceive Watergate to be an event not atypical of today's political behavior (Cooper, 1999). Congress is often the object of the public's derision. Despite the discontent amongst the public, it has become a near truism of modern elections that incumbent members of the U.S. House of Representatives get reelected. Even though Americans are skeptical of the "self-serving" motivations of incumbents (Craig, 1996), Americans continue to re-elect "their congressmen" in virtually every case. Richard Fenno identified this paradoxical situation twenty-five years ago when he asked: "If our congressmen are so good, how can our Congress be so bad? If it is the individuals that make up the institution, why should there be such a disparity in our judgements?" (Fenno, 1975, p.278) The literature happens to be full of explanations as to the causes of this "disparity" in our collective judgements at election time.

The election cycle is best viewed as a two-year process, not simply an event that occurs every other fall. Furthermore, the resources that House incumbents allocate both before and during campaigns have an impact on the electoral outcome. These resources come from two distinct sources: their campaign coffers and their taxpayer-financed office budgets. While the literature dealing with the impact of the campaign resources is direct

and substantial (for a review see Jacobson, 1997), the office budgets are less well understood and explained by the literature. Nevertheless, these resources are both likely to have an impact on election outcomes and they are both likely to answer Fenno's question about the "disparity" in our evaluations of individual incumbents. The efforts of the individual incumbents and their staff to serve constituents counteract the low expectations that Americans have of Congress as a collective body. The use of district staff and perquisites by incumbents leads one to ask important normative questions about how these staff affect the act of representation and the outcomes of congressional elections. I will return to these questions in the final chapter.

Before proceeding to study congressional district staff themselves, it is first necessary to put them into the appropriate context. The context is probably most appropriately drawn with incumbency advantage in the background. Over the past four decades incumbents have paradoxically become more electorally secure while at the same time acting aggressively to protect themselves from those rare occasions when incumbents do get defeated. They have undertaken aggressive efforts both with their campaigns and by allocating themselves more resources to effectively represent their constituents. In this chapter I will review the literature that details the rise of incumbency as a major determinant of congressional elections. The bulk of this research focuses on the increased allocation of individual incumbents' time and attentiveness as well as their allocation of resources, notably staff, to the home districts. I will conclude this chapter with a survey of the literature on congressional staff and how they are part of the modern congressional "enterprise."

## Incumbency Advantage

What is it?

One of the most reliable predictors of the outcomes of U.S. House elections is the status of the candidate. Whether the candidate is an incumbent, a challenger, or an open seat candidate is vital in determining many things about an election. This status will help determine the amount of financial support, voter respect, volunteer assistance, free media, and party support that each candidate will receive. But most importantly, that status has been shown to have a near deterministic impact on the outcome of the vote.

Incumbent House members do not lose very often. In recent decades, incumbents have been defeated only about 2% of the time in primaries and 7% of the time in general elections (Jacobson, 1997, p.20). Even 1994, an election that observers identify as a landslide defeat for Democrats, saw 84% of incumbent House Democrats retain their seats. Given that the modern House incumbent wins roughly 93% of the time in general elections, the story of aberrant election years like 1994 still tell a tale of substantial incumbent advantage. Incumbency advantage is not something peculiar to one party. While research has shown that incumbency advantage was helpful in preserving Democratic majorities throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the average Republican incumbent has also been the beneficiary of these increased advantages in the past few decades (Jacobson, 1990).

The most significant advantage enjoyed by incumbents is the rate of familiarity and name recognition that they enjoy with their constituents. Name recognition, recall and approval ratings are all substantially higher for incumbents than they are for challengers (Jacobson, 1997 p96). In most elections, challenger name recognition and approval

remain at such low levels that the incumbents face no serious threat. Yet, incumbents are especially desirous and courting of this recognition as it increases their vote totals in November and protects them from surges in national political and economic tides. Incumbents also desire comfortable victory margins to deter future challengers and prepare themselves for future runs for higher office. The literature detailing and debating incumbency advantage is massive, yet in many ways contradictory and incomplete. One scholar feared that a “primal scream” amongst congressional scholars would take place should another piece be written (Jones, 1981, p.458), and that was twenty years ago. Pardon me while I muffle the scream that the following literature review should produce.

When did wider margins begin to appear?

Two of the notable trends in the last century of American politics have been the decline in turnover in congressional elections and the rise of the professional political career (Loomis, 1998, p 63; Bullock, 1973). While some scholars choose to address turnover decline as a contemporary phenomenon, in truth, turnover has been in steady decline since the 1850s. What made it a more interesting topic was its connection to the rise in careerism and the increased vote totals and simple name recognition of incumbents that also began to rise in the 1960s. Research has shown that the electoral value of being an incumbent rose from less than 2% in 1950 to between 7% and 9% by 1994 (Jacobson, 1997; Gelman & King, 1983). In addition to higher vote totals, research began to detail the “sophomore surge”, the relatively new electoral success of freshmen incumbents. Freshmen members, historically the most vulnerable group of legislators, have become much more successful in their initial reelection bids. From 1946 until 1966, 35.9% of the freshmen incumbents were defeated. Over the next two decades, from 1968 to 1988, that

rate had fallen to 8.5% (Jacobson, 1990). With a freshmen reelection rate of over 90% and a decline in the number of retirements, the contemporary Congress is marked by relatively low turnover.<sup>1</sup>

One of the main factors explaining the rise of incumbency is the nature of incumbents' districts and their political fit within them. Mayhew (1974) argues that the electoral positions of incumbents were almost unchallenged by the 1970s because very few incumbents sat in 'marginal' seats by that time. A 'marginal' member is defined as having received less than 55% of the two-party vote in a previous election. Most academics consider this to be a level of electoral safety for most incumbents. Note that I referred to academics. Discussion below will reveal that congressional incumbents do not subscribe to the same terminology. It should also be noted that this figure is not universally accepted amongst academics. Some are more comfortable defining electoral safety as 60% of the two-party vote (see Smith, 1995). It is Mayhew's contention that 'marginal' districts had become electoral artifacts, in part due to the use of perquisites and service by the incumbent. An analysis of postwar House election returns reveals that the increased safety of House incumbents occurred in two stages. Jacobson (1990, p.28) demonstrates that the number of marginal incumbents declined in two stages. While roughly 40% of incumbents were considered to be marginal from 1946 to 1964, that number had declined to less than 30% by 1980 and had then fallen to historic lows under 20% in the 1980s. Ansolabehere, Brady and Fiorina (1992) added that incumbents today are only about one-half as vulnerable as incumbents from the 1950s. These findings are supported by the fact that the national political parties appear to challenge fewer and

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobson (1997, p.24) combines the rise of careerism or "retirement slump" with the "sophomore surge" to describe what he sees as incumbent "surge."

fewer of each other's incumbents. In the 2000 elections, each party appeared to concentrate their efforts on no more than ten percent of all seats.

Nevertheless, there are detractors to the 'declining marginals' school of thought. Jacobson (1987), among others, maintains that "marginal" elections never really "vanished". Instead, Jacobson argues that there arose a much greater volatility in individual election outcomes. While incumbents were attaining higher reelection percentages, the number of incumbent victories did not increase after the 1960s. Instead, the individual incumbents were confronted by the paradox of increased victory margins and the sudden and unexpected defeat of some of their colleagues. One can see how this might result in a feeling of uncertainty on the part of the incumbent. Jacobson and the detractors argue that when assessing electoral marginality, politicians and scholars must account for more than the previous electoral margin. They should also account for district history, challenger quality, scandal, national tides among other factors. This dissertation suggests that the activities of district staff are among those other factors that should be considered. A more thorough listing of variables will help to account for, and perhaps even prevent, victimization by random electoral defeats.

Why did incumbents become advantaged?

Is it because of micro or macro factors?

Congress has evolved as an institution both in practice and in the eyes of the voters over the past three decades. The average member of Congress has become a much more active and visible figure. Before proceeding, it is important to discuss whether incumbency advantage is a cause or a consequence of the changes in American politics. Perhaps it has been the case that the efforts and intentions of those who occupy the halls



of Congress have changed American politics. If this is the correct interpretation, it would be the case that new members or cohorts of new members have altered the processes and structures of Congress. An alternative explanation is that Congress and its occupants merely came to reflect the values of the mass political culture and that new members of Congress were nothing more than a reflection of their constituents' desires. A variety of factors have been posited to explain the changed behavior and electoral success of incumbents. These are best classified as either micro or macro-level explanations and the literature is so vast that one scholar (Jacobson, 1997, p.3) calls it a "fruitful problem" to coordinate the competing explanations of change. While one can find many apples in the orchard of the "incumbency advantage" literature, none of them seems to provide the golden explanation. In short, incumbency advantage does not appear to be wholly explained by either micro or macro-level explanations.

The macro interpretation looks at Congress as a collective and suggests that the powers and norms of the body have evolved because of collective pressures brought by a cultural mass shift. Uslaner (1993) found that the changed "comity" in Congress was largely due to changing values and interests in American culture at large. The decline of political parties and issues left constituents demanding new styles of congressional candidates and campaign strategies. When these new candidates got to Congress, the decentralization of power was caused by the need for new incumbents to represent and serve their constituents. Inevitably this new set of culturally responsive legislators clashed with a party and committee leadership that had fewer sanctions available than the previous leadership (Dodd, 1985). Ultimately party leaders were left with little choice but to respond to the macro level changes brought by the new legislators.

The micro interpretation suggests that change occurred not so much as a result of mass culture or the efforts of party leaders. Rather they credit the developments as a result of the changed motivations and behaviors on the part of individual incumbents and challengers. These individuals took advantage of slight cultural changes to enhance their power within the institution. Fiorina (1977) and Mayhew (1974), among others, assume that members of Congress behave as rational individuals. The incumbents' motivations and behaviors are seen to be products of rational decision-making, which, in turn, result in changes in the collective. The evidence on "institutionalization" can also be explained by this second approach as rational or progressively ambitious politicians sought to increase the number of positions and responsibilities available to themselves within Congress itself (Polsby, 1968). The development of the whip system or the proliferation of new sub-committee chairs and powers are good examples of how a rational approach resulted in collective change. Perhaps one might make the case that incumbents came to be aggressive and advantaged because of both micro and macro-level factors.

#### Societal reasons

The most common explanations offered to explain the recent changes in congressional behavior are the macro-level theories that cite broad societal or cultural change. The most obvious cultural target would be the "decline" of American political parties and the concurrent development of issues, mass media and interest groups. There is an extremely well ploughed field of research that details the declining attachment of voters to American political parties and the parties' subsequent decline. The detachment of the voters is usually attributed to both structural reforms, most notably the direct primary, and to changes in the electorate's ideological preferences.

Structural reforms such as primary elections and secret ballots have lessened party control over the election process. In simple terms, party officials have a greatly diminished capacity to nominate candidates and influence the outcomes of elections. Another area of diminished capacity is campaign finance, where political parties have declined as a source of incumbent's total receipts and expenditures. In 1978 incumbents received 5.6% of their total receipts from national parties. By 1992 the national party's contribution had shrunk to 0.6% for the average incumbent (Smith, 1995, p.67). When one considers that the cost of elections perhaps tripled from 1978 to 1992, that decline becomes even more meaningful. While the parties have always been involved in candidate recruitment and finance, the perceptions of the national tides increase or decrease the party's ability to recruit candidates and to raise money for them. Jacobson (1989) concluded that the aggregate quality of a party's stable of challengers is strongly related to national political and economic conditions. For example, given predictions of a Democratic takeover of the House of Representatives in 2000, it was relatively easier for Democrats to: 1) persuade incumbents to stay in office, 2) find new candidates to contest open seats or challenge marginal Republican incumbents, and importantly, 3) to raise as much money as the Republican committees who usually outspent them. While Republican incumbents maintained a substantial financial advantage on a race-by-race basis, the House Democrats substantially narrowed the overall contributions gap in 2000 relative to past elections.

Additionally, a "growing fraction" of the electorate has come to emphasize personal factors over partisan considerations in their voting patterns (Jacobson, 1990, p.72). The

decline of partisanship in the electorate over the past five decades has been well detailed by scholars and journalists (Broder, 1970; Nie, Verba and Petrocik, 1976; Wattenberg, 1984; Lunch, 1987; Sabato, 1988). While once a solid predictor of voting intentions and loyalties, partisanship has given way to an increased number of independent and split-ticket voters. The number of voters splitting their tickets between the presidential and congressional level tripled from the 1950s to the 1980s (Smith, 1995, p.63). Presidential coattails have declined since 1950 (Smith, 1995, p.75) and the unwritten law that a president's party loses seats in the midterm elections was broken in 1998 for the first time in over 60 years. All this evidence suggests that partisanship is not the dominant influence on voting behavior that it once was. Yet, one should be careful not to follow the herd of journalists, scholars and textbooks that have already buried political parties as a variable in the voting equation. The number of voters who identify themselves as independents is substantially reduced if one takes account of individuals who "lean" toward one party (Wattenberg, 1990). Furthermore, recent studies have found that rates of identification with the parties "rebounded" in the late 1980s with the increased polarization and regionalization between the Democrats and Republicans (Bartels, 2000, p.35). To the extent that there are more independent voters who will frequently defect from one party to another, Jacobson notes that they overwhelmingly jump ship to incumbents (1997, p.93).

Nevertheless, with the relative decline of resource rich and electorally reliable party organizations, incumbents were faced with a dilemma. In many districts, there were no longer sufficient numbers of strong party identifiers to ensure that they would have strong campaign machinery. Consequently, incumbents needed to create their own bases of

support or what Jacobson refers to as “personal, rather than impersonally partisan, electoral coalitions” (1990, p.3). The less partisan electorate has also become “more fickle” because of this individual attention (Jacobson, 1997, p.33) and they are not always a benefit to candidate-centered campaigns. As was mentioned above, the increased electoral volatility requires the average incumbent to do more to ensure the stability of their electoral coalitions even though incumbents will usually attract more ‘independent’ support than will challengers, hence the value of an active district staff.

A societal variable that complements the decline of parties is the decline of issues. Jacobson (1990, p.20) believes that when consensus over New Deal programs was reached and that when new, more confusing, but equally divisive issues such as civil rights, race, and abortion came to the fore, party declined as a useful voting cue. Furthermore, these new issues created cleavages that did not clearly divide the parties. For the most part, these issue cleavages diminished in their presence by the 1980s as the power of incumbency and the lack of quality challenges to incumbents based on ideological divides muted the presence of issues in congressional campaigns. When combined with the lack of quality challengers, the decline of issues meant that voters did not often get to make clear ideological choices in U.S. House elections. This is not so much determined by the candidates’ ideological proximity as it is the ability of incumbents to determine the issue content of most campaigns.

Many of the new issues, especially Vietnam and civil rights, were beamed directly into people’s homes on their television sets, and the media began to replace the political parties as the source of information for a growing number of voters. In fact, some believe the media have replaced parties as the main intermediating institution in American

politics. The number and prevalence of media outlets and the increased professionalization of politicians and their staff has made the media another tool in the decline of political parties. From daily faxes, press releases, video clips and radio actualities to visits to editorial boards, incumbents are aggressive about putting their names before the media of their district. Eighty percent of House members regularly use party facilities in Washington to send radio actualities back to district stations and a growing number are taping television segments to be beamed back as well (Smith, 1995, p.109). It is not a surprise then that the average House incumbent receives thorough coverage from their local media over the course of a two-year term, especially from small towns or limited budget media outlets. This coverage makes it difficult to mount a challenge, let alone an ideological debate, against any incumbent with media sophistication and a press secretary who has done his or her job over the preceding two-year term.<sup>2</sup>

A final societal variable is the increasing political activism of groups in American politics. A tremendous “explosion” of interest group representation took place in the 1960s as the new issues and styles of politics stirred the creation of single-issue groups and the fracturing of large umbrella organizations into many splintered groups.<sup>3</sup> This splintering was most notable amongst trade and ideological associations. Like the media, interest groups were increasingly important for the incumbents because of the resources that they could provide. The presence of interest groups was felt inside the halls of Congress through lobbying and the provision of information about issues that the party structure could less adequately provide them than was previously the case. This

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<sup>2</sup> See Cook (1990) or Hess (1982) for an extended discussion of the rise of press secretaries.

information was also made available to the incumbents' constituents through their television sets and mailboxes. Incumbents, for the most part, have been able to utilize interest group activity to their advantage. For the incumbent, the interest group represents a lucrative source of contributions, volunteers and votes. However, interest groups can be double-edged swords as incumbents can be defeated by their application of contributions, letters, votes, and volunteers. In fact, in many of the swing districts where members are struck by the "random terror" of the electorate, one will probably find the interests and activities of an interest group that feels that the incumbent no longer serves their interests. From term limits to abortion and gun owners, interest groups provide a silent but deadly core of constituents around which an incumbent's electoral coalition can be dismantled.

Interest groups have not replaced the parties as key institutions for incumbents though. Salisbury (1992) identified something of a paradoxical role for interest groups in Washington in that while there are "more groups" active at all levels of American society, he found that they tend to counterbalance each other and give the individual interest group "less clout." Because of this decline in "clout" there is a less substantial body of literature detailing the role and impact of interest groups in Congressional politics. Nevertheless, these groups are an important resource to the individual legislator. Groups seek out candidates who favor their ideological or trade's positions and favor them with information, resources and approval. Over the past half century then, members have been able to look to issues, the mass media and to interest groups to replace the

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<sup>3</sup> See Truman (1971), Wilson (1975) or Salisbury (1992) for a discussion of the growth and splintering of interest groups in America.

resources that were previously provided by the parties. During that same time period, the type of person in Congress has also changed.

Individual reasons: A “new breed” of entrepreneurs

An alternative to the societal literature is an approach that explains the growing incumbency advantage more as a product of a “new breed” of politician who took advantage of societal change. Instead of focusing on broad societal change, this research looks to the individual incumbents, their motivations, goals, and resources. The most basic assumption of this literature is that members of Congress are “single-minded seekers of reelection” (Mayhew, 1974; Fiorina, 1977). There is also a more sophisticated view of this approach, however, that emphasizes reelection as merely one of a number of goals that incumbents seek to accomplish in Congress (Fenno, 1973; Parker, 1989; Parker, 1992). The notion that incumbents are “single-minded” is debatable. What is less questionable is that incumbents do focus at some point on reelection and the more recent literature has developed the concept of a “new breed” of rational incumbents.

The “new breed” of representative is a political “self-starter” (Smith, 1995) in an era of “candidate-centered” politics (Ehrenhalt, 1992). In previous eras, political parties were the dominant influence in the structure and finance of political campaigns. Today, the candidates themselves are the determining agents at nearly all points of the campaign. From the most basic decision to enter the race, to the formal announcement, to the financing and planning of the campaign, it is the individual candidates that assess the risks, the costs and make the decisions. It is not only during the campaigns that the incumbents are generally free from structural or institutional constraints. As compared to legislators from other countries, members of the American Congress have an ideal setting



for self-promotion and re-election. They belong to weak parties, with generally weak institutional leadership that lacks the ability to impose sanctions on incumbents with deviant voting behavior. Furthermore, this same party leadership bestows considerable, and generally equitable, resources on all members, with slightly larger allocations reserved for party and committee leadership. In short, party leadership enhances and encourages “self-starting” incumbents. This is especially the case in the contemporary Congress where parties are dependent on razor-thin margins to govern.

It appears that this “self-starting” behavior commenced in the 1960s with the not-so-paradoxical intersection of declining electoral marginality and the increasing electoral activity and campaign spending by incumbents. The argument is made that this paradoxical intersection was enhanced or created by the arrival of a “new breed” of politician in the House. The “new breed” was younger and more ambitious for higher office (Payne, 1980; Fowler and McClure, 1989; Maisel, 1986; Kazee, 1980). Cooper and West (1981) found a complementary increase in the rate of retirement by senior House members during the 1960s and 1970s and concluded that many of these older members simply could not, or did not wish to adapt to the “new way.” Parker and Parker (1989) assert that the elections of 1964 marked the beginning of this “new” era. The “new” members of the House elected after 1964 are described as being more concerned about their electoral situations. Some might actually use the word paranoid. Consequently the “new” incumbents began to campaign harder, spending more time and resources on their reelection efforts. This “awareness” also offers an explanation to the finding that the “new” incumbents were more likely to allocate substantial resources to servicing district needs than were the “old” cohorts (Parker and Parker, 1985).

Other research has attributed change in Congress not so much to a fresh set of legs but rather to a “new era” where even senior members have changed their behavior. Parker (1986) found the same increase in attentiveness to the district by senior members who remained after 1964 and (1989, pp. 107-108) went on to demonstrate that each successive cohort has increased their attentiveness, with the older group quite often leading the increases.

It is not vitally important to prove which interpretation is correct as all scholars concur that congressional behavior changed in the 1960s. Given Cooper and West’s finding that there were substantial retirements in the 1960s and 1970s, it would not be a reach to argue that the “old” incumbents that stayed had the desire and the means to protect their seats. Subsequently they became “new” converts to the politics of “self-starting” that is now required of all candidates. The decline of turnover was probably a determining factor in the expansion of seniority and the desire of incumbents to receive some sort of reward for their expanded careers (Price, 1975). Whichever explanation is correct, the end result was the same; the decline of the parties coincided with the rise of personal electoral followings and the party leaders had limited ability to withhold perks or finances for members as they needed their support in the changed electoral climate. Arnold (1990) argued that congressional leadership must be predicated on an accounting of incumbent’s electoral needs. This point of view would argue that Congress is a loose collection of individuals and that in the “new” era, leaders are often required to bargain with their individual members if the majority is to be held or taken back.

The decline of partisanship in the electorate was accompanied by a decline of party leadership in Congress. Congress in the past thirty years has become much a more

individualized, fragmented or decentralized body. “Political maneuverability” or leeway has reduced the “incentives to follow party leaders and thereby weakens party cohesion” (Parker, 1989, p.218). Where power was traditionally exercised by a small number of key party leaders in Congress, a relatively sudden expansion of the subcommittee system, a widening of party leadership positions, and the rise of informal groups and caucuses widened the “power” structure of Congress quite dramatically. Furthermore, the nearly equitable allocation of office resources and perquisites and the continued norm of seniority further undercut the ability of the leadership to enforce party discipline. Finally, the increase in split-ticket voting allowed the average member a sense of independence from their president or party’s preferences. In fact, rebellion against the party leadership is often popular with home district independents or weak identifiers of the opposition party. As noted above, Jacobson (1997) found that incumbents are more likely to be beneficiaries of partisan defection than are challengers. Along similar lines, an important theme of this dissertation will detail the efforts of incumbents and their staff to persuade people outside of their partisan electoral bases, who are not normally their supporters to become active supporters, or minimally passive supporters of their opponents.

The discussion of a “Post-Reform” Congress has somewhat mediated the strong position of incumbents (Davidson, 1992; Smith 1995). Over roughly the past decade, there has been a need to pull back from the “rampant individualism” of the 1970s that had substantially decentralized power to individual incumbents. Smith characterizes this retreat as a “tradeoff” where leaders “set some direction, narrow the agenda, and reduce the uncertainty” while still allowing the individual member the discretion and the resources to pursue the necessary reelection strategies (Smith, 1995, p.18). This

argument is bolstered by findings of increased party loyalty in congressional voting (Loomis, 1996, p.122). While the House is a collection of 435 legislators from vastly different electoral settings, their constituents are similar in their demands for legislative production. Cox and McCubbins (1993) would argue that the need for production and the ideological polarization of the two parties resulted in the party leadership gaining an expansion of their ability to pass legislation. This new style of party loyalty should not be overstated, however. A classic illustration of this new style of partisanship is seen in a comparison of the 104<sup>th</sup> and 105<sup>th</sup> Congresses. In the aftermath of a significant Republican victory in the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress that produced a unified and loyal Republican caucus, the next Congress witnessed the reemergence of dissent from committee chairs and from within certain elements of the Republican caucus. While the “new” cohort was initially disposed to partisan unity in the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress, many of the incumbents resumed or adapted to the post-1964 trends after only one term of party loyalty.

During this era of “new” incumbents, the national parties have joined the congressional leadership in playing more circumscribed roles. This role, where the national parties act more as supplements than controlling influences is a new one. The most active players in congressional campaigns are the four respective “Hill” or “Congressional Campaign Committees” (CCC). These committees have been in existence since the late 1800s but their current nature and role was developed in the post reform days of the 1970s and 1980s with the development of “soft” money (Hernnson, 1988; Kolodny, 1998). While scholars disagree on when the CCC’s became involved in channeling resources to incumbent’s campaigns, it is clear that the magnitude of their involvement expanded substantially in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, as was mentioned

above, candidates now receive a smaller portion of their campaign contributions from the national parties. On occasion the national party will play a role in identifying, recruiting, or financing select candidates. Furthermore, while the national parties direct contributions to campaigns are very small, their interaction on behalf of the individual campaigns that they target will result in greatly enhanced funding from national individuals, interest groups, and PACs (Fowler, 1993, p.116). For example, with control of the House of Representatives to be determined by five-to-ten seats in the 2000 election cycle, the leadership of both parties were active in protecting incumbents in a number of swing seats, recruiting candidates for open seats or challengers for incumbents in swing districts. Because of scarce resources and the competitive balance, however, national parties have generally confined their resources to fewer than ten percent of all House races.

Instead of focusing on the national party or issues, a more contextual factor relevant to incumbents is the individual whom they face on the ballot. Coinciding with the increased level of activism by incumbents has been the diminished level of quality opponents that incumbents have come to face over the past three decades. With the diminished impact of national tides and political parties on elections, the literature has subsequently placed an increased focus on the challengers to House incumbents. Jacobson and Kernell (1983) argue that challenger quality is highly related to the electoral success of challengers and open seat candidates. Furthermore, Jacobson (1990, p.20) and Fiorina (1992) believed that the “notable dearth” of quality Republican challengers opposing a sizeable Democratic “farm team” in the 1980s was the main reason contributing to incumbency advantage and the consequent Democratic majorities.

Given that it is now an accepted fact in the literature that incumbents operate in a “rational” manner, it should come as no surprise that the same behavior labels are applied to many of their challengers. “Quality” challengers, instead of butting up against the orthodoxy of 90% reelection rates of House incumbents, have acted in the same “rational” manner as incumbents by waiting for them to retire or move on to other offices or opportunities. A “quality” challenger is someone judged to have a reasonable chance of electoral success, usually a former legislator or an individual with access to substantial resources because of their family wealth, career, or celebrity status. Jacobson (1990) conclusively demonstrates that there is a relatively higher level of “quality” candidates seeking open seats than challenging sitting incumbents. While the quality of challengers to incumbents has remained mired at roughly the same low level since mid-century, Jacobson found that the quality of open seat candidates nearly doubled during that same time period. Finally, an examination of campaign expenditures over the past four decades finds that the average open seat candidate spends more than the average incumbent and more than double the average challenger (Smith, 1995, p.69). This evidence strongly suggests that quality challengers are contributing to the self-fulfilling prophecy of incumbency advantage by not bothering to run until they have a decent chance of electoral success. Ultimately though, it cannot be stated that challenger quality is the sole factor in explaining incumbency advantage as challenger quality has not declined at a steady level mirroring the rise of incumbency advantage (Jacobson, 1990).

#### Institutional Reasons

A final explanation for the increase in incumbency advantage derives from incumbents taking advantage of the expansion of government programs with thankful

constituents paying them back at the ballot box. This explanation generates two approaches for the increase in activities and resources of incumbents. First, the growth of government engendered in the development of New Deal and Great Society programs created heightened citizen demand for service and assistance with federal bureaucracies and regulations. Patterson (1970) and Fiorina (1989) explained that staff growth is attributable to the growth in the size and complexity of the entire federal government since the 1960s. Along with government growth, there was a complementary increase in the level of complaints from constituents as this complexity had an increased invasiveness in the constituents' daily lives. It was logical for members of Congress to increase the number of staff and other resources to provide more service for the heightened constituent demand. Patterson's argument bolstered Johannes' (1980) finding that many more people are in contact with congressional offices than used to be the case. In fact, 71% of the staffers that he surveyed agreed that there has been an increase in the volume of casework requests largely because of new programs and regulations that constituents encounter. A similar, but more political argument is that Congress had to "keep up" with the growing size and complexity of the executive branch (Romzek and Utter, 1997). The desire to "keep up" with more sophisticated resource allocation was also found in the more professional state legislatures. Weberg (1988) found, from a sample of twenty states, the ten largest had decentralized routines where the individual incumbents and their staff could more directly assist their constituents, while the ten smaller states tended to rely on smaller and more centralized staff to assist constituents.

The second institutional explanation for the expansion of resources lies in the aggressive solicitations by incumbents for greater levels of constituency service. Fiorina

suggested that incumbents purposefully designed broad legislation in the hope that growing bureaucracies would create more regulation and complexity and thus more opportunities for the incumbents to do “favors” for constituents.<sup>4</sup> While Fiorina’s approach provides a cynical portrait of legislators, there is little argument that incumbents do allocate staff and resources to serve their constituents, in addition to the programs, grants and outlays that they provide for their home districts. To some, these programs are “pork”, to others they are “gravy” and still others refer to this spending as “particularistic” programs designed to directly please their constituents (Jacobson, 1997, p.185-188). After these programs are established, incumbents become prolific “credit claimers” even when they are not directly responsible for said programs (Fenno, 1973). Even supporters of the institution have a hard time denying the electoral motivations of this behavior. Whether it be the mobile home offices of the 1970s or the office hours, town hall meetings, and newsletters of today, modern members are clearly more solicitous of their constituents than were their predecessors.

Defenders of these services would use less cynical terms and assert that the modern incumbents are merely looking to represent their constituents with the complexities of a large federal bureaucracy. While Fiorina may take the cynical view of this behavior, perhaps we ought to credit members of Congress for taking an entrepreneurial view of the demand confronting them. Incumbents and their staff are aware of the political value that expanded service to constituents provides. Chapter Five will detail how incumbents and their staff act on this awareness. In sum, incumbency advantage can be seen as a product of the above factors: societal change, a rise of “new” incumbents and the creation of

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Gross (1953) had raised questions about the appropriateness of staff expansion and previewed Fiorina’s argument thirty years earlier. It was Gross’s contention that creating new staff



expanded institutional resources. It is this last factor, however, that incumbents have the most direct control over and are most easily able to manipulate to protect their positions as incumbents.

### Incumbent resources

Incumbents have fear

Preceding evidence pointed out the fact that while incumbents' margins of victory have increased over the past four decades, their numbers of victories have not. On the other hand, one might point out that the irony of the past few decades is that while party influence has weakened in Congress and the electorate, there has been less electoral turnover than in earlier decades. What unites these disparate descriptions of congressional elections is their impact on the average incumbent; the modern congressional incumbent is often "running scared" of the uncertainty of their electoral future (Mann, 1978; Ansolabehere, Brady and Fiorina, 1992). This is especially true when the prospect of occupying a marginal seat looms on the horizon. Despite much of the preceding evidence that seems to paint a picture of near electoral invulnerability, the modern House incumbent often lives in a state of "random terror" of a "more volatile and idiosyncratic" electorate (Jacobson, 1997, p.27).

Many scholars and journalists base their assumptions about congressional behavior on incumbents' consuming drive to be re-elected (see especially Fiorina, 1989). It is offered that every aspect of congressional behavior revolves to some degree around the drive to reelection: from the raising of campaign funds to the selection of committee assignments, the resolution of constituent problems, the support or proposition of legislation, and the solicitation of media attention (Smith, 1995). Mayhew (1974) lays

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positions would create more work and new challenges for the legislature.

out incumbent behavior into three basic activities that revolve around the electoral motive: they claim credit for votes and projects, take positions on issues of importance to their district, and finally, they advertise successful votes or projects that benefit their districts. Other scholars make a more sympathetic explanation of the sincere incumbent's need to keep up with their constituents' needs and desires while also attempting to legislate their own policy goals (see especially Fenno, 1973). What is clear from both lines of thought is that the average incumbent tends to have a sense of uncertainty about his or her future legislative career. Faced with this unpredictability, incumbents in the past three decades have become more responsive and active than were their predecessors.

Incumbents, their staff and consultants can never determine with certainty what worked in the last election or during their preceding term in office. In order to reduce the feeling of electoral insecurity, incumbents, their staff and consultants have been willing to attempt many activities, from the "campaign" to the "federal" side, and with many things in between. On the campaign side, incumbents have raised and spent more money with each succeeding election cycle. New technologies and the need to run more television ads have astronomically increased the level of campaign spending. On the "federal" side, incumbents have dramatically increased the number and variety of resources in their district offices to serve their constituents and increase their name recognition.

The uncertainty of modern incumbents has even turned the very explicit federal rules governing the allocation of staff and other resources, most notably the Hatch Act provisions, into a murky gray area. In the Senate each incumbent is allowed to employ three "political designees" who work in "official" positions in the federal offices. These

“designees” are permitted to take active roles in all elements of the incumbent’s campaign provided that they do not perform said activities on government time or utilize government property (like phones, postage, or offices). They can even plan fund-raisers and receive campaign contributions as long as they do not use government time or resources. The same rules apply in the House, except that all staff can act as “designees” provided that they do so on their own time.<sup>5</sup> I would suggest that the activities of these “designees” are clearly political in nature and contribute to incumbency advantage. As such, they are of interest to this dissertation and will be examined in-depth in later chapters.

On the campaign side, incumbents have come to run “permanent” campaigns, continually raising and spending massive campaign war chests. For example, in 1998, newly elected Dennis Moore of Kansas had his first fundraising event the weekend after the election, two months before he was even sworn in to office. These early events are becoming the norm, with incumbents concerned about their cash-on-hand showings on their Federal Election Commission reports even in the year before they are to be re-elected. The cash-on-hand obsession is driven by the discussion above on quality opponents. If an incumbent is found to have a lower than average cash-on-hand report even as early as the mid-year report before their reelection (a full 14 months preceding election), then the opposing party is likely to devote attention and resources to that district in the hopes of luring potential challengers. Weak incumbents often mean that the party does not have to work very hard as the line of potential challengers will have already been formed. Consequently, the solution for incumbents is to deter any potential

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<sup>5</sup> It was not my observation that all staff were directly involved in campaign-related activities. In each office these activities seemed to be mostly performed by a small number of the most senior staff.

challengers by raising more money than they did in the previous election cycle.

Increased campaign expenditures, however, have been found to have only a “marginal return” on election outcomes (Jacobson, 1997). Generally, incumbents who spend the most also have the slimmest victory margins.<sup>6</sup> Obviously then, there are other activities of incumbents that help explain re-election success. Rather than focusing merely on campaign expenditures, one needs to examine all of the “increments and margins” that enable an incumbent to attain re-election (Miller and Stokes, 1963).

The incumbent who “runs scared” operates on the basic assumption that to be perceived is to be perceived favorably. Consequently, “scared” incumbents will be more active in advertising their name and achievements to their core group of supporters, to swing voters, and possibly even to individuals who might have voted for their opponent in the previous election. Parker and Davidson (1979) found that voters based their recognition of incumbents on their attention to the district and personality to a much greater extent than to the incumbents’ ideological or partisan attachments. Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina found that “all else being equal, a very favorable image as a good constituency representative is more important to the candidate in determining the vote than having the same party affiliation as the voter” (1987, p. 119). It is these assumptions that best explain the growing activism and perquisite use of incumbents. With the decline of partisan coalitions in their home districts, it became necessary for incumbents to “cultivate personal bases of support” in order to provide the incumbent with a “personal vote” to overcome potential national swings, economic conditions and personalities (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1987). Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina found that

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<sup>6</sup> This is an illusory finding, however, in that incumbents tend to draw well-financed opponents when they are vulnerable. The simple act of spending more money does not make one more vulnerable.

the American single-member districts are largely unique in that they require legislators to construct and maintain their own electoral coalitions. Moreover, the individual coalitions can best be built and maintained with individualized contact and familiarity with constituents. This contact would hopefully lead to a “personal vote” in favor of the incumbent. Upon simple examination, these efforts appear to have been overwhelmingly successful over the past few decades. Voters are two (Jacobson, 1997, p.99) to three times (Smith, 1995, p.73) as likely to encounter House incumbents than challengers. The incumbent has higher levels of contact in all forms, from television ads to actual personal encounters, to the mail that constituents receive. The literature (Jacobson, 1997; Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987) largely finds that these contacts have a net effect to be helpful at election time.

#### So Incumbents use official resources

It’s not only campaign ads and fund-raising that returns incumbents to office. They also have a wide arsenal of official perquisites at their disposal that are useful in developing and maintaining name recognition. It was postulated above that incumbents’ resources have expanded over the past three decades because: 1) there has been an increase in the organizational complexity of Congress and a corresponding need to comply with constituent demands; 2) many incumbents have a feeling of electoral insecurity, and 3) the increase of congressional budgets have permitted incumbents the luxury of more staff and resources to allocate to their district operations.

In distributing these resources back to their home districts, incumbents are characterized as being responsive “errand boys” to their constituents and organized interests. “They spring in to action with uncritical zeal, determined from the outset to

win for the complainant because he is a constituent, not because his cause is known to be just” (Gellhorn, 1966, p.71). Incumbents tend to have a very clear notion of what “errands” they need to perform and whom they need to serve. In nearly every visit to state and federal legislative offices I witnessed elaborate maps, lists of zip codes and phone prefixes that clearly demarcate constituents from non-constituents. The lack of interest in serving non-constituents further underscores the electoral motivation of incumbent behavior.

Modern incumbents have developed “home styles” to cultivate their constituents and provide them with a positive image of their activities. Fenno (1978) believed that an average “home style” was composed of three things: the incumbent’s presentation of him/herself to the constituents; their allocation of personal time to district needs; and the explanation of their Washington activities. Almost identical to Fenno, Parker (1989) identified four activities that incumbents pursue: casework; the use of personal time; the allocation of office resources; and the promotion of the incumbent’s image. What follows is a review of the “home style” allocations that incumbents have made over the past four decades.

Fenno (1978) described the allocation of resources to the district as one of the best ways that incumbents could counter the decline of parties and solidify their hold on office. The allocations of resources to be discussed below suggest that Fenno’s depiction appears to be a bipartisan belief. Something has been made of Democratic and Republican ideological differences toward the allocation of resources. However, in the aftermath of the 1994 elections, the new Republican leadership largely spared personal staff and the franking privilege. The cuts that have occurred were usually bipartisan as

Congress has been “sensitive” to media charges about the inequity of incumbent advantages over challengers. Therefore, over the past decade, Congress has cut some staff and perquisites, reformed the ethics of the body, and some individual legislators have even returned their pay increases (Smith, 1995, p.18). But, on the whole, the system has been largely preserved with only minimal cutbacks in the allocation of incumbent’s official perquisites.

### Time

The most basic resource that incumbents can allocate is their own time. They have enhanced the value of this resource by: 1) increasing their salaries, 2) ensuring that they have the ability to travel home at taxpayer expense, and 3) hiring additional staff to maximize the value of their own schedules. These changes had an impact on the amount of time that incumbents began to spend in their districts. While the average incumbent spent only two to three days per month in the district before 1970, by 1980 the average incumbent was home for ten days per month (Parker, 1986). It was in large part because of the aforementioned reforms in the allocation of resources, and the changed attitudes in the “new” members discussed above, that incumbents increased their travel home during the 1970s and 1980s. During the 1980s there was a change in attitude amongst incumbents in both houses that led to the creation of a Tuesday-Thursday Washington schedule that would allow them more time at home. Even though the House went to this Tuesday-Thursday schedule and it increased the number of official recess days to over 100 by the mid-1980s, they still met the same number of session hours that had been taking place before the reforms. After reforms in 1973 and 1978 incumbents were compensated for unlimited travel home, as long as it came out of their office accounts.

Not so coincidentally, as will be seen below, incumbents have continued to increase their office budgets. However, the value of this resource is of debatable utility. Parker and Parker (1980, 1985) conclude that the time members spend in the district is unrelated to their vote margins.

### Committees

Research on the expanded resources of incumbents first focused on the development of committee resources at their disposal in the 1960s and 1970s. Not only did incumbents increase the number of committees and subcommittees, they also increased the turf, budgetary resources, and the number of staff serving those committees. For the “rational” incumbent, expanded committees provided the means to provide a heightened level of service to their constituencies and to hopefully gain increased exposure with their constituents, interested groups and potential contributors. Like incumbents’ time, committee resources are also not a mono-causal explanation of incumbent advantage. Over the past fifteen years, the number, turf and staffing of committees and subcommittees has begun to be pared back, with no subsequent impact on the overall level of incumbent advantage.

### Communication and Earned Media

The most basic way for incumbents to increase their familiarity with their constituents has been to take advantage of advances in communication technology. These technologies allow them to “publicize” their accomplishments (Smith, 1995, p.65). Yet strangely, the most common form of constituent contact, the “frank”, or the stationary allowance, is the contact that is least affected by increases in technology. This is a perk incumbents have enjoyed going all the way back to the First Continental



Congress. In the past few decades the level of mail going through Capitol Hill has expanded tremendously. The incoming mail has expanded because of the increased number of requests coming from individuals affected by government programs, the presence of C-SPAN as a catalyst to individuals responding to what they see on the floor or in committee and, last but perhaps most importantly, from the tremendous expansion of form letters and requests coming from interest groups (Smith, 1995, p.108). It is logical then, that the amount of outgoing mail has expanded in response to the amount of incoming mail. But it has also expanded as incumbents started to send increased numbers of mass mailings to their constituents in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>7</sup>

Other technological perks that incumbents have capitalized on include the now standard presence of press secretaries in each congressional office. Not that long ago, press secretaries were found only in the offices of leadership or prominent members of Congress. Today, the press secretary is a cornerstone of the congressional office, linking the incumbent's daily Washington and district activities to the home district press and, ultimately to the constituents (Cook, 1989). Incumbents also have access to television and radio studios, provided by their national parties, to beam back nightly messages to their district media outlets. This is an illustration of the ironic position of the national parties today, as they largely finance a resource that serves to reinforce the dominant position of individual incumbents. And they do this even on those occasions when the incumbents require use of the facilities to emphasize to their constituents how they are representing district over partisan interests.

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<sup>7</sup> A recent study by the Congressional Research Service concluded that the number of mass mailings by Congress have decreased over the past decade (Pershing, 2000). It was speculated that the substantial cost of these mailings was starting to generate negative publicity for the individual members. This has led to several waves of reform of congressional mail expenditures.

While Rosenthal (1973) found that press releases had little impact for legislators during the 1960s, except in some marginal districts, and Cover (1977,1980) found little impact of “franking” on final vote totals, it is likely that incumbent communications are another variable in the equation of incumbent success. It is not, as Rosenthal would probably agree, the only factor explaining incumbent success. In fact, the use of “franked” mail has declined in past three decades because of increased ethics and rules restrictions that were imposed in 1973, 1989, 1992 and 1995 (Smith, 1995, pp.56-57, Pershing, 2000). Restrictions aside, incumbents have also become less prolific frankers due to the increased scrutiny imposed by the media on incumbents who are at the “top of the list.”

#### Office Budgets

Perhaps the simplest means of examining the expanded perquisite use by incumbents lies in their overall office budgets. Over the past three decades, Congress has dramatically expanded office budgets while at the same time streamlining the way in which individual legislators pay for all the services that they provide. In 1995, House Republicans consolidated incumbents’ official expenses, mail and staff salary budgets into one account, a “Member’s Representational Allowance” (MRA). These accounts vary in size from \$858,000 to \$1.3 million per year per incumbent (Ornstein, Mann and Malbin, 2000, p.135). The variations reflect the obvious instances of distant location and local costs of office space, materials and salaries.<sup>8</sup> The U.S. Congress is notable, however, for granting basically equitable resources to all members of the institution regardless of tenure of majority/minority status. The increase in the number and salary of

congressional staff perhaps reflected the increased perception of vulnerability by incumbents and the weakening of party control in the legislature.

The expansion of incumbent staff and office resources is argued to have an impact on election outcomes because of the increased contact and name recognition that said resources will purchase. In research at the state level, King (1991) concluded that a \$10,000 increase in a state legislator's official operating budget will profit an additional 1.54 percent at the polls and he speculated that a similar effect works for national legislators when they increase spending on constituency service. It might further be argued that incumbents shift staff and resources back to their home districts to capitalize on voter demands. Aggregate analysis over the past four decades seems to confirm this trend. Research found that the district allocation of staff has not been uniform, however. Fenno (1978, p.44) found that seniority, margin, family residence and distance from Washington do not make a difference in staff allocation, while the region of the incumbent has "substantial effect on staff allocation patterns and home style." There will be a further discussion of the variation in allocation of staff in Chapter Four.

Obviously, office budgets and the number and quality of staff contribute to incumbent's electoral success but they cannot be argued to be the sole factor explaining their success. This dissertation will in later chapters demonstrate that some incumbents use their staff more "aggressively" to assist their electoral positions. Because of the permeable rules governing staff political behavior, they can easily make the campaign-governance transition during the course of a single business day, to say nothing of the crossover work that they might perform over an entire electoral cycle.

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<sup>8</sup> There were numerous reforms in office budgeting during the 1960s and 1970s. Ultimately the House (1978) and Senate (1973) went to the basic universal budgets that included travel, rent and other office

### Quirky collateral stuff

Additionally, the wild imaginations of incumbents with varying degrees of advertising experience from every far flung corner of the country resulted in a wide variety of other forms of office and campaign expenditures that were made to increase name recognition with constituents. These items are as idiosyncratic as the members. Some of these other types of “collateral” resources include: the mobile office van of the 1970s, stickers and handouts, baby care books mailed to new parents, and “I saw you in the news” clips. These “collateral” resources have dubious electoral value. Nonetheless, they should be considered a part of the overall incumbent protection program.

### Casework

Finally, there is the most analyzed element of the incumbents’ resources: casework. Casework is a service provided by congressional staff, both in Washington and in the home district that deals with individual constituent problems and demands. It was argued above that incumbents expanded the volume of casework activity in order that they might help their constituents navigate through the increased complexity of government. Consequently, defenders of the system celebrate casework as a non-controversial, “non-partisan, non-ideological” activity (Fiorina, 1989) but in reality, it has become a “partisan, vote-getting opportunity” (King, 1991). “Much of the advertisement and service (about casework) has been regulated by Congress itself and is, in theory not to be used by representatives in their reelection campaigns. In reality, however, these activities play vital, if sometimes indirect, roles in the election campaigns of incumbents” (Kean, Gowda, and Farmer, 1993, p.2). There is a substantial debate about the electoral value

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materials. Staff salary and mail expenses had always been kept in separate budgets.

of “assistance” to constituents and the weight of the evidence seems to suggest some beneficial value.

Casework activity is deemed by district staffers to be “pure gravy” as it makes no enemies but almost certainly wins votes (Lunch, 1987). Furthermore, Congressional staffers felt that the cases where they intervened with a bureaucracy for constituents were successful nearly 40% of the time (Johannes, 1981). The hope is that service creates some measure of gratitude. Much has been written about the use of casework services as an advantage of incumbency and its positive effect on the saliency and evaluation of the incumbent (Cover, 1980; Cover and Brumberg, 1982; Parker, 1980; Fiorina, 1989; Serra and Cover, 1992). Serra (1993) found that casework assistance increased the evaluation of incumbents by 14.6 degrees on a 100-point thermometer scale. Clapp (1963) found that voters pay back favors with increased probabilities of voting on their behalf, which is supported by findings of psychologists that people find it disagreeable to “owe” favors and tend to quickly find means to repay their debts (Cialdini, 1985; Regan, 1971). In simple terms, a particular case study found that “those that received service did vote in greater percentages for (the incumbent) than those who were not served” (Kean, Gowda and Farmer, 1993, p.32). The value of an effective casework operation was valued by one study at three to five percent to the total turnout in an average district (Fiorina, 1989).

Some scholars are dubious of the value of casework activity. First, the fact that a relatively small percent of people actually request service limits its overall value (Johannes, 1984). Second, casework alone has “no significant effect” on evaluations of incumbents and voters tend to be “ingrates” as service is an expected long-term activity, not something for which a short-term reward can be gained (Johannes and McAdams,

1987). Finally, it is possible that incumbents “overestimate” the role of constituency service and their degree of electoral marginality (Mayhew, 1974). Furthermore, Jacobson (1990, p. 45) points out the lack of value in staff and resources by showing that the growth in staff and office resources in the 1980s had flattened out while the incumbency advantage had grown.

The problem with this criticism of the value of office resources is that the approach downplays the growth in resources that took place during the 1960s and 1970s and served to entrench incumbents while at the same time discouraging potential “quality” challengers. At a minimum then, casework is perceived to be something that should be pursued in order to counter any loss in approval that an incumbent may accumulate over the course of a term and compensate for the loss of partisan coattails. Since party identification can now only guarantee a representative roughly twenty or thirty percent of the vote, it is inherent upon the incumbent to maintain the electoral coalition. While one might conclude that contacting “seven-tenths of one percent” of the total constituents or a ten percent increase in party defections are not monumental, one should not forget the “marginal” psyche of the member. As electoral victories in the present era are so “unpredictable”, Miller and Stokes’ (1963) advice on representatives winning through “increments and margins” seems even more apt. The overall utility of additional staff and resources may be debatable to scholars. Perhaps the more interesting or relevant focus though should be the psychological impressions of the incumbents. The comments of incumbents and staff in this study suggest that they perceive vulnerability and consequently worked harder to get re-elected (i.e. increased allocations of resources to their district offices and election campaigns). It is hard to argue with the reality of the

fact that incumbents have numerous staff at their disposal, especially those positioned in their home district offices. Perhaps a headline from Roll Call sums up the attitude of incumbents best: “Top Frankers Also Have the Stiffest Challengers” (Simpson, 1992).

While there has been a growing amount of research on incumbent’s efforts to attain reelection, the bulk of this work has focused on aggregate analyses of incumbent’s time and/or their overall budgets, numbers of employees, or amount of casework performed. congressional district staff remain a relatively understudied element of the incumbent’s total effort. A gradual improvement in the quantity and quality of research on congressional staff has taken place over the past thirty years, yet holes remain.

### Congressional Staff

#### Staff as a resource

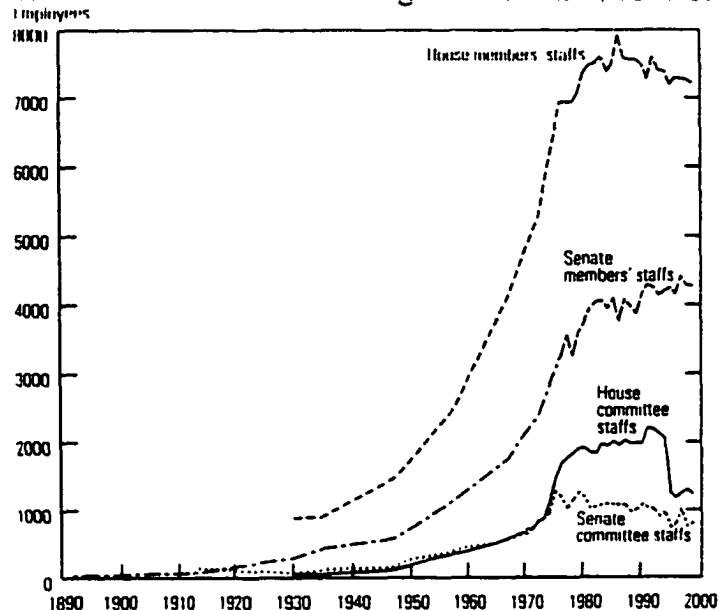
Congressional staff were rarely found in the halls of the Capitol until late in the Nineteenth Century. It was not until 1893 that the House first made an allowance for pay from the federal government. Before that time all staff were either privately paid by the incumbent or were family members (Smith, 1995, p.103). Furthermore, there wasn’t room for staff as the individual incumbents did not get their own offices until the early Twentieth Century when office buildings began to be built around the Capitol. Since the turn of the century, the size and pay of staff has increased dramatically. At the turn of the century, the House had no personal staff on payroll. By 1930, there were roughly one thousand personal staff members in and around the Capitol.<sup>9</sup> By 1965 that number had quadrupled and by the mid-1980s it had increased to seven thousand five hundred personal staff. That number has largely leveled off in the 1990s with only seven

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<sup>9</sup> “Personal” staff work directly for individual incumbents, as opposed to committee or institutional research staff.

thousand two hundred personal staff on payroll in 1999 (Salisbury and Shepsle, 1981; Smith, 1995, p.107; Ornstein, Mann and Malbin, 2000, p.129). Figure 1.1 demonstrates the incredible growth of staff over the past century.

Figure 1.1 The Growth of Congressional Staff, 1891-1999



(Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin, 2000, p.130)

There is also a comparative element to the growth of legislative staff in the latter half of the Twentieth Century. Ryle (1981), Campbell and LaPorte (1981) and Blischke (1981) found incremental staff increases in the UK, France and Germany. All three studies concluded that these increases occurred largely at the insistence of incumbent demands, a situation highly similar to that of the United States Congress.

In the latter half of the Twentieth Century, each incumbent was entitled to a "Clerk Hire" allowance that would pay the salaries of their staff. This allowance steadily increased over the past four decades. In 1955 enough funds were allocated to allow each House member the resources to employ eight full time staff. That number increased to 10 staff in 1965 and 18 in 1975. By 1977, each incumbent was allocated \$238,580 to



employ 18 individuals. That number was finally increased to \$475,000, and “up to” 22 staff in 1991. Of those twenty-two, eighteen could be full-time employees and four could be part-time. There are still no requirements as to which of these staff must work in Washington and which must work in the district. As was noted above, the House combined their budgets for staff salaries, office and mail expenses in 1995 so the employment requirements have been loosened considerably. Staff increases have been commensurate in the Senate. Hammond’s (1976) research found more sophisticated and growing personal offices in the Senate. She found that the number of legislative aides in the Senate increased from .7 per senator in 1960 to 5.3 per senator by 1975. Today, the Senate staff allowance ranges from \$1.2 to \$2.1 million depending on size of state (Ornstein, Mann and Malbin, 2000). In fact, at the high end, it is possible for one senator to employ four or five times as many staff as the average House member. In 1992, Senator Moynihan who both represented a state on the large side of the allocational formula (New York), served as chair of the Senate Finance Committee and held two other subcommittee chairmanships was entitled to employ 100 staff (Smith, 1995, p.106). Furthermore, there are no restrictions determining how many staff a senator can employ or limitations on where they have to be placed.

Finally, it should be noted that the increase in the number of staff has had a distinctly “district” edge to it. Incumbents have increasingly allocated resources to their home districts. The numbers of district staff have risen both in aggregate number and in the total proportion of all congressional staff. As the Figure 1.2 shows, while only 22% of staffers were located in district offices in 1972, 1992 the number of staff working at “home” had doubled to nearly 50% by the late 1990s.

Figure 1.2 House Staff Based in District Offices, 1970-1999

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Employees</i> | <i>Percentage of total personnel...<br/>staffs in district offices</i> |
|-------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1970        | 1,035            | n.a.                                                                   |
| 1971        | 1,121            | n.a.                                                                   |
| 1972        | 1,189            | 22.5                                                                   |
| 1973        | 1,347            | n.a.                                                                   |
| 1974        | 1,519            | n.a.                                                                   |
| 1975        | 1,732            | n.a.                                                                   |
| 1976        | 1,943            | 28.0                                                                   |
| 1977        | 2,058            | 29.6                                                                   |
| 1978        | 2,317            | 33.4                                                                   |
| 1979        | 2,445            | 34.6                                                                   |
| 1980        | 2,534            | 34.4                                                                   |
| 1981        | 2,702            | 36.1                                                                   |
| 1982        | 2,694            | 35.8                                                                   |
| 1983        | 2,785            | 36.6                                                                   |
| 1984        | 2,872            | 38.9                                                                   |
| 1985        | 2,871            | 38.1                                                                   |
| 1986        | 2,940            | 43.6                                                                   |
| 1987        | 2,503            | 33.0                                                                   |
| 1988        | 2,954            | 39.6                                                                   |
| 1989        | 2,916            | 38.5                                                                   |
| 1990        | 3,027            | 40.4                                                                   |
| 1991        | 3,022            | 41.5                                                                   |
| 1992        | 3,128            | 41.2                                                                   |
| 1993        | 3,130            | 42.3                                                                   |
| 1994        | 3,335            | 45.1                                                                   |
| 1995        | 3,459            | 48.1                                                                   |
| 1996        | 3,144            | 43.1                                                                   |
| 1997        | 3,209            | 44.1                                                                   |
| 1998        | 3,214            | 44.2                                                                   |
| 1999        | 3,192            | 44.2                                                                   |

(Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin, 2000, p.131)

While the literature has managed to discover the increase in the size, complexity and specialization legislative staff from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, that growth has not been nearly as remarkable as the overall growth in number and responsibilities of personal staff. Susan Webb Hammond's (1984, 1996) review articles on legislative staff provide the most comprehensive review of this literature and the following review draws heavily from those two articles.

The early literature (pre-1970) was very descriptive but of limited utility in constructing comparative analyses or drawing conclusions about who the staff members were, what they did, and what their importance was within the institution. While Huitt (1965) noted that the relationship between the members and their staff in the Senate was "largely unexplored", very few of his colleagues chose to examine this connection. By the late 1960s, scholars had begun to think about the policy impact that staff were having on their legislators, their committees, the institution and the overall outcome of policy

(Clapp, 1963; Fenno, 1966; Huitt, 1966; Jewell and Patterson, 1966; Manley, 1966; Matthews, 1960) but staff were often nowhere else to be seen in this literature.

In the 1970s, while the descriptive studies continued, the literature took a turn toward more systematic analyses of who the staff were and what they did, as well as asking normative questions about the impact of staffing on the legislature and the policy process. It was in the 1970s that staff began to be examined functionally and were included as important institutional actors. When the congressional literature more substantively began to turn its focus on the individuals who populated the institution in the 1960s and 1970s, studies began to compare staff across different sub-units of Congress, but they retained an almost exclusive focus on committee staff (Fox and Hammond, 1977, Patterson, 1970, Hammond, 1984). Saloma (1969) was the only researcher to study the allocation of personal staff time, while all other studies chose to focus on the incumbents' time or the aggregation of other resources and functions. Hammond found the literature after the 1970s to be marked by increasingly diverse types of research. Furthermore, there was a growing recognition of the impact that staff were having on the institution and the overall policy process. She noted "theory building is progressing on the role and functions of staff, the impact of staff on legislatures and policy making, and the effects of legislators and of legislatures on staff" (Hammond, 1984, p.302).

#### Staff as an important legislative tool

By the late 1970s, there were a number of works that detailed the growing importance of staff in Congress and it was recognized that that importance was not limited to reactive casework performed in Washington and in the district offices (see especially Malbin 1977, 1981, 1980). For example, Fox and Hammond (1977) found that

committee staff in Congress spent more time in committee hearings, writing speeches, and working with other staff or interest groups than they did researching information or responding to inquiries. The literature began to develop the “recognition that staff does more than process information or assist constituents” (Hammond, 1984, p.277). In fact Malbin’s work expressed a concern that “unelected Representatives” were having an undue impact on the legislative process through their access and control of legislative committees.

In short, congressional staff began to be considered as a variable in the process for the first time during the 1970s. Hammond notes that by 1984 there was a “subtle but important shift in research direction...toward analysis of factors affecting variation in staff work and influence and toward assessment and measurement of staff influence and impact” (p.304). Staff were recognized by Patterson (1970) and Price (1971, 1972) who found that staff in committees, if not having influence, had the potential to impact policy outcomes because of their number, control and proximity to the legislative process and principals. Ornstein (1975) was one of the first to focus on the patterns of staff allocation. He found that young, northern, liberal incumbents tended to be more “active” and that consequently translated into the fact that they had larger and more active staff involved in their legislative efforts. Wolman and Wolman’s (1977) research was driven by the assumption that staff had an impact on senators’ attitudes and legislative positions. Fox and Hammond (1977) found that committees with significantly larger staff were considerably more active in their pursuing their agendas while the individual representatives and senators had become more reliant on their staff for voting cues than had their predecessors. Finally, Fenno (1978) and Cavanaugh (1981) included

Congressional staff as a variable in explaining legislative outcomes. By the time that Hammond wrote her first literature review (1984), congressional staff were being treated as either an independent, dependent or intervening variables, and were finally part of the equation. Unfortunately, most of the studies were done in aggregate form “at the state level” (Hammond, 1984, p.299) and did not seek to examine individual variations and idiosyncracies. Ironically, just as there began to be an investigation of staff and their impact on the process, some offered that staff might have a detrimental impact on the democratic process. Malbin’s work suggests too much authority had been devolved to staff at the beginning, middle, and end of the legislative process to initiate legislation and to negotiate policy and compromises in the name of their employers. Malbin believes that staff had contributed to the isolation and distance that individual legislators had come to feel for each other. Given the incredible growth in the number of staff assigned to the districts, the same might also be said about district staff and their interactions with constituents.

#### Staff are increasingly considered as part of an enterprise

As was mentioned above, by the late 1970s the literature began a more thorough examination of Washington staff and what roles or jobs they performed. For example, Hammond (1975) provided very insightful demographic data on who the Washington staff were, where they come from, etc. Because of the constituency orientation discussed earlier in this review, some scholars have come to refer to modern incumbents as “entrepreneurs”, or the operators of “small business/member enterprises” because of the many activities that staffers perform in the name of the incumbent (Loomis, 1979; Salisbury and Shepsle, 1981). The “enterprise” is defined as including the individual

legislator, the committee and personal staff employed by the legislator, as well as the incumbent's former staffers and intimate advisers (Salisbury and Shepsle, 1981).<sup>10</sup> While the numbers and utilization of committee staff have been more constant over the past century, the numbers and roles of personal staff have increased much more dramatically.

By the late 1980s the literature had a fairly well established acceptance of congressional staff as part of the overall congressional "enterprise." But it has only been more recently that the literature has accepted staff as a "political aspect" of Congress and begun to deal with them as individual actors of importance. The growing number of articles focusing on the individual congressional staff member as a candidate is witness to the increased understanding of staff as a political variable/factor.<sup>11</sup> However, the focus of the recent literature takes an overwhelmingly aggregate look "primarily on the institution and its staff" (Hammond, 1984, p.287). Staff then, as a collection of individual political actors are woefully under-examined in the literature. Questions such as: who they are, what they do, and what are their motivations are left unanswered. This lack of attention seems not only unwarranted but it also misses the importance of a large portion of the legislative institution. The fact that staff are running for office in greater numbers has seemingly stirred the interest of more research. Do staff only become suitable topics for research and analysis once they announce their candidacies for office?

In the aftermath of Fenno's focus on the goals, motivations and resources of incumbents, Loomis (1979) was a lonely voice including a focus on the district staff as part of what he called the incumbent's "small business." In order that incumbents could

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<sup>10</sup> I will argue throughout this dissertation that the literature's definition of the "enterprise" is too limited. District staff are rarely included and the elite constituents with whom staff and incumbents interact are almost never discussed.

<sup>11</sup> See Hernnson (1994) for an excellent review of this literature.

fulfill the multiple goals of policy-making, increased influence (in Washington) and reelection, the literature usually assumed that incumbents did things in aggregate (e.g. increase their budgets) to make themselves more electorally secure so that they could concentrate on the more important goals. Loomis was the only scholar to detail how these allocations of resources included the district staff.

The literature on congressional staff has some solid infrastructure, but as Susan Webb Hammond (1996, p.571) notes, staff are still viewed as a “subset of the enterprise” that remains a “useful avenue for future research” but few have pursued the task. What is lacking is research that examines the political nature of staff and the tasks that they perform. Hammond notes that researchers “accept the political aspect of staffing” (1984, p.278) but the only study that truly looks at “political” behavior of district staff was Macartney’s (1975, 1982) dissertation based on municipal, county, state and federal legislative offices in Los Angeles county. While Hammond calls Macartney a “unique and valuable” contribution, she fails to uncover any other explicitly political examinations of legislative staff in the district.

Literature retains a focus on Washington staff while overlooking district

The above review shows that the Washington-based staffers have not been overlooked by academic research. Hammond (1984) divided the literature on legislative staff into 5 areas: 1) individual aide, 2) legislative sub-units, 3) the institution within which staff work, 4) and 5) legislative information needs and output. These inquiries were all advanced during the 1970s and 1980s but they failed to address the district staff. Her updated review from 1996 added no further contribution for the district other than the fact that Washington staffers were returning there to run for office.

Not only do we need to look at staff as an important political sub-unit of the legislature, but we also need to look at another sub-unit of staff itself; the district staff. Perhaps the absence of research on district staff can be explained by three factors: 1) they are of seemingly less interest or aggregate importance in the process because they do not have a finished product such as legislation that makes them easy to examine or compare; 2) they are less compelling objects of study because they do not seem to have interesting output (or as I will argue later, that perhaps they do have important output with regard to elites, but that this output is harder to measure); and 3) that they are harder to study because they are dispersed in 435 districts across the country. While academic research has not addressed the topic of district staff, the numbers of staff allocated to the district and the continued perceptions of vulnerability on the part of the incumbents more than justify the need for research into the political roles and impact of Congressional district staff.

Much of the literature on the relevance of staff emphasizes the importance of Washington-based staff and ignores the contributions of district staff. This is problematic because district staffers comprise over 40% of all personal staff and the typologies and descriptions that are based on Washington staff do not translate well to the district. There are other problems that can be identified in looking at some of the seminal articles on congressional staff. Hammond (1975) provides a thorough demographic analysis of Washington staff but not district staff. She even mentions the “district ties” of Washington staffers. Are district staffers any less worthy of demographic analysis? And might not we want to know from where the staff came (other political offices, campaigns or first time in government)? Fox and Hammond’s (1977) typology of staff is thorough



but does not translate well to the district staff, nor was it designed with them in mind. Burks and Cole (1978) found the role orientation of Washington staff to be either “professional” or “entrepreneurial”. One might also inquire about the role orientations of district staff. Cavanaugh (1979) provides a focus on Washington staff to show the “leeway” they buy for members of Congress, without mention of how the district staff members perform the exact same function. Schiff and Smith (1983) show that of three cohorts (pre 60, 60-67 and 68-78) that the most recent cohort, with its larger staff allows members to pursue reelection and policy goals at the same time. Again, this work has a focus on Washington staff with only a marginal reference to district staff in aggregate. Finally, Hammond (1984) suggests that comparisons across governmental institutions and the private sector have “not been done and would be useful.” Perhaps it would be more appropriate to start with a simple intra-institutional comparison of staff members before such extravagant comparative exercises are undertaken. These examples from the literature show that a need for further research on district staff remains.

Hammond (1981) suggested that the distribution of staff within the legislature is largely determined by the idiosyncratic nature of each representative and his or her ties to the district. This was a good suggestion that might be more systematically examined so that we can understand that allocation patterns and consequences of district staff. Macartney (1975) echoed Tip O’Neill’s fundamental dictum about politics as a local event in stating that the “Capitol is by no means the only arena” of investigation and that an examination of district staff is necessary for a complete understanding of congressional politics. I would conclude this review by praising Macartney’s path-breaking look at political staff from Los Angeles County. There are four main

contributions of his dissertation that are embraced and expanded upon in this dissertation. First, he identified fourteen functions performed by staff ranging from simple representation to oversight of other branches of government. Second, rejecting the literature's assumption that all district staff look and act the same, he found that they are different, look different, are set up differently and have different functions. Third, he very briefly recognizes the political impact that staff might have on their incumbents. Finally, he shows that staff can assist constituents in a variety of ways, not simply by completing casework. Yet, further work remains to be done after Macartney's analysis. While the above four contributions were path-breaking, they were based on one extremely unique county, compared across different levels of government, and his identification of the important political values of district staff was exceedingly brief. For example, his discussions of the fourteen functions were often limited to not much more than a single page of analysis each. Furthermore, he replaced the bias of the literature that asked questions simply of the incumbent, with a simple focus on the senior staff member in each office. Chapters Three through Five will take a much deeper look at some of the more important political functions performed by district staff, as well as comparing staff from different regions. It also was based on interviews with all staff members in these case studies as well as some of the constituent with whom they've interacted. In sum, it will more fully place district staff in the context of their actual functions and motivations than has any previous research.

### Conclusion

District staff are vital tools for incumbent members of the United State House of Representatives. While incumbents utilize them in a variety of fashions, this dissertation

will show that that all staff perform important representational tasks and that some offices are extremely proactive in representing the absent incumbent. Some of the more political behaviors of these proactive staff bias the representation of constituents and hinder the process of free, fair and open elections.

This chapter detailed how incumbent's attitudes towards elections and resources changed during the 1960s and consequently how these new resources, with staff in particular, began to evolve into a more significant element of the Congressional institution. More specifically, this chapter demonstrated how incumbents who continued to feel a sense of electoral vulnerability increased the resources at their disposal to serve their constituents and build their odds of being re-elected. The academic literature has only recently begun to appreciate the political value of legislative staff with district staffers remaining largely unstudied.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Research Methods: The Value of Context**

Chapter One placed congressional district staff in their appropriate context. They are a resource utilized by incumbents to serve the needs of constituents in their interactions with the government. Additionally, district staff members have come to serve the electoral needs of incumbents by performing the basic representational functions and some more political behaviors as well. Yet, the discipline knows very little about legislative staff in general, and district staff in particular. The observations of this dissertation make a compelling case for further study of district staff and the functions they perform. This chapter will explain the methodology that was utilized in this study of congressional district staff. It will also provide a justification for a district-based, in-depth contextual examination as the best approach to study and understand these staff and the impact that they have in the re-election of incumbent members of the United States House of Representatives.

#### **Research Methods**

##### **Theory-Building Dissertation**

This is a theory-building dissertation built on a number of in-depth, contextual case studies. Chapter Three will present findings on who staff members are, what they do, and how incumbents utilize them. In Chapters Five and Six I will utilize the data I've collected to propose a theory of how interaction between incumbents, staff and elite constituents impacts Congressional election outcomes. Chapters Four, Five and Six will expand on the in-depth contextual examination to probe incumbents' home activities so

that I might propose variables that might better explain incumbent behavior and motivations and further clarify the high reelection rates of incumbent members of the House of Representatives. This dissertation leaves the door open for researchers in other districts to consider this new variable as they examine incumbent advantage.

While I did not have the resources to conduct a systematic testing of the hypotheses presented here, I will offer a theory that is based on the literature, my observations, interviews, and a pinch of guesswork. This dissertation is designed to provide insights into some of the key questions raised by earlier academic studies of legislative staff. Meller (1953), Macartney (1975, 1982), Fox and Hammond (1975, 1977) and Hammond (1984, 1996) all lead in the direction of congressional district staff as important political actors. Apart from a brief glimpse by Macartney, they all seem to stop short of grasping who these staff members are and their political importance to the incumbents. As a result of my research, I will offer a theory that understands the roles and motivations of the staff members as individual political actors and how they contribute to incumbency advantage. I feel that the literature's comprehension of incumbency advantage has become somewhat stale over the past decade and that some conjecturing about new theories and variables is called for. Lofland and Lofland argue that conjecture plays "an important and indispensable role in the social sciences" for three reasons. They suggest that: 1) quantitative theorists are often "distant from the phenomena...and variables they study", 2) that researchers don't understand the participant's own "causal theories" and that 3) "elaborate quantitative research may only contribute small increments of precision to a thorough qualitative study" (1984, pp 103-104). Throughout this chapter one will see

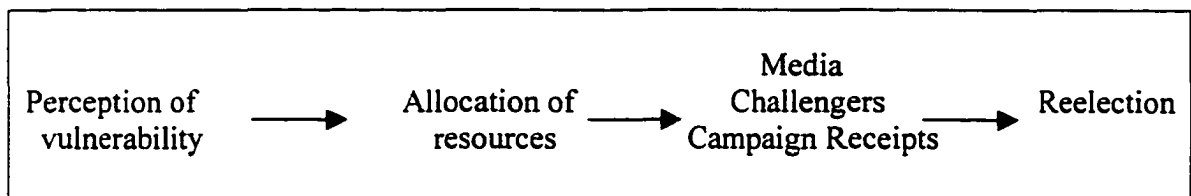
evidence of how each of these three instances are eminently demonstrated in the area of congressional district staff, elite constituents and election outcomes.

As I intentionally started writing this dissertation with the task of gaining an understanding of what congressional district staff did, it was important that I have a flexible research design and not be tied to a deterministic theory and a specific set of variables from the outset. In that sense, a theory-building/hypothesis-creating research design allowed me the appropriate measure of research flexibility. As opposed to more descriptive or explanatory designs, exploratory research requires “flexibility more than precision” and prefers designs that “need produce only an opportunity to observe the phenomena in question” (Manheim and Rich, 1991, p.73). This approach was echoed by Fenno’s call to “find it in the field.” This is how Fenno described the formulation of his theory for “Home Style”:

(You must) become interested in some observable set of activities and then decide to go have a look at them...only after a prolonged unstructured soaking is the problem formulated. Home style didn’t occur until I’d taken quite a few trips...Participant-Observation (P/O) seems less likely to be used to test an existing hypothesis than to formulate hypotheses for testing by others or to uncover some relationship that strikes others as worth hypothesizing about testing. It may be an appropriate method, however, at any stage of a research endeavor where there is a felt need for a fresh line of thought. (1990, p.57)

What I “found in the field” was that the discipline had very little understanding about what legislative staff did in the “field.” The aggregate studies of perquisite utilization and casework service were all predicated on a faulty assumption that every district office looked alike and did the same things. Furthermore, the literature failed to appreciate any political or electoral value that district staff might have beyond their ability to complete casework requests. After spending time observing incumbents and staff at work, I first

focused simply on providing a “fresh line of thought” about legislative staffers: who they were and what they did. After “prolonged soaking” it became apparent that the interactions between incumbents, staff and elite constituents would provide a more important “fresh line of thought” about the act of representation and how incumbents get re-elected. A simplified view of the literature’s understanding of incumbency advantage looks something like the following:



In Chapter Five, I will improve on this model by suggesting that district staff be included in the literature’s understanding of incumbency advantage. I was able to formulate some hypotheses about staff behavior and their electoral impact precisely because I was able to see the context of district staff. The observed context suggested that district staff had a role to play in each of the steps in the figure above. While not a determining factor in these elections, district staff are clearly involved at the “margins” and have an impact on the re-election prospects of incumbent House members.

### Contextually Based

Contextually based research goes by a number of different names and methods. It might be more commonly referred to as “qualitative social research”, “participant observation”, “intensive interviewing”, “field research” or some other combination of terms (Lofland and Lofland, 1984, p.1, 11, 47). What these methods commonly share is a “goal to collect the richest possible data...to earn intimate familiarity” with the subjects and their data is arrived at by “looking, listening, and asking.” Fenno most simply

depicts contextually based research with the label “soak and poke.” He calls it the “study of people in the natural setting...just hanging around...(it is a) blend of observation, interviewing and participation” (1990, p.55). Fenno sees “immersion as a qualitatively different experience.” These forms differ, however, in how their data should be collected from the context. Once the behavior is observed, there is a difference in method amongst qualitative researchers. At one end of a continuum might be anthropologists who suggest that one must simply observe the subject as an unknown individual, not interacting or seeking to gain an explanation of behavior. At the other end of the continuum would be the known observer who mainly collects data through observations and then questions the subjects for explanations of the meanings of their behavior. In the middle of this continuum might be P/O where an observer perhaps hopes to capture the essence of both these models: the anonymity of the anthropologist but also the explanations of the subjects.

While I would truly have preferred to do a P/O investigation of a number of different offices, I simply did not have the time or monetary resources to be able to complete such a project. Instead, I decided to gather my data based largely on intensive interviews that were complemented by as much observation as could be gathered in my four primary case studies. As I was persuaded that one could obtain better data by actually travelling to the subject’s environment, I decided to take that one step further and observe the subjects’ behavior in their roles. This contextually based research utilizes slightly more immersion into the case studies than interviewing subjects either in their Washington or their district offices. Rather, this model sought to “listen in context” to the responses that the subjects made in interviews and then apply those thoughts, rationalizations or



explanations to behaviors that I observed in much richer context over a period of time, longer than an interview. Lofland and Lofland suggest that the contextual researcher should “look and listen, watch and ask” (1984, p.13). The practical application of this advice was to spend several days observing the behavior of the incumbent and staff of each office as well as gaining an explanation from them in interviews.

What unites all of the qualitative approaches is a commitment to good science. As Lofland and Lofland describe, the qualitative researchers strive to be neither “descriptive ethnographers” nor “grounded theorists”. Rather, well-trained qualitative researchers will usually sit in the middle of these two stereotypes, seeking to “mix observation with theory and methods that matter” (1984, p151). It is the purpose of this dissertation to use the contextual data, which was collected in an identical manner from a number of different case studies, to build upon the discipline’s theory of incumbent’s political behavior.

### Justification

This dissertation holds that in-depth contextual examination is necessary to fully grasp the political significance of district staff; who they are, what they do and how that contributes to a more complete understanding of incumbency advantage. As was demonstrated in Chapter One, Congressional district staffers are an under-observed but numerically and politically significant group. Additionally, the literature’s grasp on incumbency advantage is based on aggregate evidence of district resources that are usually not observed. The few examples that are contextual in nature tend to be constrained to candidate-level decision-making (e.g. Fowler and McClure). This dissertation will add an important contextual shade to the substantial literature on

incumbency advantage. Chapter Four will slightly depart from the contextually based examination to offer some generalizations about staff behavior and motivations. Given that this is a theory-building dissertation, I did not want to preclude different avenues of analysis for future research.

#### Neither Journalists nor Political Science does context well

I would agree with Richard Fenno that contextual research is necessary because neither journalists nor political scientists tend to do it well. Journalism is condemned by most scholars for being a typically shallow depiction of anecdotal case studies that have an intellectual attention span of a drive-thru meal. In Fenno's own words: "journalists don't have the patience, training or interest to conduct a dialogue with political theorists" and that political science will "produce a better balanced, more useful understanding of politicians, more likely to focus on the political activity of politicians than journalists" (1990, pp.52-53, 127). The basic motivation of journalism is to focus on the curious, the anecdotal and the fresh and unique settings or environments.

Comparisons of what appear to be common or regular activities, like the allocation of district staff for example, do not often merit journalistic attention. My research turned up several journalistic accounts of legislative staff and as Fenno might have predicted, they tended to focus on the interesting anecdote about the power of an individual staff member or why a staff member was running for Congress. There were no sustained journalistic reviews of district staff. Contextually based research such as this dissertation is not journalism. It is not journalism precisely because political scientists do have the "patience, training and interest" to investigate the variables, environments and contexts of political situations and then engage theorists on the relevance and findings of their

research. This dissertation for example, delves into the contextual variation that exists between various congressional district offices and then offers, to that subsection of political science which studies congressional elections, a new variable to discuss and investigate.

While journalists do not often meet the scientific standards for contextual research, political science also tends to dismiss this research method. Fenno finds there to be a great “reluctance” on the part of political science to embrace the observation and discussion of politicians “up close” (1990, p.1). I would amend this to say that political scientists have grown more comfortable dealing with members of Congress “up close” in their Washington offices. A survey of the literature over the past few decades would turn up a substantial increase in the amount of research that is based on interviews conducted with incumbents in their offices. There has not been a corresponding increase in the amount of investigation of incumbents in their home districts, however. When the home district or the campaign come to be the subject of the study, the average political scientist is more comfortable relying on aggregate comparisons of spending patterns or allocations of resources complemented with an interview of the incumbent and/or campaign staff after the election is over. The contextual model holds that going home to the district allows one to get a “better feel” than interaction with members in their Washington offices (Fenno, 1990, p.92).

#### Gaps in the research

I received a “better feel” for congressional district staff and incumbents’ “home styles” when I completed an internship in a district office in 1993. Contextual researchers often suggest that “where you are” is the best place to conduct research

because you have built-in advantages of access, comprehension, interest and concern about the material. Lofland and Lofland refer to this as “opportunistic research” (1984, p.7). While I was doing the internship, I also began the requisite background reading on congressional staff for the dissertation prospectus. The absence of district staff in the literature, combined with my direct observation of the numerous political activities that were being performed by said staff convinced me that this was an eminently worthy topic for study. Given the substantial resources that incumbents spend on staff salaries, office rent and other district activities, it furthermore has a relevance to a wider social audience. It is my belief that the consequences of staff utilization and behavior have a direct impact on the reelection prospects for incumbent representatives and senators, which then leads to an obvious impact on the policies made by the legislature. When journalists and others debate elections, representation and incumbency advantage, one rarely hears reference to the thousands of individuals employed in district offices. Public awareness of district staff seems as limited in scope as the literatures’, except perhaps for the “elite” constituents and those constituents with federal problems who regularly interact with incumbents and their staff at home.

I was further inspired to do this dissertation by Susan Webb Hammond’s consistent mention of research “gaps” in her 1984 literature review on congressional staff. Following are some of the key observations in this seminal review article: “Further work on the consequences of the characteristics and patterns (of staff recruitment and communication patterns between offices) would be useful and could shed light on the policy process and on legislative change.” She went on to request work on ways to measure staff influence and power in a more “empirical” fashion (p.280). In writing

about the few individual levels studies that exist, she noted: “further research might be directed toward filling gaps in the data base” and the need to “gather data for longitudinal analysis...and assessing the impact of observed patterns and testing the generated hypotheses” (p.286). She did note that: “theory building is progressing on the role and functions of staff, the impact of staff on legislatures...and the effects of legislators on staff” (p.302). But, she goes on to mention that other important “gaps” exist where “few studies explicitly link the micro and the macro levels” and concluded that “there continues to be a need to map the terrain and to fill in data gaps” by building on earlier case studies and surveys (p.305). I would assert that my review in Chapter One combined with my internship experience clearly demonstrate the “gap” in the literature when it comes to the roles, functions and motivations of congressional district staff. Apart from a smattering of research about the “personal vote” and constituency service, there is a “gap” that exists around congressional district staff and how they interact with both their employers and their constituents, elite and otherwise.

### Research Methods

This dissertation examines congressional district staff and their interaction with incumbents and elite constituents from three different perspectives or sets of data. The primary research perspective was based on four in-depth case studies of the home district offices of incumbent members of the United States House of Representatives. The second research perspective was based on a more limited investigation of an additional nine district offices. The third and final perspective was that of the elite constituents in the four primary case studies.

### Sample/Case Selection

The four primary case studies were selected for two reasons: 1) because each case was different from the other three on a number of independent variables and 2) because they granted extremely open terms of access. As the research progressed, the four primary case studies were selected on the grounds that each of the incumbents and districts were different from those that preceded it. I started “where I was” and then began to go places that were different. The different variables in these cases most notably reflect the geography of the districts, the age and seniority of the incumbent, and the political behavior and vulnerability of the incumbent. Secondary case studies were further added where possible to enhance these variables or to explore new ones. This is precisely the method by which Fenno expanded his original pool of cases for Home Style from four cases in 1970 to eighteen by 1976. Before I detail the case studies, I will first discuss the research methods that were utilized.

### Some comments about the general process of research

#### Starting Out

The legislative internship sparked my interest in this dissertation topic. The first decision that I had to confront in my research methods was how to collect data. As was mentioned in the previous section, I decided to use a contextually based method of data collection where I would conduct intensive interviews with complementary observation where possible. My internship experience persuaded me that I would quickly be able to recognize the functions and importance of district staff behavior. While I was surprised not to find a wider degree of universality in staff behavior, I was able to modify my theory and variables quickly because I had a general understanding of staff and

incumbent motivations from the lengthy internship. Given that I had to conduct intensive interviews with the subjects and the individuals with whom they interacted, it meant that I had to be a “known” observer, subsequently rendering further limitations to my ability to do a true P/O study. Where I did my observations, however, I was very successful in remaining relatively “unknown” to the constituents.

This dissertation found inspiration in Richard Fenno’s path-breaking investigations of incumbent “home styles.” In an idyllic setting this dissertation would have more fully followed the rigors of his “Soak and Poke” or P/O style. However, limitations of time, money, and access meant that it would not be possible for me to complete the eighteen case studies (with return visits) that he accomplished over a seven-year period. What I was able to emulate from his research was the basic directive of how the “soaking and poking” gathered research. In his words, P/O is the “practice of gathering data by watching and talking to people in their natural habitats” (1990, p.6). I concurred with Fenno that interviewing and observing incumbents on their home turf put them in a more natural and relaxed situation to demonstrate and explain the complexities of representation. In Fenno’s own words, we know to a much greater extent “what they are like” when we “spend more time looking at individual members” (p. 99). Furthermore, I could immediately identify or understand their styles in ways that interviews in their DC offices simply could not allow me to capture. The same motivation applied then to the district staff. Questions that sought to uncover how they identify key constituents and how they proceeded to deal with those constituents could simply not be captured by surveys, even with open-ended questions. Alternatively, spending an afternoon with staff allowed them ample opportunity to express their thoughts, motivations and daily routines

that couldn't be expressed in a questionnaire. They drove me around the district, took me to meetings, or just went out for lunch. In each situation I was able to observe them in their work setting. On numerous occasions, questions that I asked staff about observed actions or statements created sudden realizations, perceptions, or explanations of things that they had never thought about. Therein lies the main value of contextual observation.

Interview and observe the incumbent

In each of the primary case studies, I spent at least one week in the district conducting the required interviews and observations. Of this time, at least one full day was spent in each of the primary cases with the incumbent member of Congress. During this day I gathered data in two fashions. At some point early in the data gathering in each district, I conducted an intensive interview with the incumbent. The purpose of this interview was to gain a comprehensive portrait of the incumbent's perceptions of his or her job, district and constituents. To complement the interview with the incumbent, I spent the other part of the full day in each case observing the incumbent interact with staff and constituents as a way to verify the portrait that I constructed in the interview. I attempted to gain as wide a profile of public observations as possible. In most cases these observations included large "town hall meetings", smaller meetings with constituents with individual problems or key supporters in the communities, visits to editors of local papers or radio/television studios, and occasionally with partisan supporters. In fact, Chapters Three and Four will reveal that the latter group (electoral supporters) tends to be well represented amongst the ranks of people with whom incumbents and their staff interact. This raises substantial representational questions that will be dealt with in Chapters Five and Six.



Interview and observe the staff

In addition to spending a day with the incumbent, I also interviewed and spent a full day with the ranking district staff member (RDSM). In most cases these individuals are referred to as the District Director (DD), the Administrative Assistant (AA), or the Chief-of-Staff (COS).<sup>1</sup> As the incumbents are frequently absent from their districts, this dissertation (and political reality) holds that RDSM's are extremely relevant elements of the political "enterprise" that is the modern member of Congress. As such, I felt that it was vital to collect data on at least three vital concepts when I was interviewing and observing staff leadership. First, what was the relationship that existed between the incumbent and the RDSM? Second, what kind of relationship existed between the RDSM and the other staff? In this case, as in the first question, I needed to understand the office hierarchy: who exercises power, how much, in what ways? I also needed to capture the hierarchy of power that existed between the Washington staff and the district. Third, just as I wanted to capture the incumbent's personality and perception, I also wanted to gain as comprehensive as possible an understanding of the RDSM's perception of the district. Did observations of the RDSMs tend to be similar to those of the incumbents? I will show in the next chapter that RDSMs quite often act as surrogates for the absent members, speaking at Rotary lunches, visiting with local elected officials, representing the incumbent at opening ceremonies, etc. I also observed district staff leadership interacting with local elites and partisan supporters. It was my experience that the interviews and observations of the RDSMs provided more substantial and insightful data than did the interviews with the incumbents. Or to be more precise, district staff

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<sup>1</sup> I did not encounter any offices where the RDSM did not have one of these three titles. As Chapter Three will detail, however, there is substantial variation in the roles and titles between offices.

leadership gave open, honest explanations without the “on the record” mentality that incumbents more often seemed to offer.

Once I had finished with the two principal actors in each office, I turned my attention to the remaining staff. These staff could be split into three categories. For the purposes of my research, staffers with “political” or “field” responsibilities outside of the office were more relevant than were the other district staff. The former staff usually carried the title “field representative” or “district representative.” As will be seen in Chapter Three, the functions of the people who hold these titles have substantial variation, and the distinction here is quite stereotypical. The second category of people in the district staff would be the press secretaries/media relations and schedulers. While these individuals do perform tasks of a “political” nature, they deal overwhelmingly with the same small group of elites and were less central to this dissertation. For example, the press secretaries and their relationships with district media have been well ploughed by the literature. Alternatively, while the schedulers also have interaction with district elite, they tend to deal overwhelmingly in the political minutiae of scheduling the incumbents’ time and events. The third and final category of staff is the caseworker and receptionist. As these individuals are entirely office-bound and deal, for the most part, with individuals not considered “elite” constituents, they are not the focus of this dissertation. I would also note that this is the category of staff for which there is the least amount of variation between offices. There is a simple need to help constituents and all incumbents I observed allocated this final category of staff to deal with those requests.

I allocated interview time for each of the three categories of staffers in the descending order of importance as they were listed. In the primary cases, at a minimum,

I interviewed every full-time member of the district staff for at least twenty minutes. For the first category of staffers, the “field representatives”, I additionally spent at least a morning or an afternoon observing their routines and interactions. I found the field representatives to be much more frank in their discussions of their employers and the political environments that surrounded them than most other staff. What some field representatives lacked in the quality of their interaction with truly “elite” constituents, they made up for by having lower thresholds of reservation in talking about their employers, their job roles, and the constituents they interacted with. I did not conduct extra interview time with the other two categories of staff. Some might suggest that this is unfortunate in that there was less focus on media and schedulers. My remarks above suggest that I am not missing any data by focusing on other staff. I also do not feel that I compromised more than a minor amount of data by quickly dealing with caseworkers.

#### Interviewing elites

Finally, I interviewed at least twenty “elite” constituents in each of the primary case study districts. These constituents were spread out across various cities reflecting the demography of the district. Some of these elites were people that I actually observed interacting with incumbents and their staff, others were interviewed based on reference from others or previous research I had compiled. Still others were encountered on drop-by visits. I will provide more information on the elite interviews later in this chapter.

#### Advance work

Prior to traveling to each case study, I undertook some basic research about the incumbents and their districts. Most useful was the profile provided by Congressional Quarterly’s [Almanac of American Politics](#). This resource provided a profile of each

district and its incumbent. Because of its concise and standardized depiction of districts, the Almanac provided me with conveniently comparable descriptions for quickly selecting and learning about my case studies. For further research on the districts, I examined CQ's Congressional Districts in the 1990s, which is basically an extension of the political, demographic and economic descriptions of each district. Next, I turned to the Federal Election Commission's (FEC) website, and a related spin-off ([www.trav.com](http://www.trav.com)) to gain profiles of the incumbents', as well as their opponents', fund-raising situations. This resource provided a quick understanding of the electoral environment of each incumbent for the current and previous campaigns. Additionally, these resources provide the names of donors who had given the candidates and their opponents more than \$200 in a calendar year. I would suggest that these websites are an underutilized tool for future research on the political behavior of elites. Finally, I did searches on website engines and in local newspaper indexes where possible to get recent clips on the incumbents and their political environments.

#### Multiple trips

For three of the four primary cases (A,C and D), I undertook numerous trips spread out over time. These trips were not dispersed in a manner adequate to come to longitudinal conclusions about how an incumbent's staff and style might change over the duration of a career. What the staggered trips did provide, however, was some level of control over whatever political events might have been occurring at one given point of observation. Staggering the trip times also allowed me to observe the offices at different points in the electoral cycle. While most scholars and journalists write of a "permanent campaign", I observed there to be clearly different states of "permanence" during the

two-year session of congress. For example, visiting during a “district work period” where the incumbent is at home is a far different experience than observing a typical weekend visit. Alternatively, one finds very different things going on in most offices when you compare two months and twelve months before the election. I would recommend repeat visits if anyone chose to replicate this study in order that they might check the veracity of their data.

#### Anonymity bargain

Access is a highly sensitive matter and extremely important to this research design and those of other political scientists to follow.<sup>2</sup> As Fenno noted, journalists have a different “bargain” with politicians in that they are able to attain greater access to politicians in return for highly valuable media coverage. In short, politicians need journalists. They do not need political scientists for anything other than satisfaction of ego or a scholastic desire to further academic research.<sup>3</sup> This fact may serve as a deterrent to many researchers even attempting to gain access to elected officials. The patient and persistent researcher can, in fact, get through this veil of secrecy, cynicism and mistrust but he or she must be mindful of those who follow. I was respectful of offices that did cooperate by promising to respect their anonymity and confidentiality and by not prying information about offices that decided not to participate in my study. As Fenno notes, a researcher bears the burden of protecting access for those graduate students and faculty that will follow; “getting, keeping, and preserving access for others

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<sup>2</sup> The findings and data from this dissertation pose little or no threat to anyone that I interviewed or observed. There was no data collected about any illegal or unethical behavior. Furthermore, I completed the necessary human subject questionnaire with the University of Oklahoma.

<sup>3</sup> In a true P/O study the subjects might be able to “get something” from the researcher in the sense that they are performing the same tasks as the subjects (e.g. Fenno working on the campaign by stuffing envelopes), but in the case of this research it would have been impossible for me to provide a trade-off for their time.

is the central worry of participant-observation” (1990, p.22). Leaving an incumbent or RDSM with a bad taste for academics can have an impact for years to come.

In my interviews and observations with all levels of actors, I emphasized the anonymity and confidentiality of their actions and comments. In return for this anonymity, as well as what I perceived to be an increase in many staff and elite’s sense of self-worth or political importance, I was able to attain an enhanced level of access and inside observations, complaints, and reactions from these actors. This is much the same “bargain” that Fenno struck with incumbent politicians. In most cases it seemed that the staffers had rarely, if ever, entertained inquiries about their jobs and the political significance of their actions. Spector (1980) actually found there to be a converse with public officials. He found that anonymity impeded access to quality data from public officials. While there may be something to this finding, I do not think it is logically the same with district staff, as they are not truly “public officials” and know that their remarks to me were not being quoted in the next day’s newspaper. I tend to disagree with Spector in that public officials seemed to have a natural skepticism toward academics and that anonymity was not perceived to be a problem. None of the incumbents were overtly anxious about the publication of my dissertation.

#### Access to offices

I utilized four suggestions from Lofland and Lofland to gain and maintain access to the primary and secondary case studies (1984, pp25-27). First, they suggest that the researcher use any connections or “preexisting relations of trust” to obtain access to a research setting. Second, the researcher should provide brief, straightforward accounts of the research and not mislead the subjects. Third, the researcher should demonstrate a

competent level of knowledge and interest in the subject. And finally, the researcher should act courteously and professionally.

### Connections

As was mentioned earlier, it is often useful to “start where you are.” Not only does a researcher have the advantage of greater levels of interest, even more importantly the researcher has heightened levels of access to situations where he/she has familiarity with the subjects. My initial research subject was the office in which I previously completed the internship and his successor in that district. Hence, I was able to use “preexisting relations of trust” to gain access to my early case studies.

### Provide account

Given that I could not do internships in all of my case studies, it was unrealistic to expect access being so easily attained. Therefore, I had to procure access in some other manner. Fenno (1990, p.61) got access to his case studies either through personal association with congressional incumbents and staffers or through “cold turkey letters” to the offices. Given that I was a relatively unknown graduate student with few contacts on Capitol Hill, I deduced that a more informal method would be required to procure access. What I might refer to as the drop-by method entailed a phone call and letter being sent to the office shortly before I arrived there in person to meet with the RDSM. Several weeks in advance of my visit to the district, I called each office to obtain the name of the RDSM, or relevant individual in charge of the district operation, and then mailed a letter to that individual. This letter was mailed on University stationary and provided a very general explanation of my research topic. Each letter was accompanied with a note from

my dissertation committee chairman, confirming my identity, the utility of my project, and the confidentiality that accompanied the research.

Not being a prominent tenured faculty member with numerous contacts in universities and on Capitol Hill meant that I would likely have not had the same success or response rate as Fenno. Nor did I have the resources that Fenno had, seeing my meager salary and research stipend. On the other hand, being a graduate student with fewer time constraints, I had the capacity to be more aggressive and industrious in my travels. It seemed to me that “dropping by” the offices after sending the initial letter gave me a twofold benefit over a “cold turkey letter”: 1) the offices could see me. The initial suspicions of the staffers appeared to be eased in most cases and I think there is a greater assessment of trust and honesty when you can actually see an individual making a request. And 2) my presence in their office likely made it harder for them to refuse my request. In fact, this drop-by method was successful in four out of six attempts where I was hoping to gain complete access. In other cases where the offices were less willing to grant access, or where distance and time limited my ability to focus on that incumbent, I settled on making those offices into secondary case studies. When the offices were unsure of my request or blatantly uncooperative, I was minimally able, in all but one case, of at least getting an interview with the RDSM to obtain enough information to utilize them as a background case. In most cases, the drop-bys were scheduled in geographic proximity to each other so that I could maximize my research time and resources. As was just mentioned, in every case except one drop-by, I was able to at least obtain an interview with the RDSM. In most cases it took several days to accomplish the interviews and observations of the staff working in the offices. I then spent the remainder



of the week conducting the elite interviews. In some settings, this workload was split over repeat visits.

The drop-by method also seems to be advantageous over Fenno's means of procuring access in that the district staffers are in a known place at a known time. Incumbent members of Congress have extremely fluid schedules. Meetings can quite often be cancelled, delayed or rescheduled. One might also make the claim that the incumbents' time is "more valuable" and that having an academic trailing them around is an annoyance at best. In this sense, the activities and personalities of district staff are less sensitive for the most part. To put it more frankly, they were less nervous about having me around. Actually, the converse was often the case, district staff were normally resigned to anonymity and the presence of a researcher who was spending a substantial portion of time observing their "daily routine" was explained to me as being "vindicating", "worthwhile" or "just plain interesting."

Because of the nature of the daily routines of the average district staff member it was quite possible for me to insert myself into virtually any day they were at work without 1) inconveniencing them or 2) missing out on important data. On the first point, I do not perceive that my drop-by visits were an inconvenience in that the my "interviews" could be conducted on the fly, with questions coming in the car or over lunch or a drink at the end of the day. For the most part, I simply wanted to see them in action and then debrief their perceptions at the end of an encounter or a time period spent with them. The second point refers to the random nature of my interactions with staff. Unlike Fenno, whose study was largely based on the quite standard weekend visit of the incumbent, my study subject has a much longer working week, leaving open the possibility that I would not

capture the entirety of staff jobs.<sup>4</sup> I believe that the variation in staff work weeks were captured by: 1) spending substantial amounts of time with each field staffer (an average of over ½ day in each case); 2) frequently asking them to reflect and compare their days and the experiences to what I had observed in my time with them; and 3) that field staff tend to perform a wide representation of their weekly tasks on most given days.

Gaining access to elite constituents was accomplished in a similar fashion. I would usually call a list of elite constituents that I had assembled from my research and the recommendations of staff and other constituents. I would make these calls a day or two prior to my visit and explain that I needed to interview “elite constituents” about their interactions with congressional incumbents and their staff. I have a sense that this introduction and/or the fact that they were “recommended” by another elite constituent, often played to the egos of local journalists, lawyers, and executives, and procured me access in virtually every case.

I also combined the first and second suggestions to increase the possibility of cooperation and access. This technique was to obtain letters of recommendation from several of my early case studies for use in the offices to follow. I was able to obtain favorable letters from three offices of differing political persuasions that assured potential subjects of my confidentiality and anonymity and that my studies had posed no inconveniences to their daily routines. These RDSMs also volunteered to be listed as “references” had anyone want to call to confirm these letters. In several situations, having a letter from an office of a fellow partisan granted a sense of ease, and greater access. Overall, however, it was not difficult to move back and forth between

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<sup>4</sup> I also note that my research was a more accurate reflection of what staff do than was Fenno’s portrait of incumbents’ home styles, as his research was heavily based on several weekend trips in the fall of election

Democratic and Republican offices. Appearing competent and presenting background material and references were almost universally successful in assuring the offices of my legitimate academic background.

Be competent and courteous

The third and fourth issues were more elements of style than access. Lofland and Lofland (1984) suggest that when dealing with public figures, researchers should approach the subject as neither “socially acceptable incompetents” nor as know-it-alls that anticipate everything a subject states. Rather, access will be best attained and preserved when the researcher acts as something of a “student” with a competent level of background in the subject matter, but interested in getting the complete perspective from the subject “teacher.” I found this to be a useful suggestion in dealing with all my subjects, from incumbents to staff and local elites. The final suggestion, to be courteous and professional, needs little comment. As noted above, I called and wrote in advance of my visits, was respectful of decisions to decline participation, dressed appropriately, and gave the subjects any space or anonymity that they requested.

### Feasibility

When preparing my prospectus, I concluded that this dissertation was both strategically and tactically feasible. Because I initially chose to pursue a theory-building dissertation with a limited set of case studies, I deduced that my findings and proposals were highly achievable and realistic at the strategic level. If my purpose were to offer more substantial and specific conclusions about district staff and their role in American politics, I would have had to wrestle more heavily with the issue of feasibility.

Tactically, I found this dissertation to be a highly feasible project given the preceding

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years.

discussion of access to offices and staff. Furthermore, my research method was much more time and cost flexible than Fenno's. I knew that if I was unable to obtain access after one morning or afternoon I departed that district and pushed into the next district on that same day. As mentioned above, three of my four primary cases involved return visits, as did a number of the secondary cases. When setting up appointments for my initial drop-bys, I clustered offices in close geographic proximity into a one-week schedule to maximize my efficiency of data gathering. In this sense, I knew that it would be feasible to access the four (and nine) cases that I needed to observe. Finally, I should note the limitations of being a graduate student. As Fenno observed, younger researchers have lesser problems with physical rigors than with financial rigors of field research. This dissertation was an expensive proposition made cheaper by the couches of friends and family and the thousands of miles logged on my ever-dependable Ford Escort.

#### Data collection

My data was collected in two diverse forms: interviews and observations. The majority of the data came from interviews with incumbents, staff and constituents. In each of the primary case studies, I conducted a roughly one-hour interview the incumbent, at least another one-hour interview with the RDSM, widely variant interviews with the rest of the staff (ranging in time from fifteen minutes with non-essential staff to multiple interviews exceeding three hours with other staff), and roughly twenty elite interviews per district. Following Lofland and Lofland's advice, I completed roughly twenty interviews per district in a sacrifice of "breadth for depth" (1984, p.62). The elite interviews, like the staff interviews, ranged from the uninterested fifteen-minute annoyance to the in-depth and engaging ninety-minute conversation. The interview data

was complemented by observations of the incumbents and staff interacting with each other as well as with elite constituents. In each of the primary cases, I observed the incumbent interacting with staff and constituents for at least one full day. In the case of three incumbents (A, C and D) I had substantially more observations spread out over longer periods of time. I additionally spent roughly one full day with the RDSM doing the interview and the observations. For the remaining “field” staff, my interviews and observations were of varying lengths, ranging from an hour to over a day in total. As mentioned earlier, I only conducted brief interviews (in most cases twenty minutes) with the district staff members who did not have “field” responsibilities. In the secondary case studies, I gathered the data exclusively through interviews.<sup>5</sup> While I would have liked to include observational data to improve the accuracy of my data in the secondary case studies, I simply did not have either the time or the financial resources to be able to interview the additional incumbents, staff and elites in nine more districts. In short, I made the decision of whom to interview and observe based on cost and access.

## Interviews

I utilized intensive or unscheduled interviews because of their flexibility in gathering rich data. As opposed to a standard interview or questionnaire, unscheduled interviews have a “general objective with no predetermined set of questions” (Manheim and Rich, 1991, p.140). The unscheduled interview is meant to be more free ranging and less structured than the standard interview. Moreover, unscheduled interviews are highly appropriate for theory-building research designs as they are more interested in discovering facts and patterns than in measuring pre-selected phenomena. According to

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<sup>5</sup> Secondary case studies were done by interview with the exception of one case study (E). I gained a substantial amount of data through observation in that office while I was completing my internship.

Lofland and Lofland, the intensive or unscheduled interview is a “guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis...(it) seeks to discover the informants experience of a particular topic or situation...where the scheduled interview seeks frequency (of a behavior/topic)... the unscheduled seeks to find out what kinds of things exist in the first place” (1984, p.12). I approached each interview with an interest in understanding that subject’s perceptions of politics, representation and the purpose of their interactions. If the subject was amenable, my goal in each interview was to achieve a sort of relaxed and free-flowing conversation that would allow them to comprehend and explain their “experience”. Lofland and Lofland refer to this goal as a “guided conversation” where the researcher has an “interview guide” to lead the questions (p.59). Invariably, I found that the relaxed conversation allowed me to put the subject at ease and obtain richer and more plentiful data than I would have been able to obtain utilizing standardized questionnaires.

This is not to imply that unscheduled interviews collect data based on random strings of thoughts, anecdotes, and observations. Rather, there were many common themes in the interviews and questions that I posed. After a thorough reading of the literature and a semester spent interning in my initial case study, I had established what I had thought to be a rather comprehensive set of topics and questions that was to serve as the foundation for each interview. When I set out on my first few case studies I found that my initial questions and topics were somewhat predetermined and/or biased by my first case study. But since my initial research design was merely to examine the variation in staff activities and allocation, I simply added a few questions or noted new observations that I felt enhanced the concepts under study, or proved to be more important elements of theories

that would need to be developed in future research. I also felt that with each additional case study that I became more skilled in making observations and developing a more refined theory and set of questions. Furthermore, as the list of “questions” was created and expanded, I made a point of regularly refreshing the questions in my mind to ensure that I was utilizing and comparing the same questions and observations from one office to the next.<sup>6</sup> Each interview revolved around basic inquisitions about the nature of the incumbent, politics and interaction. There were a number of questions that were asked in virtually every interview. These basic questions were mostly neutrally worded, open-ended questions that 1) tested the respondent’s level of understanding and interaction with the incumbents and/or the elite constituents and 2) sought to evaluate their normative perceptions of those same individuals. For example, the data-gathering portion of nearly every interview with elite constituents began with me asking the interviewee to “discuss the nature of the interaction that you have had with Representative X.” Starting with simple but very broad open-ended questions allowed me to deduce the interviewee’s ability to garner a passing grade on the two ‘tests’ just mentioned.

I utilized several other interview techniques suggested by Lofland and Lofland (1984, pp.55-61). I began each interview with an introduction of myself, the research topic and by giving the subject assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. I then asked the subject a basic question to deduce their interaction with the constituent, but then I sought to “build rapport” by asking them more basic questions about the nature of the political environment and their job before proceeding to more crucial questions about the

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<sup>6</sup> See the Appendix for an abbreviated listing of some of the questions and topics that I pursued in each “guided conversation.”

incumbent's staff and reelection efforts and whether they were supporters of the incumbent. As noted above, each interview was conducted more as a conversation based on several large thematic avenues that I sought to discuss with the subject. I also utilized probing questions so that the subjects might extend on topics that they only slightly mentioned or avoided altogether in my basic questions.

The quality and quantity of data varied with each interview. For every successful hour-long interview data rich in answers to questions, anecdotes and sudden realizations, there were several painfully short interviews in which staff or constituents were either uninterested or unfamiliar with the subject matter I asked of them. This is not to say that brief interviews were always unproductive. Instead, they occasionally acted to (dis)confirm statements of other staff or constituents about the levels of service and interaction that were carried out. Given that I interviewed similar types of people in each district, I felt that if a majority of the twenty plus elite interviews that I conducted were consistently brief and unflattering, that there was probably a rather passive office/incumbent/staff in that district. The results were usually in the opposite direction, however, with constituents seeking to provide some form of cover for the incumbents even if they didn't have more than a few minutes of data worth discussing.

### Observations

The research based on observations of the incumbent, staff, and elite interactions was much different in style. Anthropologists would probably not categorize Fenno's several day drop-by as actual participant-observation (P/O) for the important reason that one cannot truly obtain an understanding of a culture with only several days of observation. Furthermore, anthropologists would probably not consider Fenno's efforts to be truly



“participant” in nature. On the other hand, Fenno might argue that limited, but still personal and direct, observation is more likely to preserve the researcher’s ability to maintain reliable, unbiased data. This dissertation more fully mimicked Fenno’s “soaking and poking” research design than true P/O research. The difference between my observations and Fenno’s, however, is that mine were of much shorter duration and were spread out over a number of staff in each district office. The drawback of my design compared to Fenno’s was that I was not able to spend as much time as he did with each individual incumbent. The main purpose of this dissertation was not, however, to obtain lengthy portraits of the individual incumbents’ personalities and perceptions. Rather, my goal was to look at staff collectively and the variation that exists in their jobs and political responsibilities. Consequently, I made a sacrifice of “depth for breadth” in focusing on a group of staff. Given the discussion above, it was unlikely that an unknown graduate student was going to be able to achieve the degree of access that Fenno had attained. To make up for this loss of data, I improved on Fenno’s research design through my ability to capture the district and office psychology by observing a variety of the incumbents’ employees in a variety of settings.

In each of the primary cases I observed the incumbent interacting with staff and constituents for a minimum of one day.<sup>7</sup> These observations covered a variety of settings, ranging from Town Hall meetings, to one-on-one visits in offices, to tours of schools or industrial plants. I also observed the RDSMs for one day. This period of observation was much more a reflection of an average day. These days were a mixture of

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<sup>7</sup> While it would provide excellent material, it is highly improbable that an academic researcher can ever truly observe incumbent-staff interaction. Having worked for a number of politicians permits me to speak of a ‘code of silence’ that usually extends over these interactions. It would be great material, but is rather difficult to obtain.

returning phone calls, talking to staff, speaking at luncheons, and meetings inside and outside the office. There isn't a typical day for the RDSM. Rather, much of their schedule is determined by the priorities of the incumbents and the political environment. Finally, I observed the field representatives from each district for a morning or an afternoon. Each office had several field reps and their interactions were also quite variant, but usually more individualized than the RDSM. Most of the field rep interactions that I observed were one-on-one meetings between staff and individual constituents who either had problems to resolve or they were being visited by the field staff to get a "lay of the land."

The appendix of Fenno's *Home Style* was extremely helpful in guiding my research design and providing me with perhaps by two golden rules of observational research; 1) "go where you are driven and be quiet" and 2) "be unobtrusive, blend in" (1990, pp. 68, 71). With each observation my goal was to be as invisible as possible while still being close enough to the incumbent or staffer to be able to overhear and observe all conversations. If possible, I did not want to be a subject in the conversations between staff and constituents. I was surprised that more often than not I was able to act as if I was a member of the incumbent's staff providing additional support. In virtually all cases where I was identified, the staff member or the incumbent kept the recognition to minimal levels, usually stating that I was there to observe him or her at home, or that I was studying "congressional staff and what they do." I would note that anonymity was more difficult to preserve in situations where the incumbent was not present. It is likely that constituents had no problem buying that a member of Congress would have multiple staffers present, but when the staff were out in the field interacting with constituents on

their own, constituents seemed slightly more aware of my presence. From a practical standpoint, being invisible meant looking and acting like congressional staff. This meant standing just outside of the conversation, being alert to what the incumbent was talking about, dressing professionally, and having a notepad available to capture any remarks, complaints or addresses. Also, having worked in a number of campaigns over the past ten years has provided excellent training on how to staff an incumbent. These situations allowed me to “look, listen, and ask” the incumbent and staff about representation from the most ideal position.

I would conclude my remarks about observation with a word of caution. Lofland and Lofland suggest that when conducting observations it is best to adopt a “stance of trust combined with a heady dose of skepticism” (1984, p.37). Incumbents and staff are human beings; they have egos to preserve. In fact, most research would suggest that political figures have above average egos. Undoubtedly this has an impact on the types of people that they choose to interact with. While this dissertation is predicated on the fact that newly elected and vulnerable incumbents seek to “expand” their constituencies, I would also offer that they deliberately choose to set up networks of supporters in the different communities of interest in their districts so that their personal interaction with “new” supporters is minimized. The impact of this hypothesis is that incumbents and their staff tend to seek out people they like and can relate to. That way, if they do have bad news about people who are upset or issues that are going unresolved, at least they can hear it from a friend, and that friend can then perhaps work to resolve the issue. Consequently, when observing the interactions between incumbents, staff and elite constituents, it is best to follow Lofland and Lofland’s advice and understand whom you

are observing, what they are saying, and what is the meaning of that conversation. From a practical side, this often meant following up with a bit of research on whom individuals were and what people or projects they were referring to. It certainly also relied upon my taking good notes.

### Data recording and analysis

I found that it was important to be flexible in how I recorded the interviews and observations. At the most formal level, I took fairly structured notes of an interview as it took place, recording the thoughts, comments, and reactions to every question. Some situations called for this high level of structure, and in those situations I asked the subject it was permissible for me to record the conversation. I approached each interview with the attitude, however, that data would be recorded in a more intermediate style. This intermediate style relied on a small notebook that I kept in my coat or pants pocket in order that I might jot down a few topics or buzz words during the interview that would trigger my recollection of the interviews. Standard rules for unstructured interviews dictate that the comfort level of the subject is the most important variable in determining interview success, and that note taking can often inhibit the subject's willingness to speak frankly. Here Fenno suggests that the lack of encumbrance encourages "frank and spontaneous remarks" from incumbents (1990, p.81). Given this recommendation, at no point did I consider the extremely formal method of tape-recording conversations, despite the fact that Lofland and Lofland suggested that recording was absolutely necessary so that the interviewer can focus on the subject. In all my research and political experience, it has been my observation that politicians and elites tend to be significantly more guarded and tightlipped when they are "on record." With a tape recorder running, there

is the perception that they are always “on record” even when they have been assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Given the heightened level of partisanship and the “gotcha” mentality that exists in politics today, I thought it important to reinforce the comfort level of elected officials when seeking to gather qualitative data.

At the least structured, and what I perceived to be the most desirable, level of data collection, I relied on no overt data collection tools. During all interviews and observations a notebook was available in my pocket. I entered each situation with the intent to either have a relaxed conversation about incumbents and their staff or to observe interactions and be perceived as a member of the incumbent’s staff. As was just mentioned, note taking in interviews might possibly cause “on the record” discomfort with subjects. It was also less likely that the incumbent or staff would have to explain my presence if I did not produce a notepad to record the entirety of the interaction. Alternatively, not taking notes might give the subjects the impression that I was lackadaisical in my approach. I deduced that the former was more often a greater threat to data collection than the latter. I would add, however, that note taking in observational settings was much easier to disguise. If my goal was to appear to the constituents as a member of the incumbent’s staff, it would be quite natural for me to take notes on individuals and interactions. In these cases I would quickly jot down several key words about the individual’s characteristics and the nature of the interaction, much as if I were noting their name and complaint or issue. As a testament to the success of this style, several constituents approached me after their interactions to make sure that I had their address correctly listed.

Regardless of whether I took notes, I followed a similar process of data recording with all three levels of data collection. This process allowed me to have a quadruple check of my data coding to ensure its accuracy and comparability. The first step of data gathering was simply to sit and listen and/or observe as intently as possible. Before the interview began I tried to make as many mental notes as possible about the physical environment of the interview. When the interview began my attention turned fully to the subject. As I was doing my research internship and background reading, I realized that data recording and observational skills would be a valuable asset. Before embarking on my research trips I developed my observational skills by mentally noting detailed depictions of social interactions or television programs. In response to the question posed to Fenno, “how do you remember” what you observed, he replied; “you train yourself.” Here too my campaign experiences were quite helpful. In a campaign setting, one interacts with dozens of people on a daily basis on a wide variety of issues. As a practical method, I always carry around a small notebook to jot notes about conversations and personalities after I leave the scene of the interaction and then relay them to a database at a later point.

I followed a similar procedure for this dissertation. Immediately following the interview or observation, I would do the first data check. Sitting in my car or in a restaurant over a cup of coffee, I would quickly draft out the flow of the interview and key quotes as closely as I could remember. In order to facilitate later mental recollection of the interview I also noted physical details about the subject and the environment as well as my personal reactions to the subject and setting if I noted any abnormal preference or dislike. I felt that any “bias” should be noted for later consideration as I

was considering that interview or observation in comparison with others. I followed Lofland and Lofland's advice for dealing with quoted material; quotations set off verbatim quotes, apostrophes denoted paraphrasing, and reasonable recall was left in plain text (1984, p.65). Some days the notes would be only a few pages in the pocket notebook, whereas on other days where I might have taken more notes or had better interviews, I had upwards of twenty pages recorded in the notebook.<sup>8</sup>

The second data check would take place that night at the hotel or wherever I happened to be staying. In the second step I drastically expanded the key words and quotes that had earlier been recorded in my notebook into full sentence form. In this stage I clearly noted the formal names and titles of the subjects as well as the date and time of the interviews. To the obvious titles and descriptions, I added physical descriptions (age, gender, race, building/office traits, dress, decorations etc.) that would allow me to add context to the interview and quotes at this stage and the next.

Observation and analysis are not mutually exclusive processes. In fact, successful qualitative research is built on "concerted" analysis and observation, where ideas that come to the researcher in the field are quickly incorporated into the notes and not left to languish until the formal writing process commences (Lofland and Lofland, 1984, p.149). To that end, I began to develop the coding, early theoretical memos, insights, questions and descriptions that allowed me to develop this into a functional database with categories and variables for comparison at this stage. Notes, memos and other non-observed comments were usually set off in parentheses for quick identification. On average, five to ten pages taken from a day's worth of pocket notebook notes became five

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<sup>8</sup> I seemed to be a much more prolific note taker than Fenno, for he remarked that, on average, three days of observations produced twenty-five to thirty five pages of notes (1990, p.81). I would guess that my three-

to ten pages on a legal pad. On the days where I had lengthier notes (like the example above with twenty plus pages) it would have been unrealistic to spend eight hours transcribing notes immediately upon arriving back at the hotel. In those few cases, I would work as long as I could that night and then complete the rest of the transcriptions the first thing the next morning before beginning any data collection that day. Lofland and Lofland suggest that the researcher should spend “at least as much time immediately (to) study, and analyze as you spent in the interview, and caution that the tendency for a “novice graduate student” will be to “do not quite this much” (1984, p.61). Knowing this beforehand, I put forth the effort to conduct immediate and concerted analysis and transcription of my field notes.

When I returned to campus I initiated the third data check. Within a week, or two if it was a longer trip, I took the handwritten notes from step two and added in more detail and analysis. Having noted physical and environmental characteristics often added even further context to the field notes. The increased substance and context also added to the volume of the notes. Here the five to ten pages often became ten to twenty pages of typed text. The most important element of the third data check, however, was that I was usually logging field notes from more than one case study, or the notes represented a nearly complete case study of one congressional district office. Working at one time with data collected from such a large number of sources permitted fertile comparisons and the making of theoretical notes. It was at this stage where most of the development of my memos, theories and analysis took place. In fact, significant sections of Chapters Three through Five were written at this stage while I was transcribing my notes. I also enhanced or verified the coding of the observations into useful categories at this stage.

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day average would probably have generated five to ten pages more of final notes.



Finally, when a phase of research was completed, which usually occurred over spurts of roughly a month, I would complete the fourth data check by going over the notes to add further questions, verifications and comparisons based on all the data that had just been accumulated. Using the above example, at this stage the ten to twenty typed pages could become fifteen to twenty-five pages. The fourth data check became less intensive as the research wore on. This is logical given the number of cases completed and the amount of analysis that was extrapolating with each interview and case study completed. My questions had gelled and I was beginning to formalize my equivalent of Fenno's Home Style. These several week trips or periods of concentrated study were, perhaps, the biggest facilitator of concerted analysis because of the substantial amount of recently collected data that was being analyzed at one given period of writing.

A few remarks on data filing and coding are necessary. As I proceeded through the second, third and fourth stages of data recording, I kept an outline of the main substantive points of my dissertation handy. With each major point and sub-point, I associated a one or two word phrase that was used to code relevant quotes and theoretical notes. I would also note that as my subject and hypotheses changed and later questions and thoughts were added, I had to go back to my earlier notes to change and reclassify some of the coding and analysis so that when I began writing chapters Three through Six in the summer of 2000, all the coding was standardized to the same outline. The most substantial barrier to concerted analysis came from the fact that I had much more thoroughly developed understandings of my hypotheses and subjects during the later case studies and so much in the field writing was more sophisticated, while my earlier notes had to be amended and recoded. Occasionally, when I wanted to add or amend or

compare an earlier case study with something from later data, I added a date with the later additional material. Finally, my notes were obscured with initials so that I could protect the anonymity of my case studies. To protect the names of the substantial numbers of staff and elites I kept a code sheet of their initials and descriptions in a separate location.

### Rapport

For the qualitative researcher there is a dilemma that most quantitative researchers rarely confront. Fenno, in his study of Dan Quayle, introduces us to the potentiality of becoming a “cross over” who actually comes to like or approve of the subject and begins to advise the politician, or at least think of them in very supportive terms (1990, p.14). At that point, the academic loses all claims to objectivity on the subject. This is often referred to as “going native” or developing “private feelings” for the subject (Lofland and Lofland, 1984, p.147; Fenno, 1990, p.77). In some sense it becomes very logical to root for all your subjects, as having them continue in office can only increase the level of future access. Building a sense of rapport is not an entirely negative development. Establishing a close relationship with a public figure might lead that individual to think of the researcher as one of the team and erode the “on the record” mentality that can exist with academics. To build this sense of rapport, and to complement my note taking method, I often did not take notes when I observed the incumbents and staff and then immediately afterward asked probing questions about that immediate situation. Fenno suggested that this approach helped to build confidence and trust into his relationships with incumbents. Losing a few juicy verbatim quotes was usually rewarded with greater levels of trust and better overall context. Because I did not spend the amount of time

with each subject as Fenno did, I'm sure that he established more rapport. Yet, I can confirm that even my short relationships with staff and incumbents often produced feelings of good will.

The issue of rapport between the qualitative observer and subject also spills over into the academics relations with the rest of his or her colleagues. Fenno refers to an "ambiguity" in the boundary that exists between participant-observers (who observe and talk to politicians) and political scientists who study them from the isolation of the tower. This leads to "boundary problems" where other political scientists are less inclined to trust the objectivity of researchers who do observational work (1990, p.17). Having spent the last ten years with my feet planted firmly in both worlds of academia and campaigns, I feel that I am aware of these boundary issues. As I believe Fenno recognizes, there is no true solution for "going native". Rather, maintaining an acute awareness of people's perceptions and biases and trying to remain objective in your attitudes about your subjects is the best way to avoid being "contaminated". Lofland and Lofland concur in their remedy; "knowing they're there may lessen their impact" and the researcher should strike the appropriate balance between being a fully native "convert" and a distant "martian" observer (1984, p.35, 16).

In fact, I would argue that my experiences over the past decade, as both a campaigner and an academic researcher, have taught me how to objectively analyze situations involving human interaction. These experiences have also combined to demonstrate the value of stepping to the back of the room and just watching what goes on and retaining objectivity as long as humanly possible. Campaign staffs that are blindly loyal to their cause and refuse to be candid with their candidates are usually quite harmful

in the long run. Given these experiences, I feel that I have acquired an effective ability to cut through the hyperbole and rhetoric of elected officials, especially in the statements that they might give to academics or journalists. Working in a campaign office on a daily basis (watching CSPAN, talking to constituents, asking people for money) makes one sensitive to people's differences of opinions and the need to be objective in analysis and in approach from one conversation to the next. In this sense, relating to district staff and elite constituents is something that I have substantial experience with in each of the past four election cycles and in working as a full-time campaign fundraiser for the past two years. In terms of the case studies, I do not feel that my perceptions of the candidate's ideological positions biased my understanding or explanation of their activities in this dissertation. I am quite confident in stating that this dissertation is about the structure and function of congressional district offices and that while I have ideological differences of opinion with nearly all of the office holders, that these differences were virtually irrelevant to the dissertation at hand. In fact, I might add that I have the most cordial personal relationship with the individual who is probably most ideologically distant of all the case studies included in this dissertation. You know what they say about politics and strange bedfellows...

Given my previous political experiences in campaigns and in congressional district offices, rapport was fairly quickly accomplished, whether it was an interview with an incumbent or a constituent or it was an observation of elite-staff interaction. I generally understood what was going on in these settings and what each actor's motivations were. My knowledge of these interactions, however, was greatly enhanced by the interviews and observations that I conducted.

### Fenno and access

When I read *Home Style* for the second time, one of the things that troubled me was the timing of Fenno's visits. Having had considerable campaign experience I would note that evaluating an incumbent's attentiveness to their home districts in the few weeks prior to an election is not a representative portrait of their behavior over a two-year election cycle. Even the most "inside the beltline" members tend to go home for most of the Labor Day to Election-day push. Given that these incumbents have been in office for a relatively long period of time, they tend to have a lot of residual knowledge of their districts and the people and could make it appear that they are in touch, even when they are not. They might even be convinced that they are still in touch, given that they see and interact with the same people every other fall for twenty years. My visits were done at periods that included election seasons, but more often the visits came at varying periods of time, most of which were not during election season. Furthermore, I got to "know" each district much better than Fenno in that I arrived with more comprehensive research on the background of the political and economic makeup of the district and could get around in it by myself. Fenno's notes indicate that he arrived mostly blind; he "didn't do preliminary" research except to read CQ profiles of districts and incumbents so he would "see it through the eyes of the member." My divergence with Fenno follows from his assumption that a researcher will be able to observe all of the incumbent's activities and perceptions. Given the varying levels of access and quality of data that both he and I were able to attain, I am not prepared to accept this assumption. Therefore, I did the preliminary research and interviewed elite constituents to get many confirming or divergent viewpoints that would allow me to apply much more context, especially

because of these elite interviews. Furthermore, even if Fenno were to study incumbents's home styles at times other than the fall of election years throughout their two-year cycle, I hypothesize that he would still find regularity in the kinds of activities that they conduct. I speculate that he would be shown the regularity of the "schedule" where the incumbent goes to parades, town hall meetings, and bean suppers etc. My suspicion is that procuring genuine access to incumbents is a much more tenuous task than he detailed in *Home Style*. He recognizes that "gatekeepers" such as family and staff exist to guard access to the incumbent (1990, p.70) but often doesn't seem to connect these individuals to his own lack of access. I think he also overstates his own "participation" in his research method. Making a few phone calls and sealing a few letters do not today equate to access. I think this marginal level of participation would be unlikely to procure the same style of access today that it achieved twenty-five years ago. One other advantage I feel that I might have over Fenno in this respect is that I physically fit in more; I look like a volunteer or staffer. Consequently, a politician might be less reluctant to drag me around with his or her staff.

Dealing with staff as the subjects, on the other hand, involved a much lower threshold of ego, secrecy and conflict for the researcher to overcome. As was detailed above, staff were overwhelmingly willing to talk and be observed in the research for this dissertation. In many cases, I witnessed very unflattering depictions of the incumbents by constituents, media, government officials, and in some cases even from the staff themselves. I would also speculate that because staff do not live in the same scrutinized world that their employers do, that they aren't as likely to screen their comments and behaviors. In simple terms, observing staff is much more likely to pay off with more

access, higher quality and more accurate data compared to dealing with the actual incumbent. This belief was substantiated by Lofland and Lofland: “reliance on multiple informants is probably preferable to reliance on only one” (1984, p.42).

#### Some final thoughts on starting out

I entered the dissertation research with some expectations about my research design. Some of these held and some did not. Most notably, this research began as a descriptive effort to compare the activities of congressional district staff. As the research progressed, the concepts and questions began to change. Fenno encountered the same basic dilemma in his examination of incumbent home style. When he first set out to study the topic in 1970 he was unsure of the complexity and variation in individual member’s home styles. From that perspective, it would have been stifling for him to impose the same kind of scientific strictures upon his research design that one would impose on a survey-based instrument. Consequently, his case set and variables were constantly evolving over the seven years of research, as were his questions. He began his initial case studies with no questions prepared (p.60). This stands in stark contrast to the more basic social science precept that research questions must be prepared “before we march into the field” (Manheim and Rich, 1991, p.10). I would argue that it was more advantageous to spend time understanding the culture and standard operating procedures of one district office. I would argue this not only because there exist similarities between the district offices but also because I was able to more fully comprehend the motivations and daily behaviors of congressional district staff. I would argue that an observer with no experience or background on district staff would not be able to as fully appreciate their observations had they not had my experiences.

My district internship provided a useful start while I was completing my coursework and the lengthy background reading on congressional staff. While my initial observations of other offices were perhaps biased by my feeling that this office was an “ideal type” and by my personal investment in that “enterprise”, I ultimately was able to understand the initial district operation as merely one of four hundred and thirty-five district operations. The substantial variation in the number of staff, physical layouts and mission orientations of each office quickly allowed me to understand this diversity. In this sense, my internship experience and the first few visits to the first case study were almost something of a pretest to ensure that I had reliable concepts, variables and operationalizations. I wrote a research paper based upon my internship and ultimately delivered a conference paper based on that data and some of my early field findings from a few other cases. The paper was an exploratory project where I was able to refine my methods, develop theoretical insights, learn the lingo of the trade, etc. Given the quality of the data I obtained in my five months of research, I decided to retain the internship office as a secondary case study. Lofland and Lofland reassured me that this was the appropriate decision; “We believe that any such difficulties are a small price to pay for the very creative wellspring of the naturalistic approach” (1984, p.10). The office, nevertheless, was retained only as a secondary case study because of my personal experiences and interactions with personnel. I’m afraid that making it a primary case study would have been based on severely biased data.



#### 4 Primary Case Studies

In each of the following primary case studies, I visited all district offices and interviewed all members of the district staff. Additionally, I observed staff interact and then interviewed constituents in a variety of demographic elements of the district, from the urban to the suburban and rural. I typically apportioned the numbers of interviews and the time of observation by the physical layout of the district. In other words, in a district that was 70% urban, I did roughly 14 of my 20 interviews in the district's urban areas. In areas that were more heavily rural, I did the interviews in a number of the smaller villages and townships throughout the district. Following are descriptions of the four primary case studies of this dissertation.<sup>9</sup> Using the same label and protector of anonymity as did Fenno, the primary case studies will be designated throughout this dissertation with letters ranging from A through D. The secondary case studies discussed in the next section will be referred to with letters from E through M. I should also note that the fieldwork for this dissertation was spread out over a six-year period from the time of my initial internship to the completion of my final interviews. The physical and political descriptions of each case study reflect the time that I conducted my observations rather than the current disposition of each incumbent and district. For example, an incumbent who was just elected in 1994 and was studied in 1995 would be referred to as a freshman incumbent, not a legislator with six years of experience.

### Incumbent A

The first primary case study, incumbent A, is a Southern Republican who was ambitious to move quickly past his status as a congressional fresh face and onto a productive legislative career. A prominent Republican in his home state, A hit the ground running in Washington and quickly moved into the ranks of party leadership. Consequently, his personal style is much more ideological and partisan than one might expect for a newer member of Congress. This ideological/partisan bent was reflected in his early campaigns, where he defeated quality challengers in controversial and negative campaigns, while also heavily outspending them. In this sense, A is by no means a typical member of Congress who first serves a partisan apprenticeship before moving into prominent leadership roles.

Incumbent A's district is demographically and economically diverse. The district stretches from a large metropolitan area to include a number of suburbs as well as a substantial amount of rural and agricultural area. It is the largest district in area of the four primary case studies. While there are nine cities with over ten thousand people, the majority of the district is to be found in three suburban cities with populations over 50,000 and two other mid-sized cities at the other end of the district. This distribution of population is reflected in the two newspapers and two network affiliates located within the district's boundaries. Some might consider this district homogenous in that it has three significant military bases within its boundaries. But within its boundaries are also a major state university, substantial agricultural and oil interests, and numerous mid-sized industries as well. This district is among the least homogenous of the case studies.

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<sup>9</sup> Much of the political and demographic data is derived from Congressional Quarterly's Almanac of American Politics. I do not provide page citations for the obvious reason that they would eliminate any

While slightly more rural than the average district, the age, race, education and income variables suggest that this is a very typical district. To cover the substantial size and diversity of interest, incumbent A has two district offices for the two major population centers. Politically, A's seat has a long Democratic lineage and tradition of voting for other Democrats. But typical of many southern states, it is trending Republican with each election, having voted against Clinton twice. During the period of observation A was in the process of making the seat safe. Currently CQ suggests that this seat "retains a Republican advantage" and A is clearly to be regarded a safe incumbent in a marginally Republican seat.

While the demographic and political portraits of this district seem at first uninspiring to serve as a case study, incumbent A offers a number of unique positions. First, is his desire to move up quickly evident in the activities of his district staff? Does the typical expansionist/protectionist continuum apply in this case? Second, he is unique because his Chief of Staff is stationed in the home district and has considerably more focus and responsibilities at home than other chiefs. Are these two trends related? And third, where does he find home given the diverse interests of his district?

#### Incumbent B

In contrast to A, incumbent B is a long-serving Democrat who does not share A's motivations to quickly move up the party ladder in Congress. B has had a political career that has stretched over five decades, only part of which has been in the United States Congress. While A's motivations appear more personal and ideological, B's motivations seem much more heavily personal, given his long career in public service, and are perhaps more driven by loyalty to serve the community and the party.

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possibility of anonymity for the office.

What unites A and B is the physical and political geography of their districts. Both are Southern members of Congress and represent districts that include a mixture of urban, suburban and rural populations. B's district is only slightly smaller than A's and they both share average demographic traits of race, age, size, education and income, except that this district is slightly the oldest, poorest and least educated of the four primary cases. This district's demographic profile is more varied than A's, however, as this district lacks a predominant single employer. About one-third of the population is clustered around a large metropolitan area, while roughly half of the population lives in rural settings. There are only three cities in this district with a population over thirty thousand. Furthermore, this district is the most rural of the primary case studies and nearly as rural as incumbents J and L. With six small newspapers and only 1 network affiliate, the district has a typical pattern of rural news coverage. However, because of the district's proximity to a large metropolitan area, only a small fraction of the inhabitants are employed in the agricultural sector. So clearly J and L are much more truly rural districts. There has been substantial growth in the new technology sector, with a number of sizeable companies to accompany the increasing number of corporate farms running the ag sector in the district. Given the greater diversity and size, it should not be surprising to find out that B has three district offices spread across the district. The counties and towns of the district are largely Democratic in their historical roots. But as is the case in most Southern districts, while many of these individuals continue to elect Democrats to local and state offices, most federal and statewide elections in this district are dominated by Republican outcomes. Clinton lost this district twice, both times by large margins. As might be expected, the new suburban growth areas are much more

conservative and Republican and are having an impact on election outcomes. The county closest to the metropolitan area has seen its entire slate of Democratic officeholders replaced by Republicans in just over a decade. Furthermore, B's victory percentage shrunk to its lowest total in decades in 1998 when he faced a quality and well-funded challenger, his first in a long time. As Chapter Five will later rationalize, quality challengers are most likely to emerge when they have a reasonable chance at success. Or, in this case, to circulate their name to run again the next time after the incumbent has retired or rethought their desire to campaign again.

There are two interesting factors that added to my desire to include B as a primary case study. First, there is a substantial amount of new growth taking place in one urban corner of B's district. Consequently, the district he represented at the time of this study was not the same one that he had represented for a substantial period of time. It struck me that it would be interesting to find out what kind of impact the demographic change will have on the incumbent's allocation of staff and his political and campaign efforts. And did this have an impact on his desire to switch parties or retire? The second factor is B's age. As an older member of Congress, with a lengthy political career in another office, how has B reacted to change over time in office? While B is not from the pre-1964 class in Congress, he has held elected office almost continuously since the 1950s and his attitudes and staff seem to reflect the standard behavior and expectations consistent with the older cohort that was discussed in Chapter One. For example, he drives himself around the district, tends to employ older staff, and indicates no evidence of being "handled" by any of his staff. So, did he have a certain allocation pattern for his original staff? And has that changed over time?

### Incumbent C

Incumbent C is a moderate, long-serving Northern Republican. While not active in the partisan structure, C would be considered a leadership figure in the House of Representatives. Like B, C is not a vocal partisan. Observations from this dissertation and from journalistic accounts universally refer to C as “nonpartisan”, “moderate”, and “intellectual.” In short, he is not a typical member of the House of Representatives in the late 1990s. That is not to say, however, that C’s motivations are of the same personal sort as typified by B. In fact, C seems to have the most policy-directed motivations of all the case studies.

He hails from a district that is largely comprised of three mid-size cities, each with over one hundred thousand people. This district is the smallest in area of the primary case studies, slightly more than half as big as A’s district, and roughly average as compared to the secondary case studies. There is a substantial amount of rural area with numerous small farming communities between the cities but the population is largely urban. In fact, CQ refers to this district as the “most urbanized district in the state.” But, this district is only slightly more white, urban, educated and wealthy than A and B. Additionally, the cities are large enough that the major economic interests of the district are urban-based manufacturing and service industries. Agricultural spin-offs are also important economic interests in this district. The major employer in the district is a major state university found in the fourth largest city of the district. C enjoys very localized media markets within his district with five daily newspapers and four network television affiliates. C has 3 ½ offices in his district, reflecting not so much the diversity of the district as the three clear population centers. Despite its historic patterns of voting

Republican, the district took a more blue-collar industrial tilt with redistricting in the 1970s and 1980s, and it is not then surprising to find out that this district leans Democratic in most elections. Clinton won the district comfortably in both 1992 and 1996. In this sense, C is certainly a political aberration in his district. He has faced strong recent challenges and was actually outspent in 1996. His victory totals make him a “marginal” incumbent by percentage. CQ suggests that when C decides to retire that “this district will be hotly contested...until then (he) remains a solid favorite.”

C is an interesting case study from three perspectives. How do his policy interests (and lack of partisanship) as well as his electoral marginality (on paper) affect his staff allocation and utilization? C was also included because he was a prominent member notable for having young staff members who were not particularly active or aggressive in the district. The third perspective comes from his having three major cities with three offices. Is there a demographic element to representation and staff utilization?

#### Incumbent D

The final primary case study, incumbent D is a newly elected Northern Democrat. D represents the ideological balance to A. While evoking clear policy interests like C, D would definitely be considered a partisan member of the House along the same lines as A. D is not entirely a newcomer to politics, having held elective office for a number of years prior to running for Congress. I would suggest that D’s electoral motivations are based on a complex mixture of personal, ideological, partisan, as well as interest group affinities.

D’s district is a largely urban district, the population of which is almost three-quarters within one county. This county includes a major university, the state’s capitol, which

employs about one-third of the district's workforce, a number of mid-sized corporations and a host of emerging technology industries. Surrounding the main county are a number of smaller counties, all of which are rural and agricultural in nature. These outer counties contribute to the district's average size by area while not contributing large amounts of population. This district is the whitest, most educated, most white-collar and wealthiest of the four primary case studies. The city at the center of the main county is clearly the center of the district. With a population of over two hundred thousand it dominates the political and economic makeup of the district. It's two newspapers and four network affiliates also represent the core of the district's media. Given this, it should be no surprise that D has only 1 district office and that it is located in this central city.

Politically the district is something of an enigma. Largely based in a northern university town, one might think this to be a solidly Democratic district. And given that a former Democratic incumbent held the seat for three decades might further reinforce that thought. However, the economic growth of the city and surrounding area has brought substantial suburban growth and large numbers of moderate voters. In fact, D's predecessor was a Republican who served a number of terms and was elected by comfortable margins. Today the district on paper would have to be considered a swing district. CQ calls it "potentially competitive" but with presidential level turnouts it will continue to have solidly Democratic performance. Clinton won the district both times by solid margins.

D presents a number of obvious characteristics for inclusion in this dissertation. Primarily, she is a freshman member of Congress. Will observations of D reveal the expected expansionist behavior of the newly elected? She faced a very competitive



primary and general election in her first campaign. Will that have an impact on how she utilizes and allocates staff? Or were rumors of her protectionist activities more apparent? There are clear comparisons to be made here between her one office in the center of her district versus C's three offices dispersed throughout his district. Another valid reason for inclusion is gender. D is the only female primary case and one of the few female case studies. Does gender play a role in staff and utilization? D is also the youngest of the four primary cases. Much as one might speculate about the impact of B's cohort, we might also investigate the impact of belonging to the youngest cohort in Congress.

### 9 Secondary Case Studies

In order to accumulate more variables for contextual comparison, I also added a series of secondary case studies. The secondary case studies differ in that this data is based simply on a single office interview with the RDSM, and in some cases is complemented by interviews with the actual incumbent and other staff or advisors. In a few cases some elite interviews were conducted. As was stated earlier, in most cases offices that were less vibrant in their offers of access were more likely relegated to this secondary level.

#### Incumbent E: The internship office

The initial secondary case study is actually the site of my first research. Incumbent E is a senior Democrat from a Southern district. While doing much of the background reading on congressional staff, I interned in E's office for a semester. In the interests of full disclosure, I should confess that I later went on to work in E's campaign for higher office, a clear violation of Fenno's line of "ambiguity." I simply had too much good data from this case study not to include it in this dissertation. I make this disclosure so that

readers will be aware of my connection to E when one reads passages in the coming chapters.

Incumbent E is also an interesting case study for inclusion because he was A's predecessor in office. Incumbent A was always rumored to be a potential opponent, but the two never faced off, as E gave up the seat to run for other office, giving A the chance at an open seat. E was clearly a legislative leader and was unique among these case studies in that he had "gone Washington" to a much greater extent than any other case study and he rarely returned home during his last few terms in office. E's "gone Washington" attitude provides an interesting case study from which to examine the impact of status on the hierarchy and utilization of the district staff.

#### Incumbents F, G, H, I

Incumbent F was a mid seniority Democrat who represented an entirely urban district in the South. F is a loyally partisan Democrat whose motivations appear to be personal ambitions and representing group interests from her district. F's was the second smallest district, including the downtown core of one metropolitan county. One city represents over eighty percent of the district's entire population. Obviously, F has one district office. As might be expected, it is also a minority-majority district. Along with these demographics, it is also a younger, poorer, and less educated district than average. This district has a high percentage of service sector jobs, reflecting the presence of a large number of corporate offices and executives who actually reside in other districts. Additionally, large numbers of residents work blue-collar industrial jobs in adjoining districts. The largest employers in F's district are hospitals and local government offices. Politically, F's district was overwhelmingly Democratic at all levels. Clinton won the

seat twice by substantial margins. In addition to being unique as one of the smallest and most urban seats, F was also included for her demographic characteristics. F is both female and African-American, a not uncommon combination in urban Southern seats. F had held elective and appointive office for over twenty years at the time of this study. With the unique demographic characteristics and the extremely homogenous nature of the district, F provides an excellent case study subject.

Incumbent G, a mid-seniority Democrat from the South, had a different type of district. His constituency included a mixture of both urban and suburban population and was much smaller than the primary case studies. Like D, G's district was largely based around one urban area, with a population of over a quarter million people. G's district was perhaps even more homogenous than D's, or the average district, because of the concentration of high tech and transportation industries. It was largely one county with some urban, suburban and some rural population, with a mixture of some wealth and some poverty. G's district was largely reliant upon one massive employer and the resulting spin-off companies. Because of that one employer, G's district had the largest blue-collar workforce of any of the case studies. Like D's district, G's had a growing suburban, technological, and political face. This district was also average in terms of the age, race, education and income level of its inhabitants. Also like D, G had one district office located in the center of his district's main population. This district was electorally marginal, but it was relatively safe while held by G. As with most of the other Southern seats, this seat had a long Democratic heritage but after G retired and was replaced by a Republican, the seat continued its trend of slowly becoming more Republican, with Clinton's margin being much more narrow in 1996 than in 1992. Given the southern tilt

in politics, it is not surprising to learn that G was a moderate incumbent, who often worked with Republicans to protect the interests of his district. With the electoral and demographic comparisons to D's seat, this proved to be an interesting case study. G also came from roughly the same area as F, so how do these three cases compare?

Incumbent H was a senior Republican who represented a district that included a mixture of urban, suburban and rural elements that intertwined with G's borders. While this district is largely based in a metropolitan area, the economically and numerically dominant part of the district was found in the suburban population. The district is much more white, urban, young, educated, and wealthy than the average district or case study. H's main district interest was two large airports and the accompanying defense and technical industries. The industries and the suburban nature of the district made it more homogenous than the average district. It was smaller than any of the primary case studies but it was an elongated district including twelve towns with populations of over ten thousand. Because of this elongation, H had two district offices: one in the population center and one at the end of the district. This district has very little local media. The newspapers and the television affiliates were all metropolitan and based outside this district's boundaries. H's district was comfortably Republican, drawn to avoid urban and more Democratic areas. H still holds this seat and regularly receives in excess of seventy percent of the vote while Clinton lost this district twice by substantial margins. Given the demographic and political characteristics of the district, it should not be surprising to learn that H is a conservative Republican. Additionally, H is a partisan and committee leader in Congress. To complement his partisan and constituency ambitions, H clearly has both ideological and individual motivations. His personal motivations are reflected

in his attempts to run for higher office and his ideological motivations are reflected in a number of the fairly strident causes he has pursued while a member of Congress. Given the geographic similarities with both A and G, and the ideological comparison with C, H provides an interesting case for comparison.

Incumbent I was a senior Republican with a very small urban-suburban district in a large metropolitan area. The district was much smaller than the primary case studies and almost entirely urban in nature. Its population was largely concentrated in three contiguous cities with populations of over one hundred thousand and was an extremely wealthy district. CQ called it one of the “most affluent, educated and Republican areas in the country”. There was virtually no local media as it was the heart of a metropolitan area. There was only one small college and no military, agricultural or mineral industries. It was also an extremely homogenous district, home to mostly white, young, white-collar professionals that worked in the numerous corporate headquarters and technical industries that have moved to this district over the past ten years. Usually such population influx into a district causes an incumbent to become worried about future election returns. However, given the homogeneity of these new constituents, there has been little change in incumbent I’s final election returns. Because of this small size and homogeneity, there was only one office in the middle of this district. Politically the district was very Republican. Bob Dole won the district by a wide margin in 1996. This incumbent was one of the more ideologically driven members of this selection of cases, having only a brief career in elective office before running for Congress. CQ concludes that this seat is perhaps the safest Republican seat in country and the fact that he is rarely opposed, even by opponents with virtually no resources, confirms that it would be

difficult for him to lose this seat. This district is included to examine the staff utilization of an ideological incumbent in an extremely homogenous district. In that sense, is incumbent I much different than the average district office?

#### Incumbents J and K

Incumbent J was a junior Republican from the South. J's district was the largest, poorest, oldest, and the most rural district in this study. With no substantial urban population, the area was dominated by small towns and agricultural concerns. The largest employer in the district, a major state university, was the only city with a population over thirty thousand. There were few other large employers and most of the district's employees were blue-collar or ag workers. The media in this district was dominated by larger media markets in cities outside the boundaries of the district and a number of small daily newspapers within the district. J represents a district that is extremely large and homogenous. Given that size and diversity, he operated three district offices. Politically the seat was almost universally Democratic. It hadn't elected a Republican member of Congress until J in 1996, but culturally it is a part of the Bible-belt and very conservative in its issues. Consequently, it had begun to vote Republican in most statewide elections but for Democrats at other levels. The fact that it twice voted for Clinton suggests it still holds its Democratic roots. The most unique thing about this case study, besides the demographic factors, was that J had previously held the seat for a number of terms as a Democrat, before he retired and ran for higher office as an independent. Without his long background as a Democrat, he most certainly would not have been able to recapture this seat, and when he leaves it will unquestionably revert to the Democratic column. He has confronted quality challengers in his two elections as a

Republican, winning one closely and the other by a wide margin. While he may now hold the seat safe personally, it is not a partisan majority. Incumbent J was characterized by many as a “good old boy.” His voting record as a Democrat was very “middle of the House” and his need to continue supporting the programs that assist a substantial portion of his constituents ensure that he is still in the “middle of the House” as a Republican. Also as a “good old boy” he has retained strong relations to district politicians and elites and used the same offices and much of the same staff that he had employed before he left office originally. By reputation, it also seems that he did much of the interaction with elites on his own.

Holding the seat during the interim of J’s departure was Incumbent K, a junior Democrat. K also very much fits the “good old boy” mentality. He held elective office for a lengthy period prior to entering the House and simply chose to retire to pursue other personal (i.e. economic) interests. Politically, he was a good fit for the district, just like the early version of J, very “middle of the House.” K was a leading figure amongst the conservative Democrats in the House and was also a reflection of J in that he employed and sought the advice of many of the same individuals in the district. J and K are included to examine the differences between two individuals who operate ideologically and politically so similarly within the same district.

#### Incumbents L and M

Incumbent L was a relatively junior Democrat. Like J, L had a very large and rural district but it was much more homogenous than J’s district. With two mid-sized industrial towns in the middle of the district (each with a population over 50,000) and the rest of the district engaged in agriculture, L had considerably fewer miles and interests to

cover. It was a very homogenous district racially and there was not likely substantial variation from the average household income. The district is average in age, education and income categories and has a number of state college campuses, with a significant total number of students. Within its borders, L's district has two daily newspapers and three network television affiliates. There are numerous small-to-mid-sized industries in the two main towns of the district but no single firm stands out. Given the two major population centers of the district, and the fact that most Democrat votes come from these two cities, it is not surprising to see that L has two offices, based in these two cities. Personally, L is a young, focused, and very expansionist legislator, clearly holding ambitions for higher office and very moderate in ideology. L had limited elective experience before he went to Congress. Politically, L's seat leans Democratic and it has become electorally safe for him. While Clinton won the district in both 1992 and 1996, he was outpolled by incumbent L in both elections. L serves as interesting comparison to many of the Southern cases listed below in that he too has a large district with mixtures of urban and rural constituents. L is also interesting as a relatively junior legislator with progressive ambition. How do his staff function such a situation?

The final case is M, a mid-seniority Northern Democrat. M represented an entirely urban district, the smallest amongst the cases in this study he represented roughly ½ of an urban county. M's district was also substantially populated by African-Americans but was not a minority-majority district, as is the case in most Democratically held metropolitan districts in the North. M's district is also unique in that it combines (and segregates) traditional inner-city poverty-stricken areas, with an equally large number of white-collar families. This combination is reflected by the fact that the average



household income for the district is relatively average compared to the other case studies despite having such a large number of white-collar employees. The district is also average in most of the other demographic characteristics, except that it has no rural population or employees. There is a substantial mixture of white-collar corporations, blue-collar industry and service sector jobs such as hospitals and local government in M's district. Additionally, there are several large universities and the expected metropolitan television and newspaper. Obviously, there is one central district office. As might be expected, this district is comfortably Democratic. Clinton won the district by substantial margins in both elections. M is a moderate-to-liberal member of Congress. His motivations appear to be largely electoral in nature, given that he held elective office for a number of years prior to serving in Congress. CQ considers M's seat "safe" so his most immediate electoral fears probably stem from the coming redistricting. The demographic factors of M's district lead to an interesting element for his inclusion; how does a Caucasian represent a district with a large minority population? A majority of the state legislators who serve in M's district are black. Does this impact how he utilizes his staff?

### Elite Constituents

#### Who are they?

In the four primary case studies, I complemented my interviews and observations of staff with roughly twenty interviews of elite constituents. Elite constituents are found amongst the ranks of executives, journalists and lawyers. But they are also contributors and party activists. Most basically, elite constituents are the opinion leaders of their towns, neighborhoods and associations. As such, I hypothesize that elites enjoy

heightened levels of access and are disproportionately represented in the ranks of constituents that have interaction with incumbents and their district staff.

#### Why they are included

The elite interviews could be characterized in much the same way as staff observations. Having the opportunity to sit and discuss their interactions with incumbents and staff for thirty minutes to an hour allowed me to more fully develop the elites' thoughts and let them explain their remarks. This enhanced data took the form of observed facial expressions, tangible examples of their activities (eg. award plaques) or tours of their facilities. This kind of data simply cannot be captured in a survey instrument. Furthermore, elite constituents are probably much less likely to cooperate with survey instruments than they are with someone in their office having pleasant conversation about their actual lives and districts. One can imagine the cynical impressions of elite constituents about survey instruments coming from academic institutions, especially in cases of conservatives who support Republican incumbents.

Interviewing elite constituents beyond incumbents and staff adds an important contextual layer so that the theories developed in this dissertation do not rely solely on the perspectives of incumbents and their staff. As mentioned above, I felt that even Fenno's P/O study was subject to outside control. The true P/O study would have the time and resources to study and comprehend the meanings of staff activities. Given that a true P/O study was not achievable, I needed a contextual tool that would allow me to probe for meaning beyond what was merely presented by incumbents and staff. For example, data such as who the staff take you to see, what they allow you to observe, and what they happen to schedule during your visits will have an enormous impact on the

events and the meanings that are derived from them. In some sense, the elite interviews serve as a control group, especially those elites interviews that I tracked down with my own research as opposed to those mentioned by the incumbents, staff or other elites.

While I would have liked to complete elite interviews in all of the case studies, time and monetary constraints limited the elite interviews to the primary case studies only.

#### How they were selected

The first elites to be interviewed were those that were recommended by district staff as having had different types of interactions with the incumbent and/or staff. I asked the staff to recommend a mixture of elites: some partisan, some issue-based and some that were just plain friendly. It was not surprising then when many of these people gave glowing reviews of the staff and incumbents. Even these subjects were useful in that they often were not members of incumbents' inner circles and in some cases were willing to give very frank impressions of the incumbent. However, I did not intend that this first ring of interviewees was going to be my most productive source of information. They did prove to be useful in leading to the second source of elites by acting as sort of a referential index. The second source then were people that elites recommended as either a) being notable "elites" at the local level or b) also had some sort of substantial interaction with the district office. The third source of elite interviews was obtained by "walking Main Street"; the regular sources I dropped by in pretty much every city spread out across the primary case studies. These regular sources were Chamber of Commerce directors, local journalists, and prominent attorneys. These were deemed to be regular sources because each of these three professions tends to be politically active. Finally, there were the active partisans or campaigners. There were individuals that I identified in

the incumbents' (and their opponents') FEC reports. In each case, I made sure to pull at least two supporters and opponents to provide different perspectives on the incumbent. In some cases, these elites were partisan and not useful data sources. However, in many cases, it should be noted that elites who are political contributors are open-minded to the game of politics, are well informed about people and events, and tend to offer fairly objective criticisms and advice.

#### How they were interviewed

I interviewed the elites in much the same fashion as I observed their interactions with staff. I tried to emphasize and maintain a high comfort level with each interview, with the goal that it would be more of a conversation than a formal interview. In all cases a notebook was handy to either fully note the conversation as it took place, or to jot down key words, phrases, or names that they mentioned. As mentioned above, since these interviews tended to be roughly ½ hour in length, I usually did not use the notepad until immediately after the interview ended when I would more fully transcribe the notes.

#### Limits to Contextually Based Research

I recognize several limitations to contextually based research. The most obvious limitation to this research design is the cost of interviews in both time and money. This limitation can be overcome by conducting a smaller number of interviews and focusing on the quality of data that is produced from each case. The main criticism that is usually leveled at contextually based research is that it is merely descriptive and that it lacks generalizability. This dissertation is not immune from this criticism, but neither is this merely a descriptive dissertation without variables and comparison. As a theory-building doctoral dissertation, it is not my purpose here to generalize about what happens in all

435 districts. Rather, it is my purpose here to begin to examine the contextual differences between offices that generalized analyses might fail to incorporate. A third criticism of contextually based research is that the data it provides is overly idiosyncratic. As Fenno pointed out, his case studies, like mine, are time bound “best estimates” of four individual case studies at four specific time points (Fenno, 1990, p.61) while large-n surveys can usually test for time-based or geographic idiosyncracies. This dissertation holds that taking the time to examine and compare the individual idiosyncracies is fruitful for the development of new theories and hypotheses about incumbency advantage. Fourth, in no sense are my four and nine case studies a random sample of all House “enterprises.” Given my economic constraints, I was simply unable to do studies from all regions. With more resources and time I would have definitely included additional case studies from the West Coast, the Deep South, the Northeast as well as an incumbent close to D.C. Certainly there are other variables that warrant inclusion as well. The purpose here is only to offer a theoretical starting point from which to examine Congressional district staff.

A final concern that is raised about observational studies is the so-called “Hawthorne effect” or what Fenno refers to as a “loss of control over the research process” (1990, p.114). Measurement error may be introduced by subjects that act differently in the presence of their bosses or because they make exaggerated claims about the activities of staff and the incumbent. This final criticism might be more valid for studies such as Fenno’s that are entirely observational in nature. I believe, however, that my inclusion of open-ended staff and elite interviews, which selected both supporters and opponents away from the main subjects, introduced some element of control and verification on the

data. I found that one way to control for the “Hawthorne Effect” was to limit the amount of information that the subjects have about you as a researcher or your topic. I strove to achieve this control in two ways: 1) In many cases I was able to blend into the background enough to either not be introduced or to be introduced as someone who was doing some research on staff. In only a handful of cases did the staff or incumbent make attention-drawing statements about my research; and 2) bias is also problematic if the researcher shares too much information about the research design and/or variables that they are focusing on. In an attempt to limit this bias I would keep responses to inquiries from the interviewees brief and vague.

#### What Contextually Based Research Adds

As was discussed in Chapter One, the bulk of the research on incumbents’ home behavior and their staff is aggregate in nature. This dissertation improves the literature by: 1) seeking to add contextual clarity to the mass of literature on incumbent advantage, 2) adding some concrete observations to the considerably smaller body of literature on congressional district staff, and by 3) building theoretical propositions for future research on staff and incumbency advantage.

#### The aggregate research lacks clarity

The aggregate examination of incumbents’ home behavior and resource allocation is not sufficient. Any explanation of incumbency advantage should include a variable that captures the contextual nature of district staff activity. Constituency-level data provides much greater clarity than do aggregate studies of National Election Surveys or allocations of congressional resources. This dissertation selects a small-n approach as a “deliberate decision to sacrifice analytical range for analytical depth” with a detailed examination of

a few cases (Fenno, 1990, p.60). This observational approach is not widely approved of by the discipline. Fenno notes that this type of “research is a rarity in the American Political Science Review” and that he would “like to tease a few more graduate students into trying” to talk directly to politicians (1990, pp.101, 128). I am not arguing for a decrease in the amount of large-n analysis carried out by political science. Rather, I would suggest that given the mass of large-n analysis of incumbency advantage that seems to focus on the same variables time after time, that it is now time to go to the field and bring back some fresh variables for analysis. This is especially called for if neither the discipline nor the subjects (incumbents and staff) recognize the meaning of their activities. In this case it is important for the researcher to articulate the unrecognized meaning and importance of activities (Lofland and Lofland, 1984, p.74).

Individual variables are much more fully fleshed out by qualitative research. Fenno’s “soak and poke” approach is “valued added” in that it provides the observational richness of one case with all the variables seen up close. Fenno embraces the “bias” of this individual case approach. This approach maintains that a thorough understanding of the resources, motivations and behavior of a select few incumbents leads to a more thorough understanding of the collective. For example, political campaigns are highly studied and generalized about by political scientists, but how often are individual campaigns and decisions studied in depth? Fowler and McClure’s research on political ambition and the pool of quality challengers further demonstrates the need to get fully immersed in the context of a specific district. It is difficult to obtain an appreciation of the overall context until you’ve come to grips with the intricacies of one case. It is precisely the intricacies of one case or experience with an individual legislator that led to

Mayhew and Fiorina's seminal pieces of research (Fenno, 1990, p.100). It would have been more challenging for Mayhew and Fiorina to theorize about all legislators' motivations had they not been able to deeply probe one incumbent. The context of one example shows its importance and the need for new questions as the researcher moves from one office to the next, seeking comparison and similarity. It is the contextual comparison of these few individual cases that often breeds inquiry and that is why it is so important for the researcher to make analytical notes and comparisons while the research process proceeds. Finally, fully embracing the intricacies of an individual case allow the researcher to use more than one type of measurement to study incumbent activity. In this case I can observe multiple numbers of variables, behaviors, activities, whereas aggregate analysis of incumbency advantage tends to rely on one or a few variables that are coded and have little reliable verification.

#### Less biased data

Another strength of contextual research is that it can be argued that data collected at the actual point of observation is immune to many of the biases implicit in large-n data collection. The contextual researcher has substantially fewer data problems with survey, questioner or translation error because the researcher is there to ask and interpret all answers, both verbal and non-verbal. I might add that this type of research reduces measurement error from surveys filled out by congressional aides (or even interns) who are not from the district or travel there rarely. At another level, the unscheduled interviews and observations allow insight that standardized questionnaires have difficulty capturing. Asking a staffer to explain an action that the researcher just observed is going to provide a higher quality (and quantity) of data than responses to open-ended questions



that the subject completes away from any interactive behavior. Finally, the observational researcher has the ability to amend or alter the research design, if he/she realizes that important questions are going unasked or unanswered. For example, my initial research impetus was simply to categorize district staff and their daily tasks. Early in the research process, I realized that an equally important concept in need of study was the staff's interaction with elite constituents. This required me to alter the data that I needed to observe and collect from interviews.

#### It improves the discipline's understanding of staff

Much of the literature that does exist on staff has as its focus either Washington-based staff or aggregate categories of behavior such as the number of staff or the amount of casework that is performed. Contextual clarity emphasizes that such tasks are not the only functions performed by district staff. They are not the most common, most interesting or even the most electorally relevant behavior performed by staff. So the question should be posed, why then do studies of congressional staff continue to focus on Washington staff or the aggregate allocations of resources? The simple answer is that it is virtually the only easily quantifiable and accessible data about legislative staff. Hammond noted this problem nearly twenty years ago: "It is not possible to gather data on changes in the number of caseworkers or press aides in the U.S. Congress, because until recently names but not titles of staff aides were reported by Congress. Interviews and other data may be unclear...(for there is a) lack of data and a noncomparability of data." Furthermore: "legislatures do not keep data on other output: constituent contacts or staff memoranda. If researchers want to use quantitative measures, they often must use surrogates for the phenomenon they are tapping" (Hammond, 1984, p.303, p.304). I

can confirm Hammond's statements with my observations of the varying states of recording and readiness of information that staff kept on: 1) their daily routines, 2) their interactions with constituents, and 3) their casework activities. While there are databases, training seminars and congressional statutes guiding these behaviors, congressional district staffers demonstrate wide latitude in how they record their behaviors. Furthermore, these materials in many cases are electorally sensitive and staffers are most likely instructed not to share this data with journalists or inquiring academics. The implication then, is that more political scientists must go out and observe this behavior if the discipline is to gain a full understanding of what goes on in incumbents' home districts. As an example of the weakness of quantitative analysis in the study of district staff, I might cite Salisbury and Shepsle's (1981) investigation of incumbent "enterprises." In their study, they make conclusions and associations about Washington staff turnover and ambition but they do so without any individual-level data on the subjects (Hammond, 1984, p.293). In other words, they crunch the numbers without any suitable explanation or investigation into the causative factors of staff behavior. Again, I note the relevance of getting out into the field to find new variables for comparative analysis.

On the other hand, I would accept that the literature has improved. As Hammond notes, research in the past few decades has admitted the relevance of staff and begun to cast an eye towards the variations in their performance, but more work remains to be done as this research is still largely bound to DC staff. This leads to the final strength of contextual data; that it serves as fertile ground for the development of new theory about incumbents and staff.

### What I looked for: Concepts, Operationalizations and Questions to Ask

#### Concepts I am going to explore and build my theory around

The main concepts that I examined were incumbency advantage and the allocation and utilization of district staff. After I started this research I felt it important to add a third concept or dimension to the study; how incumbents and their staff interact with elite constituents. As was demonstrated in Chapter One, incumbency advantage is thoroughly studied by the discipline. Yet it has been my consistent claim that even while the concept has been thoroughly analyzed, it is missing certain elements, most notably congressional district staff. Developing the discipline's understanding of congressional district staff serves two purposes: First, it will contribute an understanding of who staff are, what they do, and what their incumbents want them to do. Second, following from that understanding, the discipline might utilize the knowledge gained from the study of staff to bring another variable into the discussion of incumbency advantage. An examination of the utilization of district staff leads to the third concept under study: the intersection of congressional incumbents, staff and elite constituents. It is with this third concept that the discipline's understanding of incumbency advantage might be most improved by this dissertation.

#### How I operationalized the concepts

It is my belief that to fully understand incumbency advantage, one must be able to see and measure district activity. Studies of incumbency advantage have traditionally focused largely on campaigns or budget allocations. In these cases the necessary variables are usually very obvious. Examples include the amount raised and spent in campaigns, the number of television ads, or the number of casework requests resolved.

These are fine measures but they are incomplete. This dissertation suggests that when someone desires to study incumbency advantage, that they should also include a measure of staff political activity in the district. This dissertation operationalized district political activity by looking at how district staff were allocated and utilized by the incumbents. I defined district political activity as being those things that district staff did to assist the incumbent's enterprise. This is a fairly broad concept. Included within it would be activities that 1) served the incumbent's constituents (in hopefully a favorable manner), 2) built the incumbents name recognition and/or the 3) perception that the incumbent was working hard for the district, 4) sought to interact with "opinion leaders" in the district, and 5) also sought out and countered any potential opposition that might arise.

These sub-concepts were then operationalized by looking at measurements such as: 1) how many staff had "field" assignments, 2) how much time the district staff spent out of the office, 3) who they talked to/met with, 4) what was the role of the RDSM, 5) how did the staff interact with the incumbent in completing these tasks, 6) how did the staff explain (and perceive) their responsibilities, and 7) did the office have any special techniques, forums, etc, for interacting with constituents. Once I had studied the concepts and operationalizations in each office, I could then suggest theories about district political activity based on each incumbents' differing variables; age, race, gender, party, seniority, and electoral status of each incumbent. For the most part, these variables are easily compared. Even the "electoral status" variable can be easily compared through an examination of previous electoral margins. With contextual research, one might further examine the electoral status of the incumbent based on his/her perception of vulnerability. In this example, electoral status might be operationalized through the sheer

numbers of district staff employed, or the types of district staff employed, or the staffs' political and quasi-political activities and daily responsibilities. These operationalizations appear to be much more subjective than simple measures such as age, seniority, race and gender, and from a simple coding perspective I would agree. However, after observing a number of different case studies, patterns of similarities and differences clearly arose. But clearly, this is exactly the kind of concept that requires contextual study because even the staff under study would have a difficult time agreeing on the definition and measurements of this concept.

How the concepts were measured: What questions were asked

Once I defined my concepts and operationalized the manner in which they would be studied, I began to compile the relevant list of questions and observations that would measure these variables. The items and questions that I came up with as I was doing research varied quite a bit for each category: incumbents, staff and elite constituents. What tied the questions together was the implicit aim of uncovering the goals, motivations and resources of incumbents and their staff, and the political environment of each district. As noted earlier, some of these questions are in the appendix. What follows are summaries of the most important questions that ultimately drove the research for each of the three research categories.

For incumbents the key questions centered on their perceptions of the political environments and job requirements that surrounded them. I wanted to pair these perceptions with questions about how the incumbents allocated their resources and spent their time and whether there appeared to be a connection. I also needed to see and understand the political opportunities and constraints that their districts provided and,

generally speaking, who were their friends and adversaries. I wanted to understand why they hired the specific individuals that staffed their district offices.

Questions for the staff centered on their employer's demands and instructions. In simple terms, I needed to understand what they did on a daily basis and what drove these activities. Was it their training, their staff boss or perhaps the perception of what might help their incumbent? Did they understand the political meaning of the tasks that they were performing? It was also important to understand individual staff motivations, how they got their jobs, and where they ultimately wanted to go. Just as I examined the incumbents' perceptions, it was equally important to understand staff's perceptions of the political environment, friends and foes.

Finally, with elite constituents in the primary case studies, I needed to understand what they thought about politics and the incumbent (i.e. are they a supporter?). I also needed to examine what kinds of contact they had with the incumbent and staff, how often that interaction took place, and whether they understood the meaning of these activities from the staff and incumbent's perspective. For all subjects, I wanted to understand if they comprehended the consequences of these behaviors, both for election outcomes and for the concept of representation.

In order to preserve the validity of the study, in all cases I attempted to observe the same concepts and operationalizations by paying attentions to these motivations and by talking about certain similar topics. Hopefully the extended discussion above of my methods and operationalizations and the inclusion of the relevant questions in the appendix provide the means to make replicate this study in the future.

### Why the House and not the Senate?

As a final issue in this chapter, I would like to explain why this dissertation studies incumbent members of the United States House of Representatives but makes nothing more than mention or quick comparisons with United States Senators. Members of the U.S. House of Representatives provide for much more suitable case studies on the variation and impact of district staff. For one, while all 435 House districts are of comparable population, senators represent states with widely divergent numbers of constituents. Along those lines, House seats tend to be much more homogenous in their political, economic and demographic characteristics. This facilitates House members and their staff having much more manageable levels of contact with their constituents. This is not to say that senators and their staff do not conduct constituent relations. Rather, because of the different size of states, senators are allocated more substantial resources to run their federal “enterprises”, with some senators receiving substantially larger allocations. Hence, Senate offices lack the comparability found between House offices. Another difference is reflected in the number and importance of tasks that must be performed by said staff. One can easily imagine that the political power and relevance of the state directors for senators from California and Wyoming are not in the same ballpark, to mention nothing of the sheer difference in numbers of staff that would work in each state. On the other hand, all 435 District Directors confront roughly the same number of constituents with relatively homogenous political, economic and demographic dilemmas to resolve.

A second difference lies in the fact that there are fewer Senate elections and that these elections experience a greater fluctuation in the quality and types of candidates and

issues. Furthermore, individual Senate elections tend to be more idiosyncratic with greater levels of activity by interest groups and national parties than exist in House races (Jacobson, 1997). This is increasingly the case with the growing utilization of soft money at the congressional level. It is easier and more cost effective to raise and distribute soft dollar resources for an entire state than for a specific congressional district. Not to mention that there are fewer races that will actually be targeted by the national parties from election to election.

The third factor is the different set of attitudes and behaviors that comport with being a senator or a representative. It has been found that senators function with “cyclical” periods of attention to legislation and their districts (Taggart and Durant, 1985; Fenno’s books on US Senators) and that senators and their staff devote proportionally less time to casework activity than do representatives and their staff (Breslin, 1977; Johannes, 1984). I have directly witnessed this evolution in my current job working for a United States Senator. Where in the initial period the senator can work on policy interests with little regard for reelection prospects six years hence, the House member must immediately begin to raise resources and posture on the correct issues to attain reelection just 18 to 20 months away. Members of the House are basically stuck in a permanent campaign mode. As my research investigated the political tasks of staff (both House and Senate), there was ample evidence to demonstrate the impact of the different election cycles on staff activity and motivations. While the “permanent” campaign may initially appear to be a disadvantage, such efforts also bring perks to the incumbent House members who are closer to their constituencies than the senators (i.e. more contact/service/familiarity). As was noted in the previous paragraph, House members and their staff perform more work



at the local level, and because their constituencies are smaller and more homogenous it is much easier for representatives to get a feel for the needs of their constituents. It might also be argued that House electoral outcomes are more affected by these same constituent activities.

Finally, the regularity of proximity to their constituencies allows House incumbents to regularly scout their opposition (and deter it) in a way that senators would be hard-pressed to match. The fact that representatives are closer to their constituents than are senators may be a substantial determinant of the fact that incumbent representatives are much less likely to confront quality challengers than are senators (as was discussed in Chapter One). Given that House incumbents confront lower quality challengers, it should not be surprising that the literature has found that House elections receive lower levels of media coverage and campaign expenditures. Perhaps these outcomes are much more tied to district staff and the activities that they perform than the literature realizes. All of these factors tie into perhaps what is the clearest difference between the representatives and the senators; incumbent House members enjoy a more substantial incumbency advantage than do senators. From 1952 to 1992, roughly eighty percent of incumbent senators were re-elected. The comparable figure for representatives was ninety percent (Loomis, 1998, p63). Anecdotally, nearly as many incumbent senators as representatives were defeated in the 2000 elections. Each of the above examples contributes to the fact that House incumbents rarely lose.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed and justified the methodology that was utilized in this dissertation's investigation of congressional district staff. The purpose of the observational method of research is to "inform, enrich, and guide theories of politics" (Fenno, 1990, p114). The concepts and measurements of House incumbents, their district staff, and their interactions with elite constituents will help to further "inform, enrich, and guide" theories of legislative staff and incumbency advantage. The next chapter will thoroughly examine congressional district staff. It will propose a framework to understand who they are, what they do in their jobs representing members of the US House of Representatives, and why some of them choose to work for politicians in the first place. This contextual understanding will then be useful in understanding how district staff members impact representation and the outcome of congressional elections.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Who are District Staff?**

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine congressional district staff and understand the ways in which they are allocated and utilized to assist in the reelection of incumbent members of the US House of Representatives. Through their interactions with elite constituents, district staff members both enhance and detract from the representative purpose of their district offices. This chapter will begin to examine the roles and motivations of congressional district staff in pursuing these representational and electoral functions. It will propose a framework to understand who they are, what they do in their jobs representing members of the U.S. House of Representatives, and why they choose to work for these politicians. This chapter will examine district staff from three different focal points. It will examine the roles and functions of individual staff members. It will also detail the hierarchy that exists between the various staff and incumbents. Finally, this chapter will begin to look at the relationships that exist between staff, incumbents and constituents.

#### **Who are district staff?**

##### **Staff are part of the district enterprise**

While there is no one common set of motivations or role descriptions for district staff, loyalty to their incumbent employers is perhaps the most consistent unifying depiction of district staff. This chapter, in fact this whole dissertation, is built on the assumption that all district staff are motivated in large part out of a desire to serve and promote the incumbent enterprise. Previous literature confirms the importance of

promoting the ‘owner’ of the congressional “small business” (Loomis, 1979; Salisbury and Shepsle, 1981). When asked what was the purpose of their job, a majority of the staff replied “to get the boss re-elected.” This chapter will make clear, however, that some district staff have mixed motives and varying interpretations of the means and ends of their job requirements.

As was noted in Chapter Two, the universe of this dissertation is the personal staff of incumbent members of the United States House of Representatives who work in the home district offices. This universe does not include personal staff from Washington, committee staff or other institutional support staff. As opposed to the district staff, these latter three categories have received attention from previous academic inquiries. While these studies have adequately dealt with the roles and motivations of said staff, this dissertation maintains that district staffs are qualitatively different in their behaviors. As such, they demand their own classifications.

#### Fuzzy titles

Moving from district office to district office, one finds that job titles quickly shift. Unlike Washington, where office positions such as Chief of Staff and Legislative Director carry clear connotations of office function, titles in the district office are of much less utility in determining who does what. While the titles varied, there were clearly functional differences that reflected similar hierarchies in each office. Upon entering each district office, one of my initial goals was to acquire the staff job titles, but also to ask them individually about their actual function and position in the office. From these discussions, I was able to establish several distinct groups that exist in most district staff operations. Bear in mind, however, that these relationships and titles will vary from

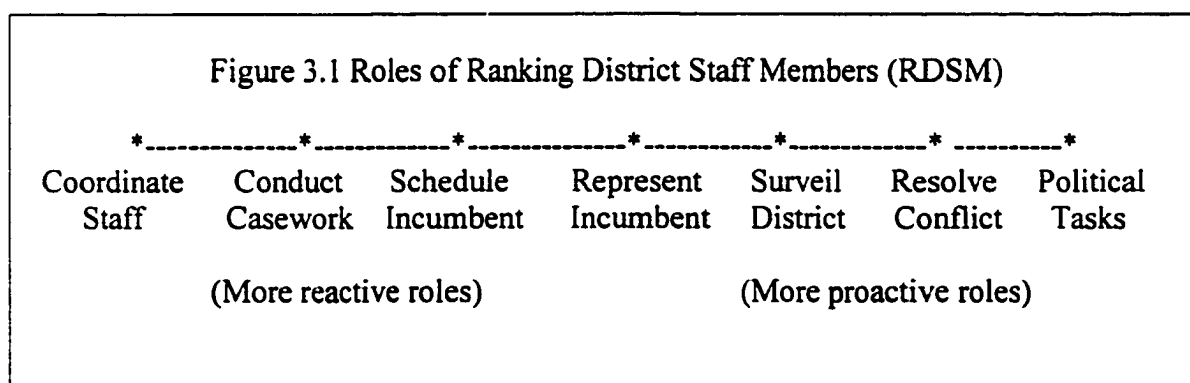
office to office. Furthermore, it is difficult to make historical comparison based on these positions because there was no tracking of jobs or titles by Congress until the early 1980s (Hammond, 1984, p.303).

### The Ranking District Staff Member (RDSM)

Macartney suggests that the top district aide to politicians often acts as their “alter ego”; sharing their offices, appointments and grasp on power (1982, p.76). Yet, given the variety of ways in which incumbents distribute power between their Washington and district offices, it is often difficult to discern who is ‘in charge’ in the district. There is no one universal scenario where a specific individual(s) exercise power. In Washington, one will most commonly find the incumbent’s chief aide to be the Chief of Staff (COS) or the Administrative Assistant (AA). In most Washington offices, these terms tend to be interchangeable. Back home, the District Director (DD) is usually the person ‘in charge’. If only it were always so simple. The reality, however, is that incumbents dole out power and decision-making authority in widely divergent manners. While it is still the case that COS’s are most commonly the chief aides, in Washington and in the district, there are an increasing number of incumbents who have shifted power to their chief district aides, sometimes retaining their titles of COS, and other times adding to the confusion by calling them DDs. To clarify the hierarchical situations in the district, I think it necessary to first identify the district staff member that exercises the most hierarchical power, the Ranking District Staff Member (RDSM). Once that individual has been identified, it is useful to determine what kind of decision-making authority he or she has vis-à-vis the ranking staffer in Washington. Chapter Four will offer some generalizations about why incumbents utilize different systems of hierarchy. Before that discussion of power and

office hierarchy, it would be useful to examine each of the categories of district staff and their basic roles in the enterprise.

As was just implied, not all RDSMs exercise the same levels of activity or decision-making power. Even with the limited sample of this dissertation, it is eminently clear that incumbents place varying levels of trust in the political abilities of their district staff, and especially their key district staffer, the RDSM. The following discussion details the basic tasks performed by RDSMs listed in order from the least active or powerful job functions to the most active. Figure 3.1 provides a basic conceptualization of the range in job functions of the RDSM. While not comprehensive, it does provide a thorough range in activities.



The most basic function of the RDSM is to coordinate the district staff. In the words of Member B, his RDSM “handles the administration of the office.” Based on comments by both B and his RDSM, as well as through interviews with subordinate staff, it was apparent that a substantial portion of her time was devoted to basic administrative tasks and the supervision of younger staff members. Throughout my interview with her, the RDSM repeatedly mentioned the amount of time she spent dealing with staff salaries, working conditions and requirements imposed by the Fair Labor Standards Act in

particular. No other RDSM was so entrenched in the minutiae of office management. In fact, most other offices employ a subordinate assistant to the RDSM who carries the title and duties of Office Manager (see below). Nevertheless, B's RDSM serves a vital function in his enterprise. In the words of a fellow district staff member, she "holds it all together" allowing B and the district staff to focus on their own individual job functions. Another limited RDSM can be found in C's district office. To be fair, the RDSM in C's office has truly been an acting executive for nearly two years and carried the title of "Special Assistant". His seven subordinate staffers all shared the simple title of "Staff Assistant."

Relatively few RDSMs perform constituent service (aka casework). Once again indicative of the relatively junior role played by B's RDSM is the fact that a significant portion of her job was devoted to casework. She estimated that between one-quarter and one-half of her time was devoted to this task. Only I's RDSM spent a larger portion of the job on casework (50% in her instance). Spending time on individual casework assistance is argued to be a routine job function as compared to the more substantial projects and opportunities for outreach that other RDSMs pursue. This argument is made because RDSM's have the ability to have a larger representational and electoral impact through other types of behaviors.

While virtually all offices have a full time scheduler, the RDSM invariably has some involvement in this portion of the incumbent enterprise.<sup>1</sup> From the minimal decisions of who is responsible for transporting the incumbent around the district to strategic

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, incumbents commonly employ two schedulers; one for their Washington schedule and one for their district schedule. Given the large numbers of incumbents who now live in their home districts, or at least travel there 30-40 weekends per year, it became logical to devote substantial office resources to ensuring that incumbents were going to all the places they needed to be going in both of their 'homes'.

decisions about the location and message of incumbent events throughout a month-long recess period during an election season, RDSMs usually have some level of involvement in the planning process. As such, the scheduling function provides an excellent microcosm to analyze the position of the RDSM in the incumbent's enterprise. I's RDSM is found at the relatively weak end of the continuum, as she is merely responsible for the acquisition, listing and scheduling of all invitations. In short, she is the office scheduler. At the other end of the spectrum, A's RDSM is involved in the scheduling process only at the strategic end, suggesting groups or geographic areas that are in need of attention from the incumbent or staff and leaving the process of scheduling to other staff.

Moving outside of office-based functions, some RDSMs carry out representative roles for the absent incumbent. The RDSM is usually the staff member most entrusted with delivering a speech, accepting an award, overseeing a politically sensitive meeting, etc., but there is variation within offices. As with scheduling, one can also construct a continuum of authority for this job function. At the most limited end of the continuum the RDSM would be unwilling to even accept an invitation for the incumbent. I's office most closely approximates this position, where she was clearly uncomfortable with the notion of representing the incumbent at public events. In her words, it would be "inappropriate" for her to try and represent the absent incumbent. B's RDSM represents only a slightly more proactive position in that she on occasion would fill invitations that B had accepted but wasn't able to attend but that she "would never speak for B." Occupying a more moderate position on this continuum would be C's office where his acting RDSM regularly attended events in C's place and on occasion would read the



incumbent's prepared remarks. At the proactive end of the continuum, A's RDSM frequently was invited to and attended events in his capacity as A's chief assistant. In the case of A and D, the RDSM is acting comfortably as a surrogate for the absent incumbent. In the other three cases mentioned here, either the incumbent is uncomfortable with the notion of having a surrogate, or merely with having their federal staff carry out that role.

Incumbents who are comfortable with their RDSMs performing surrogate roles will also likely expect their top district aides to help with more sophisticated surveillance. In the more limited role, here best seen again in the case of I, the RDSM's surveillance responsibilities are limited to nothing more than clipping newspapers and recording media coverage of the incumbent, with the occasional tallying of constituent reaction or street gossip. Again at the other end of the spectrum, the RDSM from A or D's enterprise is more fully expected to garner political information from journalists, local elected officials, constituent supporters, party leaders, etc. Incumbents with empowered aides expect them to produce much more valuable political intelligence.

Possessing information is only half of the equation. RDSMs also vary in their authority to resolve situations that are brought in to their offices or that their surveillance uncovers. It is hard to imagine I's RDSM maneuvering to resolve important disputes involving constituents or political players. As was mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is unlikely that I's RDSM would even be more than roughly acquainted with such delicate situations. G's RDSM represents a more moderate position on this power/resolution continuum. In this case, he noted that on delicate issues, the general procedure is that constituents "call G, he sends me, then I report back to him, then it gets

taken care of.” In this sense, G’s RDSM acts as an intermediary between the incumbent and his constituents. The most active RDSMs have the information and the authority to resolve disputes with little involvement of the incumbent or Washington staff. As H’s RDSM explained it, he does “outreach” and “sets up meetings” with interested or complaining constituents and then takes care of the problems himself. This district aide noted that he only involved the incumbent when it was an abnormally delicate or involved situation.

The tasks listed above and shown in figure 3.1 mostly reflect the official federal responsibilities of the RDSM. There are other political and campaign functions that some RDSMs conduct that go beyond this minimal legalist job description. The most proactive RDSMs are also involved in some elements of the incumbents’ re-election campaigns. While these are not official federal tasks, some RDSMs are involved in strategic decision-making, fund-raising, and representing the incumbent with affiliated and partisan organizations. This level of activism by federal staff was not common to district offices. Only the most proactive of the incumbents from these case studies seemed to utilize their district staff in such a fashion. Discussions later in this chapter and in Chapter Five will more fully investigate these more expansive powers. Suffice it to say here that incumbents like A and D tend to fully integrate their RDSMs into their entire enterprise, bridging their federal and campaign entities, as well as serving as a link between the incumbent and the important base communities of their geographic or reelection constituencies. As will be seen in Chapter Five, these empowered and proactive staffers can be important surrogates for the incumbents that grant them leeway to pursue multiple political goals simultaneously.

I noted two interesting variables in this equation of how much power incumbents granted to their RDSMs. The first variable was the RDSMs personal relationship with the incumbent. Staffs who were long time friends of the incumbent tended to have more empowered positions relative to other RDSMs. In this case, G and H's RDSMs clearly were able to derive this long-term trust and translate it into the ability to make political decisions in the office. Simple longevity in the relationship is not likely to be sufficient in this power equation, however. For example, B's RDSM was a long-time friend and employee of B. In this case, however, her employment in his law firm and state legislature stamped her as a clear subordinate early in her tenure with B, a hierarchical relationship that functioned for decades in the same manner. The relationship variable also applies to RDSMs who are hired as district staff members without a pre-existing personal relationship. In this case, it appears that individuals who are hired young, or with limited experience (best seen in the case of C's RDSM), are unlikely to evolve to the status of RDSMs who are hired because of their political clout or connections (best seen in the A's office). The latter employees are often hired almost as "semi-incumbents".

The other variable was the staffer's employment status. I found that this status is not necessarily descriptive of the RDSM status on the continuum in Figure 3.1. Both G and H employ part-time RDSMs who work between twenty and thirty hours per week. The initial image provided by this explanation is that surely these individuals must tend to be on the more limited and reactive side of the continuum. That turned out to not be the case. In fact, G and H's RDSMs were among the more empowered district staff that I encountered. It was precisely because these two individuals held part-time elective

offices and had familiarity with the personalities and issues of the district that made them attractive to the two incumbents.

### Field Representatives

The second group of district staff is a diverse collection of individuals commonly holding the job title of Field Representative. Just as with the RDSMs, however, there is substantial variation in both the titles and functions of this category of district staff. Alternative labels to Field Representative include Staff Assistant, Special Assistant, Outreach Coordinator, and numerous other potential titles. For the purposes of this dissertation I will refer to all district staff in this second category as either Field Representatives or occasionally as ‘interactors’. These titles reflect the major job characteristic of this layer of district staff. What separates them from other staff is that the field representatives tend to spend a substantial portion of their job interacting with constituents, both individually and in groups, in settings outside of the district office. The remaining staff members, who will be discussed below, tend to have fewer opportunities to interact with constituents and do less proactive work for the incumbent.

Just as with the RDSM, the job description of the field representative varies from office to office. Virtually all field representatives conduct at least some casework. Casework is here defined as the one-on-one assistance that staff members provide to individuals or groups of constituents. Some typical items of casework include small business loans, immigration concerns, entitlement payments, etc. It is perhaps erroneous, however, to suggest that there is a “typical” casework issue. Given the expansion of federal programs and statutes covering the incumbents’ constituents, it is not surprising that the constituents have encountered more and more regulatory mistakes, miscues and

oversights. What is more, this casework assistance does not need to be of a federal nature. Discussion below will demonstrate that quite often constituents will request that congressional staff provide them with assistance on municipal, county, state, or even personal matters. Field representatives dedicate varying amounts of time to casework assistance. At one end of the extreme, field representatives in B's district offices rarely venture outside of the offices. These staffers probably spend in excess of three-quarters of their time in their offices receiving cases, inquiring about the facts of the cases, and interacting in attempts to resolve the cases. At the other end of the extreme, the four field representatives from F's office spend in excess of three-quarters of their time out in the field attending meetings, talking to constituents, observing the community, all the while generating new casework requests that the two office-bound caseworkers then deal with. I would note that incumbents B and F seemed to be outliers in the pool of offices under study. Most of the offices tended toward a situation where field representatives spent a roughly equal amount of time out in the "field" and in the office working on cases. It is important to reiterate, however, that there is substantial variation in what field representatives do on a daily basis.

There is also substantial variation in the numbers of field representatives each incumbent utilizes in district offices. As incumbents are free to hire their own staff and make their own allocation decisions with their office budgets, they can choose to spend substantial resources hiring a highly effective RDSM, leaving fewer budgetary dollars to finance salaries for field representatives or other office staff. Alternatively, an incumbent might choose to hire a highly qualified press secretary, or spread the resources amongst a number of experienced caseworkers. The open budget allows the incumbent to choose

from a wide variety of potential employee mixes. In terms of the field representatives, I observed offices that ranged from having virtually no field representatives (Incumbent I) to an office that employed four field representatives whose simple job task was to create casework requests for the two caseworkers that remained in the office (Incumbent F). Chapter Four will propose a framework from which we might better understand how or why incumbents hire and utilize district staff for different situations.

I observed participation by field representatives on both the administrative and scheduling functions mentioned under the RDSM category. I would note, however, that their participation in both of these tasks was limited in time and content. For both reactive and proactive offices, it appears that field representatives tend to spend more time on the casework function than either on scheduling or administrative responsibilities.

In the more proactive offices, field representatives could be found carrying out the representative/surrogate and surveillance roles. It seemed to follow logically that in offices where the RDSM was empowered to be politically active on behalf of the absent incumbent that he/she would utilize the field representatives to assist in this task. In this matter, incumbent A's field representatives provide an excellent illustration.<sup>2</sup> The DD and the three field representatives in A's office are all on the proactive side of staff functions, spending substantial portions of their job time out of the office interacting with constituents, looking for new opportunities for their boss. In being proactive, they were

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<sup>2</sup> In A's case, the District Director (DD) is actually not the RDSM, but rather the "day-to-day" manager of the district field staff and caseworkers. The Chief of Staff (COS) in this office spends three weeks per month in the district office. In the words of the DD, the COS acts as the "hammer" pursuing "district" matters, "putting out fires" and running the entire enterprise. Because he is not the ranking staffer, the DD would have to be considered something of a hybrid between the RDSM and the field representatives in A's office.

often called upon to represent the incumbent at award ceremonies, deliver prepared remarks, and make honorary commendations for schoolteachers and successful business owners and on and on. While they were performing these proactive tasks, the staff members were expected to acquire new problems in which the office could assist, new names of potential supporters (or even opponents) and the latest in political gossip from the field.

Alternatively, nearly all of the field representatives of incumbents B and I appeared to be operating on different job descriptions. Following the lead of their RDSMs, these staffs were largely confined to the casework, administrative, and scheduling functions described above. Occasionally, these staff might venture forth to spend a day per month in a remote city of the district doing office hours, making themselves available to local constituents. The intensity with which they sought these opportunities, the degree to which they advertised their resources and the times in which they proactively solicited further casework requests were all substantially less than in proactive offices such as A's enterprise. Finally, I would note that even in proactive offices such as incumbent A, did I rarely observe field representatives conducting the either conflict resolution or more political tasks discussed in Figure 3.1. While it is likely that field representatives are party to the discovery and resolution of complex district issues, none occurred during my observations.

What's explains the difference between the RDSM and the Field Representative?

The obvious answer to this question is that the RDSM is in charge of the office hierarchy. The more subtle answer to the question is reflected in what I observed to be different demands placed upon the occupants of the two different jobs. As the previous

paragraph suggested, whether the office tends to be reactive or proactive in its mission, there appears to be some overlap in what the RDSM and the field representatives do in their jobs. While RDSMs and field representatives have different job responsibilities, they are similar in that they are both the ‘interactors’ of the office, dealing with constituents and groups on a larger scale than the other district staff. Ultimately, however, I observed there to be different daily motivations driving these two sets of district staff.

For the RDSM, the demands of their job tend to be more heavily determined by their incumbent’s needs and the political environments they occupy. For example, in many districts, especially the ones that tend to be more homogenous, there tends to be a single large industry or institution that demands special attention. Each of the four primary case studies provides excellent examples of an employer or institution that demands special attention from the RDSM. In the case of A it is three military bases, for C there is a large state university, D’s district includes the state capitol and most of the state’s executive branch employees, and for B, there are a series of high-tech companies. In each of these cases, with the clear exception of B, the RDSM spent a disproportionate amount of time on that primary district institution. The military base, university and state capitol all provide a myriad of individual casework items, budget requests, state and federal regulatory issues, and most simply, opportunities for political success (or failure). The presence of such large interests also poses representational opportunities and dilemmas that will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

Occasionally field representatives might also be assigned a narrow set of casework responsibilities, like veteran’s issues or immigration. Generally, field representatives



who are assigned such responsibilities have additional issue or geographic areas of representation. This stands in contrast to the RDSM who is much more heavily attuned to the military base, state university or state capitol. I would also note that only RDSM's on the extremely limited or reactive end of the continuum would have casework responsibilities. B's RDSM had some casework responsibilities to accompany her largely administrative portfolio and C's acting RDSM had to pick up some casework simply because they were shorthanded two staff.<sup>3</sup>

While the kDSM is highly constrained in a focus on the primary institution, the field representatives tend to find themselves pulled in many different directions on a daily basis. To start, their jobs are much more individually based as they are dealing largely with the cases and problems of individual constituents. Not only are these cases widely divergent in their subject matter, they also tend to be of a much smaller nature than projects usually handled by the RDSMs. For example, in C's district, one of the field representatives who worked in the town with the state university spent nearly half of her casework time on immigration issues relevant largely to the university. The RDSM, on the other hand, was involved, although peripherally, in several large research projects to bring federal funding to the university. Clearly the work of the two staff is of a different magnitude and purpose. The field representatives are also different when they find themselves out in the "field" conducting the surrogate and surveillance functions. As noted above, RDSMs also perform this function. The difference is that when RDSMs perform this function it tends to be more targeted in nature; they go to a specific town or

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<sup>3</sup> As C's 'acting' RDSM, this individual felt his job to be "ever-changing." In this role as "Special Assistant", he felt that his main requirement was to "keep it flowing for the member of Congress." In order to keep things "flowing" this RDSM carried out an odd mixture of meetings, casework, campaign and

a specific meeting for a specific purpose. For field representatives, on the other hand, their surveillance is just like their casework, it tends to be more generic and one-on-one. They go to more, and smaller meetings, to discover smaller amounts of political intelligence. This is not to shortchange them, however, in the aggregate their “small” amount of work is as valuable to the incumbent’s enterprise as are the relatively larger works performed by the RDSMs.

Another difference between the RDSM, the field representatives, and the other staff lies in their involvement on the “other side” of the incumbent enterprise: the campaign. The RDSMs tend to have a larger role in the planning and conduct of the incumbent’s campaigns. Substantial involvement in the campaign side by the RDSM was clearly observed in incumbent A and D’s office even outside of the election year. In each of these cases, the RDSM was traveling with the incumbent to out-of-state political events, attending and/or planning fund-raising events for their incumbent or other candidates that their incumbent was supporting, and doing the many other tasks that are part of the “permanent campaign.” While the connection was not quite as continuous or clear in C’s office, it was interesting to discover that his acting RDSM had served as his campaign manager in the previous election and was gearing up to resume the role at the time of this research. I did not observe B’s RDSM in this role, and given that B had not had a competitive election in recent years, I thought it unlikely that his RDSM has had more than token campaign roles.

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whatever other tasks arose on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. In short, I found him to be atypical because of his “acting” status.

### Other district staff

Besides, RDSMs, DDs and field representatives, there are a number of other district staff that should at least be recognized for the roles they play in the incumbent enterprises. As was noted in Chapter Two, however, these staff members are less central to the observations of this dissertation for a variety of reasons. The most commonly discussed group of staff other than those mentioned above are the press secretaries. The press secretary is responsible for building and maintaining relationships with journalists, both in the district and in the national press, to ensure that the incumbent's activities are loudly broadcast to his or her constituents and other potential campaign supporters. The proliferation of these individuals in Washington offices has been paralleled by an increase in the amount of academic attention paid to them over the past two decades. Numerous works by have demonstrated the important role that press secretaries play for incumbents.<sup>4</sup> While the majority of press secretaries tend to work exclusively from the Washington offices, significant numbers of them travel back to the district for at least several weeks per year, and a not insignificant number of them work there for even longer periods of time. Based on my observations, I would hypothesize that the presence of the press secretary in the district is determined by the electoral vulnerability of the incumbent, and perhaps slightly influenced by their individual styles. In the case of incumbent C, the press secretary was reassigned to the district office for what appeared to be two distinct reasons. First, C was confronting a rematch with an opponent who had given him his first real election test in over a decade. Second, the press secretary was fairly new to the office and needed to establish relationships with the journalists of the district. Conversely, prior to taking a job in politics, D's press secretary had spent a

number of years producing a television show for the media market that was almost exactly D's congressional district. Her credentials and contacts allowed her to move the operation directly to Washington and maintain her contacts by phone. This press secretary is probably typical in that she spends eighty percent of the year in Washington, returning to the district only during extended recesses or work periods so that she can be with the incumbent. In both cases, the press secretary's main responsibility is to ensure that the incumbent receives positive press coverage. Personal relationships with journalists can be helpful in the creation and maintenance of positive press coverage.

Paralleling the increase in the number of press secretaries has also been an observable increase in the number of schedulers employed by incumbents. The increased amount of travel by incumbents, and the proliferation of invitations, as well as Washington commitments that they have received certainly have caused incumbents to dedicate increased staff attention to the task of scheduling their time. Further demonstrating the increased importance of this task has been the fact that many incumbents now have both Washington and district schedulers to ensure that their travel is efficient.<sup>5</sup> Not so ironically, schedulers seem to be the staffers whom often have the most contact with the incumbent.

As members of Congress increased their legislative budgets to cope with the increased constituent demand created by New Deal and Great Society spending (see Fiorina!), caseworkers became the largest group of district staff, and perhaps, the largest

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<sup>4</sup> See especially Cook (1989) and Hess (1982).

<sup>5</sup> It was also quite evident from my observations that virtually all district staff, from caseworkers to field representatives to ranking members, had at least some role in the scheduling process. Again, this is a reflection of the increased travel on the part of the incumbent. It was rare that senior staff devoted much time to scheduling (only observed with incumbent I), but I did observe scheduling by committee with input from all staff (D's office).

group of all legislative staff. As was noted above, field representatives tend to have some political responsibilities that take them outside of the office to interact with constituents. By definition, caseworkers are largely office-bound and spend their days accumulating and resolving individual constituent problems that are presented to them either by constituents coming in to the office or by work generated by the incumbent and other staff.<sup>6</sup> It was rare to find an office that employed such a stark division in staff responsibilities. Of all the offices that I observed, only F maintained such a clear split between her four field representatives, who each spent only one day per week in the office, and her two caseworkers, who never left the office. Once caseworkers obtain the necessary information from the constituents, their basic purpose is to navigate through local, state and federal bureaucracies to deduce whether the constituent's problem can be rectified. At that point there is often a philosophical split between offices. Some incumbents will direct their staff to go to great lengths to actually resolve cases for their constituents. Others take a different philosophical interpretation of their role as public servants and direct their staff merely to provide information for the constituents to help themselves navigate through the system. A large majority of the observed cases preferred the former style to the latter.

The remaining three staff types can be found in every office and their roles are fairly self-explanatory. In offices where the RDSM does not want to be burdened with administrative duties, as in D's case, one can often find an office manager who takes care of payroll, benefits, the purchase of office supplies and any other projects as they arise. Quite often the office manager will also occupy the role of receptionist. Some

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<sup>6</sup> One should note that most field representatives have at least some casework responsibilities and that there are some individuals that spend in excess of ¼ of their time in the district offices performing tasks identical

incumbents, as in the case of incumbent B, also retain a personal assistant who usually works part-time and will drive or run errands for the incumbent when he or she is at home. Finally, interns are a staple of virtually every congressional office, with more of them found in districts with large collegiate populations. On the rare occasion where incumbents have excess funds in the budget and a need for additional labor, interns might be made part-time employees. Whether paid, or un-paid, full or part-time, all of these staffers should be considered part of the incumbent's enterprise.

#### Beware of titles

While the previous discussion appears to suggest that there is a clear procession of power from RDSM down to intern in congressional district offices, one should be careful in assuming that this hierarchy can be found in every enterprise. Many staffers with some of the lesser job titles are in fact much more political than their titles suggest. I found this to especially be the case for the long-serving staffers. For example, B's personal assistant/driver is a long time friend of the incumbent. Given that B appears to have a relatively weak district staff and no clear set of advisers, it is likely that this staffer plays a key advisory and support role for the incumbent during their long drives throughout the district. While most incumbents are likely to observe the hierarchal relationships provided by job titles, it is clear from B's examples that there will be some that will buck that trend and look for advice farther down the office chart. It was also clear in the case of B's caseworkers and field representatives, of whom many were with him for the entirety of his congressional career, that some staff are relatively less controlled by office hierarchy. B explained to me that he gave much less thought to the work that the more experienced staff were doing, while the two new hires, both recent

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to caseworkers. Conversely, caseworkers in some offices perform tasks similar to the field representatives.

college graduates, were much more likely to receive frequent calls from his RDSM and were not “cut loose” like the “old gals.” There is clearly variation in the authority of individual staffers with the same job titles.

Individual district staff members can, on occasion, buck the office hierarchy through the overall commitment to the incumbent’s enterprise. Whether it be a willingness to cart the incumbent across the district (like B’s assistant) or long after-work hours put in either on political campaigns or interacting with community and political groups, it appeared to me that staff could earn the equivalent of “extra credit” by proving their value to the incumbent. Personal experience and interest also can increase the value of district staff. For example, staffers who had experience or interest with a particular issue area (examples include military, education, housing agencies, etc.) or staffers who previously held elective office tended to be more valued by incumbents and granted greater levels of access to the incumbent and the COS. In short, I would conclude that who staff “are” depends on what they bring to the job. It also depends on where their office is located. Staff members that work in the remote reaches of large geographic districts tend to have less of a role in the incumbent’s enterprise. This was most stark in comparing the four offices of B to the single office of D.

#### The extended enterprise: Campaign, Cabinet and Surrogate

Observations of the incumbents in their home districts suggest that our understanding of the enterprise needs to be widened even further than current and former congressional staff. Besides the obvious groups of staff, family and friends, the district enterprise properly includes campaign staff, a kitchen cabinet, and other individuals who perform “political” services for the incumbent.

While there is common discussion of the permanent campaign, we have not yet reached the point where incumbents keep fully staffed campaigns running for their entire two-year cycle. It is becoming more common, however, for them to keep a fundraiser or administrative person fully employed for that period. As will be seen below, federal district staff members are also permitted to assist in the incumbent's reelection campaigns, often even serving as the incumbent's chief fundraiser (as in the case of D's RDSM or A's DD).<sup>7</sup> Even with these political 'designees', political uncertainty and the quest for larger campaign coffers has caused more and more incumbents to employ campaign staff throughout their two-year cycle. While these staff are not allowed to work in the federal office an examination of incumbent's schedules and an observation of their behavior found numerous examples of campaign staff, usually fund-raisers, sprinkled throughout their district activities. Other incumbents freely transfer campaign and federal staff between their political worlds. C's RDSM served as his campaign manager in the previous two elections, each time making the transition back to the federal office. As will be discussed below and in the next chapter, staff who can cross into both worlds are invaluable to the incumbents as they meet whole new worlds of political specialists, constituents and potential supporters who can assist the incumbent's enterprise in vastly different manners on both sides of the federal/campaign split. On this point, C's RDSM noted that his campaign experience was extremely useful in preparing him for the next two-year cycle because of the new relationships that he was able to form. Clearly the discipline must expand its conception of the enterprise to include staff in both the federal and the campaign worlds.

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<sup>7</sup> These joint duties are perfectly legal as long as the federal employees perform the campaign work on personal time or take a leave or part-time status and are compensated by the campaign. Despite all the



Some incumbent enterprises should be defined as including a “kitchen cabinet,” a collection of informal advisers that serve a number of functions. The basic cabinet function is to be a political sounding board, but some cabinet members help with political surveillance, fundraising, and strategic planning. The “cabinet” is an amorphous category of advisers. I found that incumbents who have a stronger “personal” style, which I will explain in Chapter Four, tend to have relatively fewer formal and informal advisory structures than other incumbents. Incumbent C is an illustration of this type of individual. He has identified a few friends, selected because of their expertise on certain issues or geographic areas, that he calls individually when he has a question. This group should not be thought of as a typical “kitchen cabinet” that gives political advice. At the other extreme is D’s key advisory body, commonly known by political players in her district as “D”2. This group consists of five long-time friends who directed her transition to office after her initial election and continued to give input on large strategic issues. “D”2 is also not a typical “kitchen cabinet.” By definition, a traditional “kitchen cabinet” is a select group of friends/ advisers that enjoy continued and personal access to the incumbent and high-ranking staff. Because of the sensitive and private nature of these advisers, incumbents were reluctant to include me in these meetings or admit that they were reliant upon these groups. Clearly they exist, albeit in different forms and levels of importance. Fortunately, I was able to interview several elite constituents that staff or incumbents confirmed were key advisory figures. As opposed to the elite constituents mentioned above that incumbent C calls upon for specific issue advice, the “cabinet” adviser tends to have more regular contact with the incumbent, and provides political advice on the issues and surveillance on the district. In the case of B’s key fund-raiser

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regulations, this is clearly a murky gray area.

and long-time friend, the usual pattern was for B to send the constituent a fax of speeches, ideas and legislative proposals to mull it over and get the sense of support from his “circle of friends.” This constituent had the ability to contact the incumbent at any time and generally talked to him on a weekly basis. This individual is much more clearly a part of B’s enterprise than virtually all of the incumbent’s federal staff. “Kitchen Cabinet” members are also vital to the incumbents’ fundraising activities. In the case of B’s constituent above, this individual was responsible for raising a substantial portion of the incumbent’s in-district individual contributions. The constituent relayed to me that four or five times a year he invites several different groups of friends to his cabin to fish, talk politics and raise money for B. Additionally, one of the “D”2 members served for a time as D’s fund-raising director on the campaign staff.

The most powerful “cabinets” will provide incumbents with more formal and regular assessments of political strategy. Here again, “D”2 is an illustration of a highly formalized “cabinet.” In her case, this group of advisers were vital in making her a viable candidate for office, assisting her in an extremely competitive primary and general election, managing the transition team for her first federal staff, and giving her strategic advice on her career and national politics. It occurs to me that “D”2 is a rare advisory structure for a freshman legislator.<sup>8</sup> It also occurs that it might be possible for these “cabinet” advisers to have a measure of authority over district staff that I did not observe in these four primary cases. While unlikely, it does seem possible that friends of the

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<sup>8</sup> Logically comparing senior legislators to the freshmen struggling to get that first reelection, I thought that there probably exists an interesting paradox of “kitchen cabinets”; while it is the freshmen that could probably make greater use of their advice, it is more likely that the senior members will have them. Ah, the perks of seniority!

incumbent could be tasked important political responsibilities or leadership roles that casual observation would not detect.

The final additions to the extended enterprise are surrogates who perform “political” services when the incumbent feels that his or her staff members are not suitable or qualified for the occasion. An example of the former situation was encountered at an awards dinner where B couldn’t make the invitation, so he delegated the reading of his remarks to a local attorney and supporter, instead of his long-time aide in that city. The federal staff person appeared later by telephone to answer questions. In this case, B probably concluded that his aide, while well known in the area, did not have the savvy to deliver the remarks, so he used a surrogate to deliver the proper image and in typical fashion provided for a district staffer to clean up the nuts and bolts. Sometimes a “suitable” addition to the enterprise is not someone who has savvy or valuable skills but instead, provides an important political connection. In one observed case, the wife of a prominent state legislator served as C’s “person” or contact in that county. Surrogates are also used in situations where the staffs are not qualified to assist constituents. A common example is found in issue forums, where incumbents bring together specialists on health care, education, housing issues, etc., to give advice to large gatherings of constituents. Incumbents on occasion will mobilize attorneys that support them to sit for office hours offering free legal advice. Both of these are excellent examples of the incumbent broadening his or her enterprise to include expert advice that assists constituents and theoretically results in positive evaluations of the incumbent – which is the overriding purpose of the enterprise. Keeping these disparate elements on the same page can often be a challenge for the incumbent and their chief aides.

### Hierarchy: How does the enterprise function as an institution?

Who runs the district show? Who handles problems, does representation?

Patterson (1970) and Fox and Hammond (1977) found that legislators structure their Washington offices in hierarchical, coordinative or individualistic styles. As was hinted at above, reflections of these styles can also be found in the district offices. Incumbents vary in the amount of decision-making authority they grant to their RDSMs. In the next chapter I will suggest some factors that might explain this variation in office style. Here I will focus on the relationship between the incumbent, the COS and the RDSM.

The first scenario involved autonomy for the RDSM. In E's office, the RDSM functioned with substantial autonomy largely because the attentions of the incumbent and the COS were almost entirely focused on legislative activity in Washington. The incumbent had been in office for more than a decade and returned home mostly only during extended recess or work periods. Because of his position in the party leadership, his COS was equally drawn into legislative activity. Apart from monthly telephone conference calls and staff training retreats, he had little interaction with most of the district staff. The incumbent and the COS had the luxury of the reduced attention because the RDSM was an extremely capable and loyal servant with strong ties to the community. In short, his presence gave them the leeway to focus on other activities. This RDSM carried substantial authority to investigate, mediate and resolve political and constituent matters. I did not encounter another RDSM who appeared to carry such political authority.

Another model that I observed in only one case was similar to Fox and Hammond coordinative model. D's office structure could be described as very coordinated or

consensual. In this model, the COS and the RDSM have a very cooperative relationship. The RDSM suggested that they are on the phone ten to twenty times per day and that the incumbent's image, message, schedule and legislative issues are all regular topics of these phone conversations. While the COS tends to focus more on the legislative issues and the RDSM tends to have more autonomy on district issues, there is very little that they do not discuss with each other. This model is clearly different from E where the RDSM and the COS tend to operate at higher levels of autonomy.

I more commonly found that the COS was empowered by the incumbent to run the entire staff enterprise, with the RDSM acting in a more restricted manner; the "hierarchical" model. Based on previous experience, I would suggest that this is probably the most common model of enterprise structure. Fox and Hammond (1977) also suggested that this was the most typical model of staff hierarchy. From my observations, this structure was clearly seen in C's office, although I would note that C is perhaps even an extreme case of this in that he designated a temporary title of "Special Assistant" to his RDSM for a two-year period. Based on observations of staff and constituents, C and his COS were clearly in charge of all facets of the district enterprise when they needed to be. I will hypothesize in Chapter Four that this model applies to the large number of long-serving safe incumbents who choose not to devote substantial attention to their districts, or grant their district staff significant decision-making power. This model is also preferable for many incumbents and COS for two reasons. First, it grants them substantial control over the strategic direction and daily routine of the district staff. Indeed, in the case of C, the eight district staff members were merely extensions of the employer's authority. Secondly, this model prevents district staff from using their

positions to bolster their own standings in the community for a future run for office. An excellent illustration of this choice was provided by one of C's district staff who suggested that the COS devoted roughly 10% of his attention to the district over a two-year term, and the only reason they got to 10% was because of the increased attention over the last six months of the cycle. Over the first eighteen months, the district staff member felt that the COS' presence was much closer to 0%. The COS was also unique in that his role appeared to be more reactive than other chiefs. A number of staff characterized him as having an "open" door model of decision-making: that he trusted the staff to do their jobs, but that they should and could always call on sensitive issues. This model seemed to work in cases where staff were long serving and got the sense of what required the COS and the incumbent's attention. In fact, one staff member suggested that she only calls the COS when an issue needs "Mr. C's" attention. I do not get the impression that this model was functioning as well with the more recently hired staff. These staff members were often frustrated by a lack of direction and clarity about when to involve their superiors. Furthermore, the vacuum of authority in this office led to an openly hostile competition between staff. Staff openly commented about this situation; "for a variety of reasons...the position was kept vacant." "Some voids are not filled because there is no one person responsible." "There are too many chiefs, not enough Indians." Clearly this particular case called for increased supervision and control at the local level.

The hierarchical model can also be found in a style that is the converse of C's district structure. For incumbent A, the COS spent a more substantial period of time in the district (3 weeks per month) than in Washington (1 week). In this case, two of the

incumbent's three key staffers, the COS and the DD, were devoted to district political activity. As noted above, they are the "hammer" and the "day-to-day" director of district affairs. The third key staffer, the press secretary who was later promoted to "Deputy COS", was responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Washington office when the COS was in the district. This model is becoming more in vogue with junior legislators. In fact, more than 40 of the 72 Republicans elected in 1994 opted to go with this model.<sup>9</sup> While this model also serves to increase the political clout and attention that the incumbent directs toward the district, it too had its detractors. Several of the staff felt that there was "intermittent micro-management" from senior staff members. This varying interference caused confusion amongst the junior staff as to their proper roles as field representatives and caseworkers. In fact, the DD in this case would have preferred a "distant but constant micromanagement" where he would have had more autonomy to direct the district staff and report to the COS everyday, but from afar. Constituent opinion was also divided on this model. While some constituents appreciated the time that the COS devoted to district issues, some more sophisticated constituents suggested that the COS would be more useful in Washington. As one of A's constituents remarked, "the last he'd heard, the Armed Services Committee doesn't meet in (A's hometown)." He approves of the job the COS was doing, but he would like to see him spend more time in Washington, defending the district's military bases there.

On occasion, the incumbent might take an individualistic stance and run the district operation on his or her own initiative. As observed with incumbents B and G, there is no

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<sup>9</sup> This may be an effort by contemporary Republicans to use their COS's to get back to a Jeffersonian-style representation of interests. In the previous two decades, the Democratic majority had been more interested in policy-making in Washington, so there was a tendency to allocate more staff, and especially the COS, to

clearly identified district boss other than the incumbent. The models above all presume the incumbent to take a larger interest in Washington-based activities, with the possible exception of D. The individualistic incumbent travels home regularly, virtually every weekend in these two cases, and largely sets their own priorities and schedules. There was a presumption in the literature's models that the incumbent is an "infrequent actor" in district issues such as casework and constituent meetings. For example, Macartney simply concluded that most incumbents spend no more than 5% of their time in direct communication with constituents. That seems to mask substantial variation that I observed in incumbent activities. The activities of both B and G suggest the need for a 'personal' category where an incumbent is more active in the routine functions of the office. These incumbents drive their districts, attend meetings alone, and call constituents from Washington to inquire about their casework/projects. To direct this system, B had a unique system of communication with his staff. The usual procedure was for them to "leave messages" on his voice mail that he would "take care of" at his own discretion. In fact, one staff member suggested that she communicated about 50% of the time with B, 33% with the RDSM and the remaining 15% with the COS. Another staff member characterized the district leadership as "split", where the long-serving staff had the ability to float along in their jobs with minimal supervision from the RDSM or the COS. Clearly, B was the incumbent who delegated the least amount of work to his staff but was most reliant upon the staff to keep him informed of the specifics of the district. Interestingly, there appears to be little hierarchy in this model.

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Washington to assist with the legislative tasks. It will be interesting to see whether this pattern remains the case in the future.



To summarize, the power of the RDSM, like the role of the field representative discussed above, is largely contingent on the abilities that these individuals bring (as in the case of E's top aide) or the particular electoral environment they find themselves occupying (as in the case of a junior legislator who needs the help or a senior legislator is who is less concerned about the district). The role and autonomy of the RDSM is also likely affected by their personal relationship with the incumbent. Hammond (1975) found that the ranking Washington staffers tend to be older and have a longer tenure than the rest of staff. More recent data from the Congressional Management Foundation suggest that this is also the case for the RDSM as compared to the rest of the district staff. Based on my observation of several district operations, I would speculate that incumbent B is a common model; the incumbent keeps the important decision-maker in the district for the first few terms and then move that staff member to DC as the incumbent moves up the institutional ladder. B characterized it as an "easy decision" to move that person to DC once she had "gotten to know pretty much everything going on in the district." It is also easier for the incumbent when, as in B's case, there was a reliable old hand to remain on the scene and not make a power grab.

#### Caught between a rock and a hard place: The RDSM and the district staff

Once the issue of authority between the incumbent, COS and RDSM is resolved, the incumbent and RDSM must ponder to what degree the RDSM is in charge of the day-to-day and overall direction of the office. As the examples above demonstrate, office hierarchy varies considerably based on the role the incumbent plays and the power that is invested in top district aide, and in the end it varies based on the personality and electoral needs of the incumbent. Worman (1975) found that Florida legislative staff members

agree with their incumbent on legislative tasks, but they often have different role perceptions for what their constituent responsibilities are supposed to be. That appears to carry over into the daily functioning of the office. My research found that district staff members often feel that they have more autonomy than Washington staff because the real boss is not around the office very much, although there is variation in the degree of absence. Macartney (1982) made the same observation with Los Angeles county staff. As was noted with A's DD, however, the "intermittent micromanagement" provided by the COS and the incumbent is not always an ideal relationship between the employer and the staff. This situation can result in a senior staff member such as A's DD or C's "acting Special Assistant" to be in a precarious situation directing the staff for much of the year but subject to random intervention by the incumbent or COS. I would suspect that these are precisely the types of management problems that staffs try to work out when they have training retreats. Many offices have these training retreats back in the district in the off-year summer. It provides the senior staff a chance to interact with employees they do not regularly work with, and for some offices, it offers the chance for a number of the Washington staff to return to the district office and meet the people with whom they regularly deal with only by phone or email.

#### The DC-District Tension

In a number of the offices that I observed, there appeared to be a near complete segregation between casework and legislative work. This segregation was often accompanied by hostility between the two different sets of staff. What surprised me about this finding was that in the majority of cases, long-serving district staff members were not hostile to the Washington staff, and often accepted their clearly subordinate

roles in positive manners. Incumbent I's long-serving RDSM clearly embraced her office-bound casework roles. What was more commonly the case, however, was an explanation by RDSMs that the two sets of staff were "two sides of the same coin." For example, I's RDSM noted "most constituent services (were run) out of this office...the first contact almost always here... with some people in the Washington offices helping later." Rarely did I hear Washington COS' describe the relationship in such consensual terms. They tended to agree in part that the district performed significant and necessary functions but there nearly always seemed to be the subtle suggestion that the legislative effort was the primary focus of the incumbent enterprise. Incumbent A's office would be an exception in this case as the district staff so regularly interacted with the COS in the district office that their contact with Washington was substantially more limited than in other offices. These district staff would need to call or email Washington only for purely informational reasons.

Constituents can further stoke these tensions by ignoring or downplaying the roles of district staff. For instance, one of A's constituents explained that 90% of his staff interactions were with Washington staff because "90% of district work is related to simple casework...checks, flags and stuff." Even more blatant was a comment by one of B's constituents who remarked that district staff do not have the "technical competence" to deal with the constituent's legislative interests, so he called Washington directly. I noticed that staffers tend to pick up on these kinds of characterizations and that these can exacerbate conflict amongst the staff.

One other factor that appeared to alienate district staff was the lack of authority situated in the district office. This inequity can further compound the normal tension that

exists between Washington and the district, as it appeared to do in the case of C's office. Over the course of my observations it was becoming clear that C was aware of the nature of the staff's discontent. It was explained to me that the situation was only allowed to stand because C's COS was from the district and was a long time friend of incumbent. To rectify the situation, the COS was going to go back to the district more (an increase from two visits to three or four per year) and be in more regular phone contact. They had also permitted the acting RDSM to pick up some of the political/surrogate tasks in an "unofficial way." I found it telling that the COS felt the minimal increase in attention would be adequate. As Chapter Five will point out, it is perhaps in situations like this, where the incumbent and his or her key staff stay one term too long in office.

The division between the district and the Washington functions is not always a problem. Even if individual staff members do not realize it, the reality is that they are "two sides of the same coin", or enterprise in this case. One side might be shinier and be given more credit but both conduct functions vital to the incumbent staying in office. The most positive explanation of the two staff sets came from C's RDSM. He felt that there had to be a "two-way relationship" between the offices so that the district staff could acquire the necessary issue information in return for the applied politics and results that the district staff could provide to the Washington staff. To put it another way, one of B's caseworkers noted that the district staff "see eye to eye with the constituents, its up to us to win votes" whereas the Washington staff was entrusted with a broader legislative effort. While I do not believe that the relationship is that simple, I will, in Chapter Five, attempt to explain the actual impact that district staff behavior has on election outcomes. Many district staff members seem to feel that they are shorted because, as B's caseworker

suggests, they feel like they are doing more important contact with real people, while all the credit for the success of the incumbent is usually given to the press secretary and the legislative team. The district staff then, is a complex mix of people and activities that toil in relative obscurity. The degree of that obscurity, and the amount of hierarchy imposed on their daily routines is most often determined by the personal style of the incumbent as well as his or her electoral/political needs.

#### What district staff do: The typologies from the literature

There are three studies that begin to provide typologies that loosely define district staff behavior. Meller (1952) was among the pioneers who suggested that legislative staffing should be studied functionally; that they have different forms and carry out different activities. One of the first academics to conduct functional studies of legislative staff. Saloma (1969) studied the average working week of U.S. Senate staff in the Washington offices. He found that these staff spent a majority of their time on correspondence (41%) and constituent service (25%), while legislative support (14%) and education/publicity (10%) lagged farther behind. Over the past thirty years, these numbers have undoubtedly reversed (look no further than the disenchantment of the district staff above), as the staff enterprise has been bolstered to more aggressively pursue the latter two functions and promote the incumbent's name recognition in the district. Substantial advances in technology in the form of computer databases, email, and fax machines have also rendered Saloma's depiction less accurate. Despite these weaknesses and the fact that Saloma discusses neither inter-office variation nor district staff, his focus on the functions of a staff work week provided a gateway for new analysis.

Macartney (1975, 1982) applied the early functional analysis to executive and legislative staffing in Los Angeles County. He broadly found that these incumbents had four key staff needs: 1) top assistants who helped them with their strategic missions, 2) legislative assistants who helped craft the specifics of those visions, 3) speechwriters, and 4) caseworkers to deal with constituent requests (p.95). Based on these four categories of staff, Macartney discusses very briefly the fourteen “tasks” that staffs perform in Los Angeles County.<sup>10</sup> For his decision to look at staff outside of Washington, Macartney is a pioneer in the study of district staff. However, his exclusive focus on one county and the timing of his study, done just as the staff explosion and incumbency advantage had commenced, meant that he could not truly capture the full significance of what district staffs were doing on a daily basis to assist the incumbent enterprise. The staff activities that I observed are largely based on his categorizations but I seek to go further in illustrating these activities, the variation in how they’re performed and how some of those activities have an actual impact on representation and congressional election outcomes.

Capturing the notion that staff played different political roles in incumbent enterprises, Fox (1972) and Fox and Hammond (1977), like Saloma studied the individuals who worked in senate offices in Washington. They came up with a typology of five political roles performed by staff that I roughly incorporated into my discussion of staff functions and motivations. They also noted an “overlap” in the functions performed by these staff. The “investigators” and “supporters” were the legislative aides who did

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<sup>10</sup> While it may appear that Macartney has answered the question “What do staff do?” the fact that he spent little more than a page detailing each of the important tasks performed by district staff suggested to me that his categories needed to be explained in greater detail as well replicated and studied across congressional districts. For example, he seeks to utilize Fox and Hammond’s model of staff hierarchy but has a small case set (19) all of which are from one very urban county. He also compares municipal, county, state and federal staff in his data calculations.

the research and legwork for the incumbent's legislative agenda. These two categories did not make the transition into my typology of district staff. The other three categories were more useful in thinking about district staff. Fox and Hammond found that "corresponders" handled the constituent requests for information. This category roughly corresponds to the large number of caseworkers that are found in district offices today, the largest portion of all legislative staff. The "advertisers" are press aides for the most part and can be found in both Washington and district offices. Finally, the "interactors" were often the Administrative Assistants (AA) who handled large projects, groups and lobbyists. As was detailed earlier in this chapter, it is necessary to divide the "interactor" category into at least two groups, the RDSM's who most truly approximate Fox and Hammond's definition and the field representatives who also look more like "interactors" than any of the other categories. As this chapter and Chapter Five will demonstrate, it was necessary to divide the RDSMs from the field representatives because the political nature of their activities tended to be quite different. Like Macartney, Fox and Hammond came up with a useful typology that allows us to further understand the roles and functions of legislative staff. Unfortunately, it's Washington classifications were slightly too rigid to apply to district staff. Reviewing all of this literature on legislative staffing, Hammond (1984) suggested that further hypothesizing on the roles of all legislative staff was necessary. Following this advice I combined the categories from Fox and Hammond with the functions of Macartney and Saloma.

### The Routine activities performed by district staff

#### A complex mixture of activities

The daily routines of congressional district staff include a complex mixture of activities. To illustrate the complexity, one of C's staff likened the job to being a "combination of a diplomat and a paralegal and...every day is different." One of E's staff suggested that the main district staff functions were: casework, information requests, answering phone calls, and "representing the absent member in the field." A more comprehensive listing of their daily tasks might include: answering phones, opening mail, doing casework, transporting the incumbent around the district, doing outreach into the district, taking notes, watching the district and representing the incumbent at functions. Because I observed variation in the types of functions and styles of representation that district staff conducted, I feel it important to distinguish between the routine types of activities that the more reactive staff offices tend to conduct as compared to those offices that were clearly more aggressive in their district behaviors (to be seen in the following two sections). The types of behaviors in the following sections are loosely based on, but much better explained and defined than Macartney's list of staff functions (1975, 1982). The following is a fairly comprehensive discussion of the most common district staff functions. Given the idiosyncracies of the incumbents and staff, however, this is not an exhaustive list.

#### Provide information to the incumbent

Perhaps the most basic and vital task of any district office is to provide the incumbent with information. There are a variety of ways in which district staff offices are expected to keep the incumbent informed. Every staff office observed clipped



newspaper stories about the incumbent and important local political stories. The routine office, seen here in incumbent I, will occasionally rely on the clips as they feel the district is “too big” to understand any other way, or they simply don’t have the time or need to go out into it. I also observed that many district offices were virtual clearinghouses of political gossip where people would drop by or call to discuss with a ‘political’ person the latest local and national issues. The routine office relied on this accumulation of gossip or the aggregation of letters, calls, and emails sent to the office to inform the incumbent about the political on-goings in the district. Most of the communication coming into the office, however, tended to be casework requests or interest group generated calls about specific pieces of legislation. If an office wanted better intelligence about the district they would have to be more proactive.

Slightly more proactive offices would extend this intelligence function to include radio and television stories as well. Incumbents find it useful if the staff report political gossip. In the case of E, several of his field representatives kept log books of the people they met with and what their issues were, both as a means of more efficiently keeping contact with their designated officials, but also so they could more easily report to E when necessary. Some incumbents also have an expectation that they be briefed on the meetings and events that they will attend when they are at home. I would note, however, that this seemed to vary by individual. There were some incumbents who merely needed the directions and a one or two sentence description of the events. More high maintenance incumbents required extensive briefs that included exact times, more developed explanations of the event and its history, a log of the incumbent’s interaction with the group, and in one case, even a seating plan with background notes on the

individuals sitting at the incumbent's table. An even more obvious distinction between the two levels of information provision is whether the staff was responsible for preparing the incumbent's remarks. Again, this is a personal characteristic. Some incumbents prefer to make brief extemporaneous remarks entirely of their own creation, others prefer a set of "talking points" that will make sure to hit the high points and recognize the key people. Still other incumbents require fully prepared speeches for public gatherings.

Incumbents usually require that their district staff also keep the Washington staff informed by sending the copies of the news clips, programs, newsletters and press releases from local groups, and reports on the political nature of the district and opportunities for further legislation based on constituent problems. Another source of district information that incumbents usually want passed on to Washington is a tally of constituent opinion. Whether it is letters, phone calls, emails or conversations with constituents who drop-by the office, incumbents and their Washington staff usually want to know constituent sentiment about the matters of the day. Some incumbents utilize their district staff (and interns!) to tabulate surveys or responses to other mass mailings into their districts. While district staffs rarely work on legislation or oversight, they do listen to the voters, and attempt to track public opinion for the incumbent especially on controversial issues. This information can be of help to the incumbent and Washington staff as they formulate policy positions. Finally, some incumbents also request that their staff provide them with oral or written reports on the political nature of the district. The "eyes and ears", however, tends to be a function more often pursued by the aggressive offices discussed below.

### Provide information to the constituents

Each district office was also responsible for providing some basic information to the constituents. Incumbents obviously want their constituents to know that they are the area's elected representatives and that there is an office nearby where the constituents can communicate with them. Incumbents want their constituents to know whom they are, what they do, and that they want to hear from them. Furthermore, incumbents want their constituents to know that there is an office staffed by employees who can get them flags flown over the capitol, help them arrange for visits to the nation's capitol, and more importantly, help them resolve problems or complications with government programs and acquire loans or government assistance that they might not have known about. When incumbents and staff are successful in providing this type of information to their constituents, it often leads to an increase in the following routine function conducted by district staff.

### Mediate with individual constituents (aka Casework)

As was discussed in Chapter One, the creation and expansion of government programs over the past fifty years have resulted in both the provision of more services for American citizens and the increase in the number of problems and complications that those same citizens encounter with the federal government. Consequently, mediating solutions between constituents and government bureaucracy has become one of the most routine of all district staff operations. All offices, both routine and aggressive, devote at least some resources to the resolution of these problems.

### What is casework?

Casework or mediation is best defined as a one-to-one interaction between a constituent and a legislative staff member. The purpose of this interaction is generally to resolve a case or problem specific to that individual. For the purposes of this dissertation I would distinguish between casework and projects, or separate larger cases that involve numerous individuals or groups. Some examples of projects would be those cases that involved churches, school groups, unions, or businesses larger than a family operation. Incumbents and their staff can, and do, conduct casework for bigger groups. I will discuss project work below.<sup>11</sup>

Casework generally originates with a governmental problem. Most commonly these relate to entitlement or health care programs; a check is lost, a recipient moves or dies, a benefit is perceived to be too small. Interestingly, the casework request does not have to be of a federal nature. I observed constituents who brought state, municipal, county, or even inter-governmental problems to the attention of district staff. There tend to be a fair number of the latter problems as constituents get skipped from one governmental entity to another when there is no clear resolution to a problem. Finally, there are a substantial number of personal cases that make their way into district offices. I observed cases involving land disputes, divorce settlements, car accidents, and many work-related suits as well. It seemed likely that many of these personal cases end up in congressional offices for two reasons: 1) because a substantial function of the district staff is to listen to constituent's problems and 2) because often these constituents do not have the resources

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<sup>11</sup> These are subjective definitions. As Macartney (1982, p73) noted, it is often difficult to distinguish between a "project" and a "case" because constituents don't demarcate their requests. D's RDSM further noted it had been his experience that each office defines and counts casework using different definitions

to retain attorneys. Incumbents who receive many requests of this second type are wise to procure the assistance of volunteer attorneys to help them resolve these cases, or at least move them to another arena where the constituent can make some form of legal progress. I observed several staff members interacting with attorneys to assist constituent requests.

#### How does the 'case' come to the office?

Generally, casework comes into the office in a very routine fashion. In all of the offices that I observed, caseworkers agreed that the bulk of the casework came in to the office under the constituent's initiative, either by phone or mail. In many of these situations, constituents will call or write directly to the incumbent seeking help with the resolution of their problem. The increasing amount of electronic communication suggests that constituent requests will soon come largely by email. These forms of arrival comply with the standard operating procedure of the routine office; the staffs are there to provide a standard service to the constituents. Alternatively, the incumbent and staff can generate casework. Following the routine model, sometimes individuals who happen upon the incumbent at events in the field will explain their dilemmas. In these situations, incumbents, or more likely their staff, will record the relevant information and bring it back to the office for the caseworkers' attention.

In more proactive settings, incumbents and staff will advertise their service abilities in speeches, brochures, or casual conversations. These advertisements will often generate casework requests from constituents who did not realize the resources and abilities of the district offices. In simple terms, the aggressive office is more directly soliciting

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and that it would be a "challenge" to compare offices using this measure. Chapter Five will look more closely at both types of service offered by district staff and the possible political impact of these behaviors.

constituents about their casework needs. Generally, staff will strictly observe the boundaries of congressional districts when providing information to constituents or carrying out their other functions. I noticed that offices had well-marked lists of phone prefixes and zip codes to denote the boundaries of their constituent responsibilities. There was, however, the occasional zealous staff member who vigorously followed up with individuals who made requests, even though they were not from the district or they did not have a serious case to be resolved.

What happens after the casework gets to the office? “Investigate, Mediate, Advocate”

Once the request arrives in the office, staffs basically describe their function as “listening” to the constituents. At this point staff members tend to act on behalf of the incumbent. It was my observation that, with the exception of B, very few incumbents keep track of the meditative activities of their district staff. This is not to suggest that B oversaw every case, but his staff did characterize themselves as “intermediaries” for the congressman and “chief caseworker” and noted that B had a substantial involvement in ordinary cases in their office. The first task for the district staff is to discern whether they can actually do anything for the constituent. One of C’s staff suggested that they will “listen like a doctor and try to diagnose the person’s problem and then use the “rolodex” of people and agencies that (they) know.” A surprising number of requests are either out of the jurisdiction of a federal legislative staff member or are of a personal, non-governmental nature that are even more removed from their jurisdiction. This does not mean, however, that the staff’s “rolodex” is useless. One staff member in another office suggested that constituents often “don’t know how to ask” for help, or in many cases, don’t know where to ask. District staffs also help to mediate for constituents with other

levels of government. Incumbent B detailed an example where he and his staff were working to help a church group buy land from a city in his district.

At this point, offices tend to demonstrate a philosophical difference in how they will further assist the constituent. Those offices that take a more routine view of their functions will simply refer the constituents to the proper office or jurisdiction. For example, once the “listening” was complete, another C staff member explained that their office dealt with casework requests in a three-stage manner: to investigate the case (which they did “often”), to then mediate in clear-cut disputes (which they did “usually”) and finally, to advocate for the constituent (which occurred only “rarely”). The vast majority of C’s district staff activity was intended “to put their resources and ability to get information from bureaucrats for the average citizen who is too intimidated by government to want or know how to ask.” In this sense, the most routine staff office belonged to C. The routine office will handle many requests that it does not have jurisdiction over, whether they are issues of a local, county or state nature. But in C’s case the usual procedure for the routine office was simply to refer the case to the relevant government office. C’s staff unanimously agreed that this was the main purpose of their job. Conversely, many offices openly embraced these tasks even though they had little ability to help resolve these cases. The additional actions taken by more aggressive offices in “cross-jurisdictional” cases will be discussed in greater depth below.

If the case is of a federal nature, most staff will pore through their “rolodexes” and attempt to mediate and advocate on behalf of the constituent. Even though such occurrences were “rare”, even C’s staff members suggested that it was their job function to assist constituents by rectifying their problems with the federal government when there

was a clear call for such action. Mediating for the constituents usually involves collecting the proper information and filling out the proper forms. Given citizen disgust with bureaucracy and paperwork requirements, it should not be surprising to see that the simple act of filling out the proper forms often results in the mediation of cases. If a case cannot be resolved through mediation and the clear presentation of evidence, then incumbents and staff members have one final means of assistance for the constituent.

The final step is deciding whether to advocate on behalf of the constituent. Advocacy generally means that the staff writes a letter or makes a phone call to a bureaucrat expressing their support (or opposition) of the constituent. If they are firmly committed to the constituent's case, the incumbent can become personally involved, taking the case directly to the highest levels of any bureaucratic agency (rarely done). For example, a Chamber of Commerce director from B's district explained how he had observed the incumbent's help with the EPA on a regulatory matter. This constituent felt that bureaucrats take a member of congress' involvement more seriously and tend to resolve issues more quickly when an incumbent is involved. I again discovered a philosophical difference in the attitudes of staff and incumbents about just how far the staff should go for the constituents. C's staff tended towards a role that might be labeled more routine and informational, while B's caseworkers had a greater emphasis on advocacy and resolution of the case. The difference might also have been reflected in the fact that B's caseworkers had decades of experience and likely knew very quickly which cases could be resolved and where that resolution would take place. In short, it pays to hire experienced caseworkers. They know whom to call!



Do all offices do the same amount of casework?

No. Most of the flow of casework is self-generated and beyond the control of the incumbent and staff. Yet, some offices make attempts to generate more casework for their staff to resolve. Incumbents B and C tended to be on the routine side of this equation, working on cases that are virtually all self-generated. These two offices suggest that it not uncommon for district operations to have caseworkers (or as in case of C, virtually all of his staff) that do not do much more than reactive mediation with constituents. This is not to suggest these offices are slower or lazier than other offices. Rather, some of these offices will devote more attention to specific cases. Two of B's staff provide excellent examples, in one case I observed an B staff member spend an entire morning (over three hours) on the phone dealing with just three cases, and he felt that was a pretty typical morning for him. Routine offices also tend to more easily get bogged down in new cases arriving by phone and mail. I observed a constituent make a request for a birth certificate where the caseworker had been helping previously, but the caseworker was too busy with newly arriving cases in the mail to even do a full referral for the constituent. At the other extreme was F's district operation. She employed four field representatives who had relatively light casework responsibilities and two full-time caseworkers. The field representatives were expected to spend the majority of their working week out in the field, giving speeches, meeting with community groups, dropping in on local businesses to see if there was anything that the congressional office could do for them. It is hard to compare the amount of casework done by individual staff across offices because they tend to vary in how much time they dedicate to this activity. The amount of casework carried out by field representatives also tends to vary even for

those staff members that have specific issues or areas to represent. One of C's staffers noted that while his casework portfolio did not shift over the year, the time allocated to it was never consistent; it varied between 25% and 75% of his time. The above depictions suggest that while all staff and incumbents agree that it is their "job" to help the constituents, there is also unmistakably a variation in when and where the routine and aggressive offices will get involved in casework requests. There is also a variation in how far the staff will go to understand what is going on in the community.

#### Contacting the community/Outreach

While the casework function tends to be a much more reactive staff function, the more proactive staff members usually pursue outreach. The community contact function is fulfilled when staffs represent an incumbent at an event, "listen" to group needs, or do some project work for that group. I observed that even in the most routine of offices there were usually one or two staff members who made an effort to connect with their district communities on a semi-regular basis. Nevertheless, this staff function begins to move even further in the direction of the aggressive office style. Routine offices like B and C did correspondingly less community contact. One might argue that from a representation and electoral standpoint, it is more efficient to deal with people in groups, rather than wait for them to approach the office individually. Perhaps this approach explains the variation in office style, where the routine office chooses a more limited version of representation while the more aggressive offices utilize all the advantages of incumbency. At any rate, both philosophical approaches suggest that the representative should seek some exposure in the constituency.

### Represent the incumbent in the field

The most basic outreach function is to represent the incumbent at events in the district. Incumbents generally receive far more invitations to events than they can possibly hope to attend, regardless of how often they are at home or committed they are to personally meeting all of their constituents. Therefore, in both routine and aggressive offices, staffs attend events in the name of the incumbent. These events range from ribbon cuttings to award ceremonies and regular group meetings. The aggressive and routine offices tend to vary in the degree of staff involvement with these community groups. For the routine office, the basic rationale for attending meetings, giving awards and eating a lot of rubber chicken is to cover the bases for the absent incumbent. Incumbent B's RDSM and field representatives "fill in" for B when he "rarely" fails to cover an official invitation. The commonality amongst B's staff was that they all mentioned "official" invitations. None of them felt comfortable popping in for quick or unofficial invitations to say a few words on his behalf. In fact, from the types of invitations they described, it appeared that they only represented B at what I would refer to as 'safe' appearances: ribbon-cuttings, accepting recognitions and award ceremonies. In other words, events where they don't have to do much besides show up. In this way, the routine interaction might also be characterized as a minimal political behavior; staffs go to events just so that people can say "Congressperson X had people at the event."

To ensure that the incumbent is exposed to a wider range of people beyond the invitations, district staffs often pursue office hours out in the district. District staff will commonly visit a particular library or courthouse at a remote location in the district on a monthly basis. These visits will usually be advertised in a local paper so that constituents

do not have to travel to the central office with their casework requests. While there is clearly an electoral motivation to this behavior, one of B's staff members also suggested that there is a representational motive as well; "we need to be accessible (by)...taking government to the people." As has been noted repeatedly, staff from routine offices are much less likely spend time outside of the office. The same B staff member said that she spent about four days in her office doing the work she got over phone and from her one day per week out in the field. The interval of the visit is likely to say a lot about the activity level of that particular office and staff member. While nearly all district offices attend events and office hours in their districts, routine offices tend to pursue fewer of these opportunities and when they are out in the field, the interactions tend to be decidedly more one-sided than the aggressive offices. One of C's constituents noted that he saw the former RDSM at events that had "political auras." He gave numerous examples of ribbon cuttings and award ceremonies. But he also noted her presence to be quite limited – something a keen observer will notice between the routine and the aggressive office.

When staffs from more aggressive offices represent the incumbent at meetings or conduct office hours, I observed a tendency for the staff to fulfill wider purposes. As discussion below will show, aggressive staff are likely to use field opportunities to do four things: 1) to do more field work by dropping-by places they ordinarily don't go, 2) to listen to constituents (the same as routine function), 3) to "listen" to what the constituents are saying about political matters and 4) to "tell" the constituents what the incumbents have been doing. In short, the aggressive staff will "listen" and "talk" more when they're out in the field.

### “Listening” for the incumbent/Liaison with community groups

In addition to attending events and office hours, district staffs often seek to “listen” for the political benefit of their incumbents. As was just mentioned, this style of “listening” tends to be more two-way communication than simply attending an event or office hour. When district staffs interact with community groups as liaisons, they are attempting to understand the group’s needs, what they are saying about the politics of the district, as well as attempting to tell them about what the incumbent can/is doing for them. There is clearly a bigger electoral reward for this style of “listening.” But it also requires more time and energy from the staff, as well as a commitment to a more aggressive style of district representation.

District staff members logically want to know what is going on more generally within their districts. Therefore, they visit with individual constituents or attend meetings to discover the constituents’ needs, motivations and politics. As one C staff member put it, they go to meetings “to get the feel of the community and its areas of need.” They act as the “front line” in dealing with groups and issues. One of incumbent I’s staff put it in similar terms, attending meetings serves “two purposes...to represent the member and to keep us abreast of new issues.” Some staff members even utilize their own membership in constituency groups to help the incumbent get a handle on the district.

The routine offices that do go out and “listen” in the district tend to do it more so when they are invited, and they do so largely to drive the incumbent’s schedule or agenda; where does he/she need to go and what does he/she need to do. For example, to ensure that all the relevant groups of the district are “being touched”, the RDSM met with the field representatives in her office weekly to go over the schedule and discuss

“coalition reports” and where incumbent I might need to go. The motivation is to simply cover the bases until the incumbent or the COS can resolve any problems. I frequently found that staffs from routine offices suggest that they did not have the time to do any extra listening for their incumbent. In B’s office, one staff member who was working in his original hometown belonged to no community groups other than the fact that he “does the Rotaries” on occasion. Another of B’s staff declared that she had “no time to meet new people” and that she seeks out “no one really” when she goes out into the community. A third B staff member said that she discontinued her office hours in a remote county years ago, not because the district changed, but because she had become too busy with casework requests called in to the office. This routine attitude can also be seen in C’s staff, where staff only rarely conducted office hours or events out in the district. In fact, one C staffer said that “never, except on rare occasions” did he leave the office for public meetings. C’s town hall meetings were one of the few public interactions performed by his district enterprise.

The aggressive office tends to be more proactive in it’s “listening.” I noticed that staff from A and D’s offices tended to get out of the office more frequently to “listen”, and once they found problems they were more proactive in working with the RDSM or the incumbent to resolve the problem. Additionally, the RDSM in both of these offices was usually the individual who rectified the problem, as opposed to it being a phone call or visit from incumbents B, C, G or I. I also encountered staff in the aggressive offices that were willing to join groups for the purpose of “listening” to the district. I am not suggesting that they were spying on these groups. While members of routine offices tend only to go to meetings that have a true personal interest for them, members of aggressive

offices are more likely to go to Rotary lunches, become involved in the Junior League or United Way, and most clearly to get active in partisan politics, for the benefit of the incumbent. Consequently, the aggressive office tends to have “representation” in more places.

“Listening” to a group’s needs is not only politically expedient, it also serves legitimate democratic functions. Often times a field representative is assigned to liaison with large interests within the constituency so that they can relay important legislative changes to these groups and get their reactions. Additionally, these groups can suggest to the incumbent, via the field representative, the unintended impact that any previous legislation might have had on their group.

#### Where do staff go to “listen”?

There are a wide variety of groups that district staff seem to seek out. The most common and obvious groups are those that will tell the staff and incumbent about the economic health of the district. Groups that serve this function well are Rotary or Lions Club luncheons/breakfasts, meetings of trade associations or corporate boards, and union meetings. Perhaps visits to local Chambers of Commerce are the best source of economic information. One staff member and a chamber director suggested that Chambers are a good source of information because they deal with transport, commerce and the many “smaller issues” peculiar to a local area. Another chamber director suggested that they were good sources of information because they have become more active across the nation seeking out representation from congressional incumbents and their staff. As was noted earlier, incumbent House members quite often have very homogenous districts. For those that do, it is easier for staff to understand the economic

health of the district. In A (military bases), C (state university) and D's (state capitol) districts there is clearly one substantial district employer and the staff can pursue those contacts. In districts such as B's that are more geographically and economically diverse, it is harder for staff to find one such source of information. To determine the social health of the district, staff regularly met with school board or PTA members, church groups, and seniors associations.

The political health of the district is much trickier to measure than the first two indicators. Obvious sources of information would include trips to county political party meetings and stops by the courthouse or state capitol offices. This information can be problematic, however, in that many of these individuals are predisposed to be fans and not likely to give unbiased information. For incumbents who are safely ensconced in safe districts, this is not a problem. For example, incumbent I's RDSM said that she obtained most of her political intelligence from the Republican Women's clubs of the district. Staff from more electorally vulnerable incumbents might prefer to rely on visits to local coffee shops, or with the aforementioned measures of economic and social health, to acquire their political information about the district.

When acquiring political information about the incumbent and the district, some staff also tended to be mindful of the incumbent's base or background. Again, in the case of I, the fact that he was a veteran suggested to his RDSM that she was able to get more access and information from veteran's groups than would other politicians. This can also be a trap, however, in that the RDSM said that she and the incumbent devoted substantial amounts of time to these groups in the district. If the demography of a district changes or if staffs devote too much time or resources to these supportive groups, they potentially



run the risk of alienating groups that they have fewer connections to. In the case of I, this is not likely to be problematic. But it would be good advice to a more vulnerable incumbent to make sure that his or her staffs are not paying exclusive attention to the groups that have an affinity for his or her positions.

One final group that should be noted are the journalists of the district. As was mentioned above, press secretaries who are based either in Washington or the district have the basic responsibility of maintaining favorable relationships with the journalists of the district. Certainly this group of constituents is “listened” to a much greater degree than virtually any other group in the district.

#### Project work with groups

Once groups have been identified and “listened” to, some district offices will work with them on projects. These projects come in a variety of shapes. They ranged in size from A’s DD helping a constituent’s company gain access to a new street to E’s Economic Development Task Force, an entity that worked with local development agencies and capital to move new industries to his congressional district. The distinction between these projects and regular casework is that projects are larger in size and are generally part of deliberate strategies or efforts by the incumbent and his or her staff. It is precisely the latter part of the definition that tends to make project work more of an aggressive staff function. I found that routine offices such as B and C were much less likely to establish and pursue explicit relationships with constituent groups of this nature. This is not to suggest that B and C do not serve businesses and groups of constituents. Rather, their service is of an individualized and reactive nature. For example, one of B’s field representatives characterized her job as being 70% casework and 30% projects, but

when I pressed her to define “project”, she stated her projects are generally for people who call or come in to the office from local businesses. So the distinction was merely a private citizen versus a business. Given this mindset, it is not likely that a routine office like B or C would have an “Economic Development Task Force” that sought to recruit companies to their districts.

On the other hand, offices such as A’s or D’s were much more direct and creative in their interactions with businesses and groups of constituents. The aggressive office is likely to utilize plans, programs, and “task forces” that other staff operations have found to be successful. Another distinction between the routine and the aggressive office is the way in which they deal with the largest groups or corporations in their districts. In the case of B (with his multiple technology companies) and C (with the major state university), district staff suggested that their major interests took care of their own needs either through Washington-based associations or direct lobbying efforts to the appropriate executive agency or congressional committee themselves. One of B’s staff suggested that because B “has been there since 1980” and because he personally visits them on occasion, the technology companies know how to reach the incumbent and he was unlikely to ever consider proactive communication with them.<sup>12</sup> Aggressive district offices, on the other hand, often asserted themselves with these companies to see if there were any issues that they could help them with on the local level. For example, H’s office frequently worked with the major corporation in his district on zoning, tax, and

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<sup>12</sup> If Fiorina’s model of ‘rational’ behavior is still applicable, I certainly found little evidence of it in B’s district offices. There appeared to be no impetus or incentive amongst the district staff to contact the high tech companies in his district about vague legislation or any kind of regulatory issues they might have. Perhaps the model/relationship applies in other districts or with Washington staff, but this case suggests that not all district staff act ‘rationally’ and seek out constituents who have been negatively impacted by government regulation.

workplace safety issues that were commonly found in the domain of state politics. I observed that the aggressive offices were willing to do more of this “cross-jurisdictional” work to ensure the happiness of their constituents.

As will be discussed in Chapter Five, constituents and groups desire accessibility to their members of Congress. There is a feeling of comfort knowing where they can get help even if they don’t particularly need it. As one staff member remarked, many constituents appreciate the ability to “bend the ear” of staff. At a minimum, the routine office serves as a “clearinghouse” of information on government grants, regulations and other programs that might benefit the individual constituents and groups. Maximally, the aggressive office tends to be thinking about these programs, grants, and regulations and helping the constituents maneuver through the complexities. Once the constituent has been assisted, the difference between routine and aggressive offices appears again.

#### Advertising the incumbent

The final task of the routine office completes the circle; its basic purpose is to advertise not only what the incumbent has successfully accomplished through legislation in Washington, but also what the incumbent and staff have been able to achieve in the functions listed above. There is no incumbent enterprise in Washington that does not promote the incumbent to at least some extent. Undoubtedly, some incumbents are more aggressive self-promoters than others. Whether the promotion is routine or aggressive, advertising the incumbent enterprise and the services that they offer usually is circular because it invariably generates more requests for help and information and hence, more opportunities to help constituents. An excellent example of this circularity was found in the statement by one of B’s constituents who felt that B was “visible” in the district

because his staff did a good job of “advertising” B’s presence at local events and meetings with individual constituents. Another of B’s constituents felt that district staff’s main function should be “to provide public information...most don’t even know that congressmen have staff who work for them.” This “advertising” with constituents is done through a variety of means and locations. In some offices, aggressive efforts by incumbents and staff can contact thousands of constituents per year. These efforts should be considered a supplement to the massive amount of (impersonal) contact that incumbents have with their constituents through mass mailings sent by the office, and the individualized mail, phone and email correspondence that their constituents and staff engage in. But because every office sends the mass mailings, it is more interesting to examine the supplemental behaviors that particular offices pursue.

#### Incumbent efforts

Incumbents themselves are active advertisers when they are in the district. The most common vehicle used was the town hall meeting or some derivative of that concept. Various incumbents practiced “constituent meetings”, “van tours”, “office on the road”, and “listening sessions.” In addition to these widely practiced meetings, some incumbents held forums to discuss specific political or legislative issues, while others simply preferred to take “Main Street walks” and drop in on the journalists and elected officials of their district’s towns. Still others simply preferred to advertise their efforts largely through individual or small-scale meetings with constituents. Advertising is often the key to the success of incumbent events in the district. Without an effective media strategy to promote incumbent events, turnout, and hence the overall impact, is guaranteed to be dismal. A final way that incumbents can communicate a connection to

their constituents individually is through the way they decorate their offices with the plaques and awards that represent their service to the area or ideological cause. Awards come from an endless assortment of gun owners, schools, teachers, unions, small businesses, clubs and associations.

### Staff efforts

Every office employs a press secretary whose primary role in the enterprise is to obtain positive coverage for the incumbent. Virtually every office will also do large mass mailings to constituents on the issues and targeted direct mailing to specific constituents, commonly in the form of Christmas cards to thousands of lucky constituents. The resolution of particularly moving cases can also lead to a media hit. For example, D's staff was able to get a set of medals replaced for a veteran constituent, which resulted in several positive television and print stories the next day. District staff members also advertise the achievements of their employers in a variety of other ways. The routine offices are not very aggressive in advertising when they do go out into the district. They usually have long-standing set routines, places that they go to that solidify over time. Over time they begin to do less advertising for these visits. Furthermore, as their work requirements begin to pile up, not only do they do less advertising, they also tend to cut back on time spent outside of the office. The newspaper located on the same block as B's main office suggested that the district staff do not do a lot of press but that they see a staff member "almost weekly" and a press release on a less than monthly basis. Clearly they are not in a rush to promote their incumbent.

At the other end of the continuum, aggressive office staffs attend meetings not only to "hear" what groups are saying about the incumbent but also to "talk" to them about

what their incumbent is doing relative to their particular needs. For example, one of A's staff who went to see a veterans groups told me after the meeting that "its good to keep A's name out there (telling them what he's doing)...they expect us to be here." The advertisement can also be individual in nature. At the same meeting, the A staffer reminded a disaffected veteran that A had gotten him a flag from the capitol the year before. This individual ad was clearly effective.

Individual staff members, like incumbents, utilize a variety of methods for their advertisements to constituents. The routine office tends to rely more on word-of-mouth, individual meetings in the office and the office hours discussed above. As the A example suggests, some staff rely on meetings with groups or face-to-face meetings with individual constituents. Staff that rely on this technique are probably more effective in their advertising if they focus on elite constituents with the same "Main Street" technique used by the incumbents. If you are only going to talk to four or five constituents in an afternoon, it is better to talk to the mayor, the paper editor, and a couple of business owners than five random constituents. This type of contact is clearly a more aggressive style of representation. I will explore this contact much more deeply in Chapter Five. Other interesting forms of advertising by district staff included van tours and mobile office hours throughout the district. Most offices do some form of satellite visits to outlying counties to communicate with constituents who don't regularly have the opportunity to interact with the staff or incumbent. Regardless of which form of advertising the district staff utilize, or whether the advertising style is routine or aggressive, a premium is placed on having "good community skills" according to one of C's staff.

### The Routine office summarized

The routine office provides information to the incumbent and constituents, although it tends to stick to basic activities like newspaper clippings and regular office hours. All offices conduct casework. In fact, routine offices conduct large amounts of casework. But in the case of routine offices, the caseworkers do not tend to be aggressive listeners, nor do they tend to be proactive on the part of the complainants. All offices tend to conduct some form of community outreach. Routine offices, however, tend only to contact their communities when they are invited, and rarely do these staff act as surrogates for their incumbents. Furthermore, their subsequent relationships with constituents tend to be very reactive in nature. Only rarely do routine offices initiate service for interests in their districts. Finally, all offices advertise their services and the accomplishments of the incumbent. Routine offices, however, tend to have fewer district items to promote, and they tend to be less vocal in their promotion. To conclude, one of B's younger staff members had recently come to realize the routine nature of her colleague's behaviors and was quite negative in her assessments. She was displeased with the "sitting" and the wasted time and inefficiency of the other staff. But mainly her problem was the virtual absence of any proactivity on the part of any staff, especially in light of the limited personal activities of the incumbent.

### "Laying the Groundwork"/Building a Reputation

The tasks performed above, whether they are routine or aggressive, are intended to serve the incumbent enterprise. Much of what district staff does can be characterized as building a "reputation". That "reputation" is something that allows the individual staff member to more proficiently do their job over the two-year cycle as they learn more

about the people and issues of their communities. More importantly, that “reputation” is also beneficial to the incumbent during election season. C’s RDSM explicitly referred to much of what he did as “laying the groundwork” for the campaign and for the next term in office. From the constituent’s perspective this “reputation” can be a range of things; from how effective the legislator has been in Washington to whether the constituent sees enough evidence that the incumbent and staff are around the community.

#### Everybody does it to some extent

Because each incumbent needs to be reelected every 2 years, nearly all incumbents are concerned about their “reputation”. Long serving incumbents like Neal Smith of Iowa or Bob Kastenmeier of Wisconsin are often said to have stayed “one term too long” and wore out their “reputations.” Nearly every office seemed to have at least one staff member who proactively worked on the incumbent’s “reputation”, and it tended to be a younger staffer. For example, C’s RDSM related that he enjoys the “political nature” of his job and is always looking for more opportunities to reach out. Another example was the displeased B staffer mentioned just above, who feels that she works hard getting out for the incumbent. Even B himself noted that he has to have staff in some places “looking out for his interests” because he can’t personally take care of everyone’s needs, and that to some extent his staff should be both “working on representation and reelection” because they are often the same thing.

#### High expectations

Most incumbents operate under the assumption that constituents have low evaluations of politicians in general, but high expectations of service and attention from their own incumbent. This is even more the case for relatively junior incumbents. One



of A's constituents likened the "reputation" to a "district connection" saying the A would never have the "connection" that his predecessor had. This seemed to me an unfair assessment but one I encountered with other constituents in the district. He simply had high expectations because the previous incumbent had long-serving staff that paid a lot of attention and took good care of the district. Whether it is A, B, C or D, all incumbents and staff were aware of these expectations and the need to protect the "reputation." Nevertheless, they each proceeded to defend their positions in different ways.

#### How to build a reputation

Some incumbents believed that their reputations were mostly built on the perceptions of their constituents that they "got the job done." If staff simply worked hard by attending more meetings, talking to more constituents, following through on more cases, that constituents would understand the efforts of the incumbent enterprise. Where I observed that incumbents were apparently stressing this strategy, it appeared that the staff worked hard to do "more." If, on the other hand, the incumbent appeared to be doing "less", than that message was subtly passed to the staff. In C's office, for example, the infrequent travel home and the lack of organized efforts at constituent contact suggested to the staff they need not work aggressively for "more" contact. Alternatively, the message sent continually by A and D, and their RDSMs, was that they were trying new things to meet new people. Clearly the field representatives in these offices interpreted that to also mean that they individually needed to do "more" in their regular behaviors contacting the local constituents, journalists, and other elites to let them know that the office was working hard on district interests.

As opposed to doing “more”, I found that some offices seem to build their reputation by specializing on particular projects or issues. Some offices devoted extra staff time or resources to veterans, seniors, and transportation issues. Particularly in larger urban areas, certain offices and staff appeared to specialize in policy areas. Here I’s personal and staff work on veteran’s issues is a great example. His colleagues in the area delegation often referred cases to his office simply because of staff expertise and a willingness to deal with these issues. Another great illustration of this type of reputation building was with C’s office. Over half of the twenty interviews and observations that I conducted mentioned the importance of low-income housing to C and several of his staff. The consensus was that “they seem to be around on that issue.”

How does this reputation work with constituents?

I observed numerous constituents’ say that they go to particular incumbents based on the incumbent, or their staff’s, specialties. After praising the job that C’s staff does on housing issues, one of his constituents noted that he “will contact the feds based on what they’re good at.” While the incumbent and staff specialization in this case largely drives the “reputation”, there are other factors that some sophisticated constituents also evaluate when determining whom they will contact. For example, one of C’s constituents noted that he works with an incumbent from another state for three reasons: 1) the incumbent is a vet so he has more interest in the subject matter; 2) he has more clout on the appropriate committee and is a senior member of congress; and 3) he is in the president’s party, so he can get things done with the Veteran’s Administration that a Republican incumbent could not. This constituent was afraid of another base closing commission, so his contact with individual legislators was fairly important to him, and his “community.” Another C

constituent noted that he goes to “where the expertise and clout lies” on any particular issue. That meant that this particular constituent went to his state’s senior United States Senator for aging and agricultural issues, to the junior senator for finance issues and to C for the issues that he has a national reputation on. These particular constituents all noted that their contact with the incumbent enterprise is largely conducted with the incumbent and his Washington staff. They did note, however, that in each case, the incumbents’ district staff tended to be “above average” in their assistance on the incumbents’ specialties so that they could work with the Washington staff to assist the constituents.

#### Increased Name Recognition

The cynic will suggest that incumbents work on their “reputation” to solidify their electoral positions. Defenders of the incumbents would more likely stress that personal interests, like C on housing or I on veterans, drive their activities and staff utilization and that they want their “reputation” to be evaluated by the voters based on those preferences, not the simple fact that they are doing “more.” Whether these activities are done to simply be more effective or to serve a personal policy interest, it is clear that either way they build some leeway for incumbents by increasing name recognition and popularity. Incumbents are not the only ones to benefit from increased name recognition through the “groundwork” activities. It will be shown below that the district staffers also increase their “reputation” with individual constituents, journalists and the political elites of the district and that they are able to put this recognition to use in a variety of fashions. What is clear is that some incumbents and staff are more proactive in how they “listen” to their constituents talk about the incumbent. C and D’s staff were aggressive in these activities, not merely acting like the passive “shock absorbers” identified by Macartney (1975,

p.80). Chapters Four and Five will look more fully at why these offices take different approaches to district work and why proactive “listening” is so important. But first, let me explain how the proactive office is different from the routine.

### The Aggressive or Proactive Office

The aggressive or proactive district enterprise is different from the routine office in three ways. First, the aggressive office tends to do “more” of the routine tasks described above. “More” signifies both a quantitative and qualitative level of activity. Second, the aggressive office additionally performs political tasks that routine offices tend to shy away from. Third, the aggressive office is more often significantly involved in the incumbent’s reelection campaign. This section will progress from the routine toward the more aggressive functions. This progression is also significant in that it symbolized the increasing impact of district staff on representation and congressional elections. The most aggressive district staff, while also enhancing the representation provided by incumbents, can also serve to bias that service to a particular group of constituents and negatively affect the outcomes of congressional elections.

The aggressive activities tend to be found much more in the realm of the RDSMs and the field representatives. Earlier in the chapter these individuals were referred to as the “interactors” of the district enterprise. Virtually every district office has schedulers, caseworkers, office managers, and press secretaries that perform nearly identical tasks. It is the job performance of the “interactors” that set apart the routine from the aggressive offices. Therefore, the following activities are largely focused on the behaviors of the RDSMs and the field representatives. There are individual staffers in what might be described as generally routine offices that also perform the aggressive activities below. I

found there to be exceptionally few of these individuals, however, as most individual staff conformed to the office style and the pattern set by the incumbent.

#### Aggressive staffs do “more” of the routine activities

Not only do aggressive offices perform a larger quantity of the routine activities, they also tend to pursue a larger number of approaches to the resolution of the routine tasks. In short, they do more tasks and they do them more creatively. Aggressive staffs were observed to be more effective in informing the incumbent. For reasons that will be seen in the next few functions, the aggressive district staff member tends to have more, and more interesting, information to share with the incumbent. The aggressive staff member is simply put in more situations that are valuable for the incumbent. The same relationship holds for the constituent information function. Because the aggressive staff member generally spends more time out in the field, they interact with more constituents and are able to not only receive information from the constituents, but also relay to them things that the incumbent has done or additional ways in which they can help.

The casework function is probably where the aggressive and routine offices are most similar. Most constituents with problems will call, email, or fax the office without being solicited by the incumbent or staff. There is, nevertheless, variation at the extremes of the two office types. B’s staff curtailed their office hours out in the community and stopped appearing at new community events to advertise their casework services. In fact, B’s RDSM suggested that they “didn’t want the extra work.” F continued to send four field representatives out into her district on a weekly basis, continually interacting with constituents who can utilize the services that her office provides. While it is impossible

to determine the actual amount of casework that this aggressiveness creates, clearly it does bring more work into F's office.<sup>13</sup>

The most apparent difference between the two office types is found in how they pursue the community contact function. While staff members from both offices do many of the same community contact functions, the number of staff out in the field during some part of their routine suggests the different priorities of each office type. Again, B and F seem to provide the ideal cases of each type of office. In the case of B, staff members rarely leave the office. They conduct the vast majority of their work by letter and phone in the office. The RDSM and the two younger field representatives were the only staff to conduct outreach. In contrast, F's staff was highly engaged in the field. The RDSM and four field representatives each spent substantial portions of their working routine in the field generating work through their direct interaction with constituents.

Perhaps a better measure of the variance was the amount of time that the staff spent on outreach. When this measure is utilized it somewhat softens the extremes of the cases. In the case of B, the RDSM and the two field representatives spent a few hours per week conducting community contact functions, while F's five "interactors" each spent at least two and ½ days per week in the field. Based upon my observations, I would suggest that B and F are extreme rather than ideal cases. The remaining offices tend toward one case or the other, but no other case seemed so entirely office-bound or aggressively field-engaged. Macartney's LA staff averaged 25% of their weeks out in the field doing

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<sup>13</sup> Rosenthal (1971) found that the legislators who had more staff in Washington tended to produce more legislation. The same logic seems to apply to district staff. Incumbents such as F that employed more "interactors" seemed to process relatively higher levels of casework. Comparisons of staff through interviews suggested that aggressive offices had more staff doing more cases on a weekly basis. I was not able to obtain precise numbers of cases resolved, so I could not give an accurate comparison across all offices.

community contact (1982, p71). I observed that the routine offices spent more of their weeks on the phone working cases, while the aggressive offices tried to spend roughly as much time interacting with the constituents as they were with the office work. In the words of one staff member, their job was “not sitting behind a desk all day” but to try and get out in the field for some portion of the week.

The difference in community interaction was not simply a quantitative difference, where the aggressive office strove to actually meet more individual constituents. Rather, the aggressive office is also generally more strategic about who it is they are actually seeing on a regular basis. In two different aggressive offices (A and E), I observed staff maintain lists of constituents who they came into contact with. For one of E’s long-serving staff members, the list served as a reminder of the many individuals he had built relationships with and needed to contact on his visits to the community. The list included names of elected officials, political/campaign supporters, and constituents he had worked on important cases with. Given that she was relatively new to the district, A’s staff member had a different type of constituent list. She maintained a list of individuals and communities that she met with and got invitations from and then made a “quarterly, monthly and city by city plan” to ensure that she was “hitting at least one community” a day through a speech, a visit or office hours. While the E list was built more on maintaining contact with a set list of individuals, the A list was built to both maintain old names and collect new ones. In fact, the A staff member proposed that the list had four parts: people A needs to hear from, people other staff recommend that she see, people that she knows, and new people that she meets.

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Where routine staffs tend to do their outreach through scheduled meetings, aggressive staffs also sometimes have more informal contact with constituents through unannounced drop-by visits. Sometimes these drop-bys are truly random visits in the course of a normal day to the mayors, journalists, bankers, chambers of commerce, barbers, etc. At other times, when staff schedule outreach days in the outer reaches of their districts, they will do drop-ins to the people that might be mentioned on the lists above. Either way, the purpose of the visit is twofold; to get a taste of the local political, economic, and social life and to let them know that the incumbent's enterprise was in the area that day. For the latter purpose, even when the staffs were not able to make contact with the people they were seeking, leaving a business card or message had the same effect.

Even in the drop-by visits there is room for the aggressive office to do "more." One of A's more aggressive staffers had a practice of "sticking his head in" on constituents, but he was much more interactive than simply leaving a business card. I observed a number of interactions where he would go through a "litany" of projects where A's office could possibly assist. He was also very aggressive about following up with people when he happened to return to their area. I observed him visiting a health clinic that he'd been to the previous month and told them "I just wanted to check in...I don't know of anything going on with your issue" but that he was still working for them. This aggressiveness directly contrasts with one of C's constituent, a city manager who noted that when he called with a request for information about a fairly significant grant program, they gave him a simple reference where to find the information, but never offered to help or bothered to check on his progress. Or, another of C's constituents, a bank president,



characterized the staff as being “not as visible” as other legislative staff in the area, because no one from C’s office had ever called or stopped into his office.

Aggressive staffs also tend to prefer the drop-by visit to the more routine office hours. Spending three hours sitting in a library talking to a handful of constituents, and on some days not even a handful, strikes some staff as tremendously less productive than simply spending an hour or two walking down main street or a key neighborhood and talking to five or six key people and getting out of town. In the words of one of A’s constituents, who remarked to a staff member sitting at an empty office visit: “you’ll get more votes at Rotary than sitting here by yourself.” Furthermore, aggressive staff noted that once you institutionalize your office hour routines and field visits you end up seeing many of the same people. Chapter Five will return to the issue of which of these forms of activity is more valuable for the incumbent.

I observed a considerable difference between how aggressive and routine offices represented incumbents in the field. The typical routine staff handled a field event in three quick steps: 1) if the incumbent wasn’t available but wanted representation, they would accept an invitation, 2) and then show up for the event, without having a role and 3) then depart without any further thought about the importance of the event. Aggressive offices are much more likely to play hardball with field events at all three steps. The aggressive staff member is 1) likely to attend events, either with the incumbent or in their place, 2) have a role in the planning and execution of the event, and 3) attempt to garner media coverage for the event or at least talk it up amongst area constituents. A prototypical routine staff member from C’s office remarked that it’s all about “just showing up” to “cover the bases.” But the aggressive staff tends to be thinking in more

promotional terms before, during and after the event. This style of aggressiveness also pertains to the scheduling of the incumbent. B's scheduler accepts or declines invitations and then gets basic information about his role in the event. I observed staff from A and D's offices negotiating about who would be invited and what kind of speaking roles that individuals would have. The aggressive office is unlikely to settle for a mere invitation and not negotiate their role in the event unless the invitation includes a more senior member of their party, like a senator or the president. The press secretary would also be involved in events involving the incumbent. Before the event the press secretary's job is to make sure journalists show up. If they don't most politicians would tell you "the event never happened." After the event, it is the press secretaries responsibility to work the journalists to ensure that the right story gets told. At all levels there is a clear difference in the attitudes of routine and aggressive offices.

One final way that offices are noticeably different is how they divide responsibilities between their caseworkers and field representatives. It seemed to be the case that more aggressive offices divided their caseworkers and field representatives by geography. Both A and D tended to organize their staff in this manner. This division allowed the field representatives and RDSMs to more clearly focus on specific communities. This division also comports well with districts that have obvious communities of interest. For example, large college towns usually have immigration as their major casework request. It also can be easier to divide an office this way earlier in the incumbent's career. Along these lines, the slightly more aggressive staff member might meld his or her casework responsibilities with a particular policy responsibility. In this case, one of C's more aggressive staff assistants did both housing and community finance issues. He felt that

“sometimes they meld together” and that he would be able to help two different communities of interest. While C’s office was generally routine in nature, this staff member was clearly thinking of his particular responsibilities in a more aggressive manner.

Once patterns of casework are established, it appeared that particular staff and offices tend to grow into issue-specific divisions where certain staff members developed “reputations” for handling certain types of cases, regardless of where they live in the district. The fact that potential cases might not occur in the vicinity of the caseworker or field representative is less problematic for the routine office than for the aggressive. This pattern of efficiency even appeared to become inter-office in metropolitan areas. Incumbent I’s office devoted substantial resources to military and veteran’s issues, often representing constituents from adjoining districts. It appeared that they received assistance on other issues, most notably on transportation matters, from the adjoining districts in return for the assistance with the veteran’s issues.

To conclude, aggressive staff members perform the same functions as routine offices. The difference is that they tend to do them in greater quantities and in more original fashions. Aggressive staff members also fulfill political tasks that routine offices rarely carry out.

Moving into the “gray” area: The political activities of aggressive district staff  
“Political” work defined

One of the distinctions between routine and aggressive offices that was hinted at in the previous section is the on-going relationships that the latter offices tend to have with elite constituents in their districts. Incumbents have done town hall meetings since the

colonial era in order that they might “hear” their constituents. But because traditional town hall meetings are drawing fewer people than they used to, and because many of those that do come are supporters (Washington Post, 1999, p.14), incumbents need to communicate with their constituents in different ways. Throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, people have become busier in their daily routines and less interested in politics. Therefore, staff and incumbents have come to use ‘political’ or more one-on-one relationships in order that they might better “hear” and “help” their constituents. These relationships also tend to be disproportionately focused on elite constituents. While all of the activities in this section clearly fall within the legal and ethical guidelines for federal staff, some of the functions begin to shade into “grayer” interpretations of what staff should be doing.

### Projects

Projects are one of the most notable sources of political collaboration between incumbents, staff and district elites. Sometimes these projects have specified purposes and lengths of duration, but usually they are more informal and on-going relationships between incumbents, staff and elite constituents. An example of the former would be the effort by A’s RDSM to procure street access for a constituent business owner. An example of the latter would be the regular involvement of D and her RDSM with the large state university located within her district. These two interactions are quite clearly at opposite ends of a spectrum of project relationships with elite constituents. They do share, however, a process that “listens” to what constituents are saying, fixes the problem, and then goes back to “listen” again. Ultimately it is hoped that these

relationships will provide important political rewards. These relationships and rewards will be more fully described in Chapter Five.

As was noted above, virtually all of the district offices carry out some degree of project work. What distinguishes the routine from the aggressive, however, is the degree of organization, commitment and continuity that the staff have toward projects. A, D and E each committed substantial resources to these larger institutional efforts. In the case of A's office, the RDSM was largely engaged in military staffing and procurement issues with the three military bases in the district. Even though the RDSM was in the office for three weeks per month, the DD said that he worked with the RDSM on only a few cases outside of military affairs. E employed one field representative who did little more than run his Economic Development Task Force, a forum in which the staff member worked with local officials and businesspeople to recruit new businesses and capital into the district. She traveled regularly throughout the district meeting with these elites whenever they had interest in new business. She also organized a yearly forum for the whole district that would introduce the federal grant programs that were available to assist local economic development. This entity was so successful that E's successor, who was of the opposite party, attempted to hire her to continue the Task Force. In both A and E's case, the relevant elites came to have a vested interest in the maintenance of the incumbent who helped them. Conversely, B and C did not have sustained "projects" or efforts comparable to these where elite constituents developed vested interests in defending the incumbents.

### Cross-Jurisdictional work

Not all of the political interactions of district staff focus on large federal projects where staff can interact and “win” on behalf of the constituents. Another form of political staff activity takes place where the staff can’t really “win” for the constituents, and where it logically appears that they have no business being. Cross-jurisdictional issues come about when a constituent makes a request that concerns some level of government other than the federal government.<sup>14</sup> Because there is no clear way in which the office can assist in the resolution of the case, staff will often suggest that they are involved for the benefit of the individual constituent, or the community. Given that aldermanic and state legislative districts fall within the constituencies of the federal legislator, it should be no surprise that incumbents direct their staff to assist their constituents. It was notable, however, that some offices (A and D) were much more likely to pursue cross-jurisdictional cases than were the others (B and C).

The importance of the local issue is often obscured. While most academic and political observers would focus on an incumbent’s legislative and oversight activities on behalf of a major district employer, an equally important interaction occurs at the local level. An example: While H’s Washington staff managed the budget, legislative and oversight activities for the largest district employer, a national airline company, the district staff and RDSM were especially attentive to the municipal, county and state issues that involved that company. There were issues such as zoning, access, parking, health care, and local taxation. The literature tends to overlook the importance of zoning,

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<sup>14</sup> We might also broaden this definition to include constituents who make personal or business requests that do not involve any level of government, for ultimately, these individuals are asking the staff and incumbent to intervene with an executive, judicial or legislative body in order to rectify their personal problem. Examples might include property disputes, divorces, or intellectual property.

parking, access, and employee concerns but that is what district staff can help out with to ensure that the large employers remain in the district and remain profitable. And also so they remain interested in supporting the incumbent! Routine offices and staff often do not pursue cross-jurisdictional cases because of the simple presumption that a federal legislative office cannot assist in non-federal cases. Constituents who do not think that federal staff can help drive this presumption as do routine staff who do not think it is their responsibility to intervene. Local economic elites usually stressed that the bulk of their governmental work was not federal in nature. In fact, a number of different chamber officials characterized their levels of government involvement as: 70% local, 30% state, and 0% federal. One of C's supporters, a prominent attorney involved in a chamber, noted that on the Legislative Affairs Committee, he did mostly "state issues" like transportation and that there was "very little federal stuff." A chamber official from B's district who been on the job for six months in her hometown and had been to the state capitol repeatedly, had still not yet been to her local federal office. "All politics and economics is local," she informed me. Furthermore, this chamber official and others will suggest that even their "local" development work sometimes goes through Washington staff if they are good. This presumption also came from state legislative officials. A staff member from a state senator in B's district suggested that all of their interactions were one-sided, with the federal staff calling them. This state staff member felt that they "almost never" contact the federal representatives, and if a "bigger issue" came up, the state legislators might contact the federal incumbent directly. These characterizations might lead one to give up on the importance of staff interaction on nonfederal matters. It was notable, then, that economic elites and chamber officials still interacted with district

staff despite these depictions! Clearly there are other factors driving these interactions that must be considered.

The routine office generally confirms the lack of importance of cross-jurisdictional issues, as they will usually refer cases over which they have no jurisdiction to the appropriate municipal, county or state contact. The more aggressive office will often work with the other governmental levels to seek solutions and monitor the progress of cases for the constituents. All offices did some cross-jurisdictional work. There were small bits of it even in C's office, despite his philosophical conservatism about casework. In fact, these types of cases even play to B's ideology; "I'm a local guy, problems are all the same from my court experience to the state senate to congress." This style of work suited his personal nature. The difference is that while B personally pursues some cross-jurisdictional cases, his staff did not do them to the extent of A or D's offices.

What the routine office often underplays is that there is, in fact, an actual opportunity for federal district staff to help on these issues. If for no other reason, federal district staffs tend to interact on a daily basis with staff from different levels of government who undoubtedly can help the constituents. For example, one of A's field representatives noted that she dealt with 42 agencies in the 6 counties she represented. And one of C's staff noted that he does "coordination with other levels of government and the private sector" on housing and economic development issues at meetings three to four times per month. Even though B and C did not have staff that utilized these agencies, both of their states have "Councils of Government" where state, local, and county programs cooperatively pooled their ideas and resources. Only one staff member from each of B



and C's staff mentioned any level of interaction with these types of agencies, and neither suggested that they were proactively involved on behalf of their constituents.

While elites may be puzzled at federal involvement in these issues, it is often quite logical when the staff member is a "community person" like an individual from A's office. Because of her daily casework assignments and interactions with staff from different levels of government, she can act as crucible of contact where people and problems congregate. She is able to put people together. It might even be suggested that this is new type of "iron triangle" where the incumbent and staff interact with constituents who have problems and then with other levels of government as the third leg. The logic for contact is made all the stronger by the fact that district offices are quite often located in the very same federal office buildings where constituents will have their issue difficulties. The motivation for contact is often likely to be stronger for the federal staff than for staff at other levels. I argue this because the local courthouse people, for example, deal at the small end with the people and the problems and they may tire of trying to find solutions, while the federal staff has access to grants, programs, and ideas that have been tried at all levels of government across the country. In short, the federal district staffs not only have the contacts, but they also have the motivation to want to rectify complex situations. These contacts are especially useful in homogenous districts where similar people work in similar jobs and have similar problems. For A's staff member, her homogenous group of constituents is the military. She regularly confronts veterans, retirees, surplus property, etc and is able to rely on both her community contacts and her federal resources. Alternatively, a staff member who handles grants programs such as one of C's staff, know federal, state and local sources of grant money. This is

extremely helpful in C's district, where a large metropolitan area is comprised of four large cities between three counties and two states all governmentally intermeshed. This situation presents an interesting opportunity for such an individual to help break down boundaries, as opposed to the routine staff that will merely refer out problems that arise because of jurisdictional complexities. It is also logical that district staffs interact with different levels of government when one considers the "power and presence" that a federal legislator and his or her staff can bring to a situation. For example, a local government official in B's district talked about how B's "power and presence" was a key factor in making EPA officials expedite a municipal issue.

The desire and ability to interact is also extremely important in relatively poorer districts. In F's district and in one of A's towns, district field representatives were an important community resource because there were relatively fewer businesses or community organizations with resources or information to assist in community development. As the examples above demonstrated, in wealthier districts staff can serve as a clearinghouse or organizing point for the many individuals and groups with resources. Poorer communities are more reliant upon staff to take leadership roles on these issues.

The basic motivation for getting involved in cross-jurisdictional cases for both routine and aggressive offices might be to make "things to go smoothly," as one staffer put it. Even staffs in routine offices like B's tend to be involved in governmental boards like the state's "council of government." She felt that "things go smoother if we have a relationship, and we do." But for the aggressive office, helping out on these types of issues is done because it does more for the incumbent. Here there is clearly a perception

on the part of staff that it is important to help out constituents even if their problems are beyond the staff's jurisdiction. Some staff made clear that their efforts were driven by a sense that many constituents cannot distinguish between levels of government and that some are more likely to "call their congressman" for problems as small as the potholes in their streets. Whether it is out of a sense of fear that they will be blamed for not helping or because they will be able to take credit for trying is less important than the fact that staff from aggressive offices actually attempt to resolve these cases. The perception appears to be well founded, for in both examples cited above, A's veterans and B's local government officials were grateful for the service. If nothing else, cross-jurisdictional issues provide an opportunity for staff to keep the lines of communication open with down-ballot office holders (state legislators, local office holders, judges, etc). While even routine offices are likely to intervene and monitor for elite constituents on occasion, the aggressive offices seemed to make more concerted efforts on behalf of these constituents. As Chapter Five will demonstrate, providing access to the incumbent and the offer of assistance on casework or other projects can pay more substantial political dividends.

### Advisories

Another aggressive political tactic is to involve individual constituents and groups within the rubric of the congressional office. Some offices accomplish this through advisory panels. The most common examples of these panels included financial, health care, military and agricultural committees. The format of these panels varied. Some are public (open to constituents and journalists) while others are more suited to simply advise the incumbent and staff. The leadership of the panels varies as well. Some are lead by

the incumbent, others by staff or constituents. They also range in size. H has nearly 800 people in his advisory committee database. This list has been accumulating throughout his tenure. He is a good case to show how the district operation evolves and grows more powerful over time. His RDSM said that when it first started that “certain key advisers” were invited to noon lunches. Now, years later it is “not so much by invitation” as by announcement, and they draw an average of 80 people to each of the four or five yearly advisory sessions.

The routine offices generally do not even do advisories or they use them solely to support the incumbent’s legislative behavior. For example, G disbanded (or more likely just stopped calling) his veteran’s advisory committee when he left that subcommittee. Incumbent I did “agency seminars” often in cooperation with other metropolitan offices. The topics were usually items of general interest like taxation and immigration. These “seminars” were “open to the public” but they found that it was mostly friends of the office that showed up. For G and I, advisories were largely informational for constituents and for their own staff to a lesser extent.

Several other examples are illustrative of other purposes that advisories serve in the incumbent enterprise. In the case of B’s Saturday brunches, he was clearly using the forums with different guests for his own informational purposes. They weren’t advertised, nor did they include members of the general public. H’s forums, conversely, were large public events that were organized and led with the intention of informing constituents and keeping numerous elites involved in his enterprise through the honor of being selected a participant on a panel. Finally, A’s veteran’s forum was a third style of organization. In this case, several elite veteran constituents were in charge and they

conducted private meetings with relevant veterans and officials, operating tacitly in the name of A, usually without his presence. While this wasn't a public event, it was an event that served to assist A's enterprise in the veteran's community. All three of these forums involved an outreach to constituents but each had distinct motives. It is also possible that there is a mixture of motives in advisories. One of G's staff stated that their advisory bodies have "some people we know who are our friends and some who are major players" who they would like to know better. From one point of view, the argument can be made that these individuals are an extension of the enterprise and serve as a legitimate tool of representation of district interests. From another point of view these advisories are means by which incumbents can either "honor" or "payback" district elites – either way, they are including them in the "enterprise" and making them want to ensure that the incumbent stays in office. Incumbent-staff-elite interaction facilitates the positive evaluation of the enterprise.

#### Interaction with elite constituents – elected officials

As noted in the discussion of drop-by visits and cross-jurisdictional requests, district staffs interact with elite constituents. It appeared that staff members made special efforts to interact with the elected officials of their districts. These interactions tended to be almost exclusively with their own partisans, however. Comments from elected officials of the other party tended to be overwhelmingly unfavorable, or the officials suggested that they only sought assistance through officials from their own party. For example, one of the mayors from C's district, who was elected as a nonpartisan but was clearly Democratic, suggested that she goes to the U.S. Senator of her own party and did not even know the names of the local staff for C or the Republican senator. Generally

elected officials are willing to maintain close relationships with district staff because they recognize the nature of politics and the important role that staff members play in some enterprises. Not having empowered district staff, however, can damage that relationship, as seen in the case of one of C's state senators. While she noted that she regularly refers casework directly to his district staff, on legislative or more "political" issues she will call the COS or C directly in Washington. In A and D's office, the RDSMs regularly interacted with officials like this state senator. I would speculate, however, that local officials in A and D's districts would be much more apt to take legislative and "political" issues through the district staff before calling Washington. What this suggests is that some elites, especially elected officials, are likely to perceive the 'power' hierarchy in the office and make their inquiries accordingly. This has important ramifications for a junior incumbent in a competitive electoral situation that will be examined in Chapters Five and Six. I would also note that elite constituents and elected officials were often pragmatic in their relationships with incumbents and district staff. Some of the examples above indicated that elite constituents recognized and sought out incumbents who were likely to be in helpful positions (i.e. had seniority, were on the right committee or had pull with the presidential administration). Occasionally, elites and elected officials who admitted these relationships would also make efforts to contact district staff and make themselves known. I found this especially to be the case in A's district.

### Surveillance

One of the subtle purposes of carrying out 'political' interaction with constituents is to provide the staff and incumbent with information about the district. This information ranges from simple items such as people's general disposition toward the incumbent, to

the economic or legislative needs of a community, to the political rumblings of local elections and potential challengers to the incumbent. One of C's staffers called herself the "eyes and ears" of the incumbent. Interacting with elite constituents is perhaps the best way for district staff to pursue the surveillance function. Macartney (1975, 1982) briefly noted that surveillance was one of the fourteen tasks performed by district staff in LA County. My observations clearly concur. While he suggested that the staff were useful in "taking the pulse" of the district (see my comments above about providing information to the incumbent) and in cultivating contacts (see comments on community outreach), I do not think that he appreciated the degree to which incumbents have come to rely on this staff function, nor how aggressively some staff operations pursue these kinds of activities. Furthermore, Macartney did not begin to discuss the impact that such interactions have on incumbents, constituents and competitive elections. I will return to examine this topic in great depth in Chapters Five and Six.

#### The purely political behavior: campaign activities of district staff

Up until this point, the behaviors described in this chapter might strike the reader as being obvious and non-controversial. However, the political activity carried out by district staff is often "gray" in shade as it lies between the clearly ethical and the problematic. The previous section is aptly referred to as a collection of "gray" activities because some of the aggressive activities are harder to examine than the routine and the staff members who perform them are usually less willing to discuss these activities in interviews, let alone in questionnaires. In this section, I will draw upon observations from my campaign experiences to supplement what information I was able to extract from federal staff that were more reluctant to talk about their campaign responsibilities.

### The “gray” area

The amount of time and money spent on election campaigns over the past thirty years has increasingly required incumbents to have “permanent” staff for their “permanent” campaigns. At the same time there was a continual expansion in the number of federal staff that incumbents employed to keep up with their constituent’s growing demands for casework, project assistance and the passage of new legislation. Rather than allocating funds for two entirely different sets of staff or trying to get taxpayers to directly pay for their campaign staff, it was more logical to allow a few of the individuals to coordinate the activities of both parts of the incumbent enterprise.<sup>15</sup> On the Senate side these individuals came to be known as “political designees.” These individuals (three per Senate office and no limit per House office) are permitted to deal with overt campaign matters ranging from the scheduling of campaign events, to the ordering of yard signs, right up to, and including, the solicitation of hard money contributions. The only restrictions imposed on the designees are those that logically follow from the enforcement of federal ethics laws. These prevent federal employees from conducting campaign work on office time or from using office resources.<sup>16</sup> Their salaries must also reflect the source of their work. If they are going to take a paid position in the campaign, their federal salary and responsibilities must be commensurately reduced. These provisions were not always followed. State and federal staff both admitted to me, or were observed conducting fundraising activities in their public offices, or were using lists developed from their constituency work to supplement fund-raising or voter databases. The one obvious permissible exception to the ethical

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<sup>15</sup> Be careful here. “Coordination” is a word that makes campaigners and designees quite nervous, as it is one of the increasingly few campaign activities that the FEC still prohibits.



separation is scheduling the incumbent's activities. Because it would be problematic to cleave the incumbent into two separate individuals for scheduling purposes, schedulers are tacitly allowed to conduct campaign scheduling from their federal offices. In addition to the scheduler, in the aggressive offices, most of the "interactor" staff had some political roles to play. But the campaign and fund-raising roles were most especially undertaken by the RDSMs.

Given public cynicism about politicians and the current state of campaign finance, see especially people's reaction to Gore's defense about "no controlling legal authority, it is perhaps surprising to find out how much more "gray" the area between federal and campaign activities used to be. Prior to the passage of campaign finance laws in 1971, 1974 and 1976, there were virtually no limits on the solicitation and expenditure of campaign funds, nor was there any means of disclosure. Even more surprising was that campaign contributions could also be utilized to fund federal office budgets, or develop "slush funds" to privately finance district office operations. Often times in-kind contributions came in the form of office gifts, free printing, reduced rent and "private funding" of special office projects (Macartney, 1975, pp.68-70, 122). It is difficult to conclude which system is more ethically challenged. The relatively smaller office and campaign expenditures from thirty years ago, however, suggest that the contemporary situation is more problematic.

#### Working on the "relationship" during the lull

In the words of one RDSM, the political designees will take care of "relationship stuff" during the periods between elections. At the most elemental level this means staying in contact with elected and partisan officials to make sure the campaign

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<sup>16</sup> Federal employees are exempted from Hatch Act provisions barring campaign activity.

mechanism can be brought back to life for the election. The RDSM will need to wear both hats when dealing with these individuals on their professional, political and personal issues. Also during this period, some designees are assigned whatever “campaign” activities might arise, usually making a speech or driving the incumbent to a party event. Transportation is actually a tricky issue because incumbents cannot use federal vehicles to travel to political events. Nor can their travel from Washington to the district be publicly financed if they start any trip home with a “non-federal event”, a designation that leads many an incumbent to the creation of imaginative events. It also tells you why Presidents and visiting elected officials or cabinet secretaries go directly to schools or neighborhood associations before they head to fundraisers when they arrive in a state.

More commonly these campaign events will be fundraisers. If the candidate is vulnerable it will mean that other party officials are coming in to help that individual. I didn’t observe any of these cases for the dissertation but have seen numerous examples in campaign settings. If the candidate is electorally comfortable, they will often take to the road to assist the previous category of incumbents. Incumbent A was of the latter type. This level of profile also involves the incumbent’s staff. In A’s case, at the time of the interview, his DD had traveled with him fifty of the previous fifty-eight weekends, some in the state, some out, some federal events, some campaign. Wearing both hats at that pace can be a dizzying act. Fundraising for House members is a never-ending project, and the designees tend to be involved in these activities throughout the cycle. For these staff members, the campaign cycle truly is “permanent.” But as the election approaches, it appears that designees from the more aggressive offices become more heavily involved in solicitation, spending larger portions of their days on the phone to ensure that fund-

raising events are well attended or that well-known special guests can be procured to enhance turnout. As noted earlier, House staff can wear both hats as long as they do it on personal time or on unpaid leave, and they do not do it with government resources. Given this very permeable transition and the fact that constituents are generally unaware of these distinctions suggests a troubling gray area. In fact, the gray area is not always gray. While I did not directly observe staff breaking ethics restrictions, off the record comments, second-hand stories and my personal political experiences all encountered such abuses. Not all “gray” activity is “gray”. Some of it is illegal: staffs are known to raise money and plan campaign events from their federal offices. In other settings affiliated interest groups share polls or media strategies in coordination with the incumbent’s campaigns. Some of it is simply very gray: Campaign supporters seek meetings with incumbents and staff to discuss legislative priorities after making financial contributions. In each of these scenarios, taxpayer-financed legislative staff assist in subverting fair and open congressional elections.

The highly aggressive offices, often the ones confronting viable election opponents, tend to supplement their designees with professional campaign assistance. In the case of A and D, both RDSMs operated alongside of professional campaign workers who helped with media and fieldwork activities. In both cases, however, the designees served in significant fund-raising and strategic advisor roles. Ultimately, A’s designee shifted over to his campaign.

#### The last six months: How staffs assist come election time

It does not always logically follow that the aggressive office will be the one where staffs shift from the federal office to the campaign. In the four primary cases, the

designees for A and C shifted, while D's stayed in the federal office and B had a separate campaign staff. I should note, however, that C's designee did not operate in the same capacity as those from A and D's offices. Up to this point "more" activity in a category implied that an office was of the more aggressive type. But because we are now talking about a different type of activity (i.e. the campaign) I do not feel that the "more" categorization applies. For example, there might be an office that is exclusively routine in all of the above functions but come the last six months of the cycle, every staff member rolls out to the campaign headquarters nightly to stuff envelopes. While I would suggest that this is not a likely occurrence, I would also suggest that this type of office is probably not permeating into the "gray" activities like the examples of A and D above. Federal employees are fully allowed, and usually encouraged, to help out on their employers' campaigns. After reading so far that staff are so active for their incumbent enterprise, it might be interesting to learn that more often than not federal staff do not regularly volunteer for campaigns. Except for the strategic and fund-raising roles that are played by the more senior employees, however, most of these activities performed by federal volunteers are found in the realm of phone calls, lit drops and data entry. It would be more productive to focus here on the roles of senior staff that bridge between the campaign and federal worlds.

Some RDSMs will ultimately become campaign managers. In the case of A's office above, the transition was nothing more than a subtle shift over time, where the designee moved from doing some campaign activities to substantially more travel and fund-raising and ultimately running the campaign for the final four months. Given his RDSM's activities, C's designee operated in a much more black and white world than in A and D's

offices. For C, there was no subtle transition. Rather, the RDSM wore his federal hat almost exclusively until a point five months before the election when he shifted to run the campaign full-time. In Chapters Five and Six I will return to this issue and discuss the consequences of these staff transitions.

From the routine functions of providing information to the incumbent all the way up to managing an incumbent's campaign for re-election, it has been shown that district staff enterprises approach their missions in different fashions. Up to this point, this chapter has focused on the staff's functions in the context of the incumbent enterprise. Some staffs, however, operate with a mixed set of motives.

#### Motives of individual district staffers

##### Mixture of motives

As the literature has found that individual legislators have different motives, I observed that staffs seek different ends through their employment in district offices. While some studies conclude that legislators have one overriding motive, usually to be reelected, district staffs are motivated by a variety of factors. In a study of the motives of committee staff, Price (1971) identified three role orientations: "professionals", "entrepreneurs" and "mixed" motives. While Price examined how these roles impact policy innovation in Congress, I will mold his typology to look at what staff members hope to achieve while in the enterprise and with other long-term goals.

##### "Professionals"

The first type of staff has a bottom line motivation to do a good job. Yet "doing a good job" meant two very different things. For some "professional" staffers, working for a federal legislator allowed them to do a good job **for other people** through the services

they could offer. For other “professionals” the basic motivation derived from **personal satisfaction** with the tasks they could accomplish.

### The Humanitarian

The “professional” who is motivated to serve others might even be referred to as a humanitarian. This was a commonly found motivation amongst caseworkers and some field representatives. One of A’s field representatives was an excellent illustration of this role type. She claimed that she had “a desire to help people.” The interview and observations suggested very little in the way of partisan or political motive in her actions or what elites said of her. She suggested that her job was: “75% is public service, 5% is politics and 20% a mix of other things.” When the “professional” staffer was asked why they stayed in this job, the common response was that “they’re there to help people.” District staff also revealed their “helping” motive in how they depicted their job responsibilities as compared to staff with divergent motives. For example, the humanitarian staffer sees the advisory forum as a way to inform constituents, where other types of staff suggest that forums are an effective way to reach a lot of educated elites and help voter’s perception of the incumbent while providing some information. The humanitarian motivation is especially believable given the low pay and lack of respect given to caseworkers and field representatives. Given this dual blow, one senator’s staff member suggested that “there are lots of compassionate staff” who do the job solely to help people. Constituents echoed that sentiment. The low pay already established, one constituent noted that a field representative didn’t do a lot of “advertising” for B. This could only lead her to conclude that the staff did the work because of “their personal interest” in helping people.

One way to verify the “humanitarian” credentials was to inquire about extra-curricular activities. Often staff would supplement their job descriptions by talking about the kinds of groups they belonged to outside of the office. There intuitively seems to be lesser electoral value for the incumbent if the staff belongs to the Red Cross or Women’s Shelter groups as opposed to those staff who belong to Chamber or Rotary groups. The former type of group membership goes to the heart of staff interest in helping others. The more routine offices tended to carry more of these “humanitarian” membership cards while the aggressive offices could usually be found attending business club luncheons or after hours.

I would note that some offices fit into this category because of the ideological limitations that the incumbent placed upon their functions. C’s staff saw an inherent conservative mission to have a limited and reactive role with constituents. Their job was simply to help constituents who brought problems into the office. In fact, one of the staff had a “mission statement” that she’d written years earlier, that repeatedly emphasized her “service to the people.” Observations and elite interviews confirmed the staff directives. C’s staff was “humanitarian” by job description.

### The Careerist

The other type of “professional” staff has the simple motivation of excelling in the staff career that they have chosen. The clearest expression of this motivation was found in C’s RDSM. This individual referred to his fondness for the “psychology of the job.” He so thoroughly enjoyed the five years that he had spent in the office that he was going on for a master’s degree in organizational theory while he continued to work in the office. Other “professionals” might not be dedicated so much to the exact staff position they

were holding at the time, as much as they enjoyed working in a government job. Here one of B's staff that had Hill experience had moved back home to do a master's degree, in the eventual hope of becoming a city manager. So the job with B was the right time in the right place, and provided him good training for his eventual career in city government. Finally, there are the "professional" staffers who enjoy the interpersonal challenges presented by this style of work. One of A's staff suggested that her job "sharpens her communication skills and personal development." As she noted above, the job requires good "community skills." Being a field representative was definitely a good career move for someone who hoped to sharpen her set of skills. Whether the motivation is to serve others or do a good job, either way the "professional" staffs are motivated by the means of the job. Other staff members were motivated more by the ends generated by their job responsibilities.

#### **"Entrepreneurs"**

The 'rational' incumbent has been well studied by the literature; he or she should utilize multiple resources to first, and foremost, attain reelection. According to Salsibury & Shepsle (1981), the majority of Washington staff share this primary goal of advancing the incumbent's career. I found that these same conclusions applied to many of the district staff. The "entrepreneurial" district staff tends to be motivated to help their employer's political position.

B's personal assistant said it best, "my main job is to get B reelected." Some "entrepreneurs" are more overt in this behavior and statements than others, even though virtually all district staff to some extent acted in this fashion (or else they'd be fired?). Numerous other staff explained that their behaviors were largely driven by the need to



keep the incumbent's name "out there", to represent the incumbent, or to build the incumbent's "reputation." All of these observed behaviors and explanations testify to the primacy of the reelection goal in the minds of district staff.

Clearly not all incumbents are driven solely by the electoral motivation. Personal and policy interests can often have just as large an impact on individual incumbents as the drive to be re-elected. So it should follow that staff will also be able to remove the primacy of reelection. Indeed, one of C's constituents stated; "staff members are a reflection of their boss." In the case of C, they tend to be "cerebral" and out working on the types of issues that C deems important and worthwhile. Observations suggested that this was, in fact, the case. C's staff was the least election-oriented of the case studies. It also follows then that incumbents who are in more uncertain electoral situations and are working hard to attain reelection (A and D), will have more "entrepreneurial" staff who are busily occupied attempting to build the "reputation" of the incumbent with constituents in the field. Observations confirmed that the majority of A and D's district staff conformed to the incumbent's motivations.

Some other staff had completely different motives that defied classification. These staffers generally wanted to do something different in their life and took the job because they enjoyed interacting with others. One of B's staff depicted this motivation in his explanation that he took the job for "longevity." He had been married for 50 years, had long since retired, and has fun with the job. In his own words, he'd "fought a war, ran a drugstore and this is something completely different." Another of B's staff had a similar motive. She had been a schoolteacher who helped out on B's first congressional race and then took a year leave to "do something different" and she hasn't looked back for twenty

years. So far I have depicted staff with “professional”, “entrepreneurial” and ‘other’ motivations. These categories did not appear to be mutually exclusive, however, and I would suggest that most staff have a mixture of motivations. For example, B’s personal assistant was motivated to both enjoy the job and to get B reelected.

#### “Mixed” motives?

It appeared to me that most staff had multiple motivations that derived from three distinct sources; the constituent that needs help, the incumbent that needs reelection and the various personal motives of the individual staff member. The “professional” and the “entrepreneur” appear to be ideal classifications that most staff members only tend towards. Using Price’s classifications, Burks and Cole (1978) found that most Washington aides saw themselves as a mixture of the “professional” and “entrepreneur”, where the “entrepreneurs” tended to be younger. I generally observed the same pattern for district staff that Burks and Cole found in Washington simply by walking in the front door and meeting the first few staff. Observations confirmed a cohort difference in staff attitudes. The offices of A, C, and D were substantially younger than B. In the district, young staff more often mentioned their own careers or the desire to make policy or work hard to ensure the incumbent’s reelection, while older staff tended to mention their role in helping the incumbent assist constituents. Some staff resisted classification as either one type or the other. One clear hybrid case was one of A’s staff, who defined her role in helping a particular constituent with a medical problem for his child as both “building the community and helping the incumbent.”

Amongst younger staff, I regularly observed individuals with another set of motives who enjoyed both helping people as well as the political nature of their jobs. I suggest

that this category is not really a hybrid or “mix” of Price’s two categories. Rather, this category is based on a larger recognition of the staff’s own motives. My observations suggest that some staff need to be recognized as rational self-actors, with motives above and beyond the “enterprise” or the need to do humanitarian “service.” One of the best examples of this type of was one of B’s field representatives, who while clearly working for B, was driven by her love for the political interaction and discourse that came with her job. She derived tremendous satisfaction from her role in the community and the fact that she did “work” when people see her out in the community, at a restaurant etc. For her the “work” was a reflection of her position in the community. So she was doing the job almost as much for herself as for B, not that she’s ever thinking of running for office. This is not to suggest that all the staff that have rational self-motivations are less valuable elements of the incumbent enterprise. In fact, it was precisely this love for the politics of the job that lead B to hire this individual years ago when he suggested that “she knows where the bodies are buried.” Another staff member who fit this categorization was an individual from C’s office who liked a job with a “different set of responsibilities” that would allow him to do the politics he clearly enjoyed while still working in his pre-politics business profession. Both of these cases suggest that staff can have their own rational self-motivations and still be dedicated to the incumbent.

#### Becoming an institution impacts motives

It was not uncommon for staff in some offices to become personally institutionalized in their localities. One of C’s long serving staff worked out of an office that numerous constituents suggested was “her office.” This same characterization was also applied to C’s former RDSM and to one of the U.S. Senator’s representatives in C’s district.

Pursuing the aggressive behaviors described above institutionalizes a staffer; they organize activities for their incumbent, they are active in outreach, they interact with elite constituents, etc. While this does not suggest that the staff member ever becomes an equal of the incumbent, it does suggest that many elites come to see district staff as autonomous political actors. They have their own contacts, sources of information, and occasionally even their own agendas. In this sense the incumbent's enterprise can be comprised of multiple people with conflicting agendas. The literature tends to assume that incumbent enterprises are entirely subsumed within, and devoted to, the incumbent. Having witnessed the damage that empowered and autonomous staff can do to an incumbent's reputation, it should come as no surprise that most incumbents generally like to anchor their staff to the main motivation of the office; the promotion of the boss's electoral career.

A staff member becoming an "institution" is not always negative for the incumbent's enterprise. For example the incumbents just mentioned clearly benefited from the positions of the three staff members in their communities, if for no other reason than they were able to collect valuable political information. At the most beneficial level, these efforts might also improve people's perceptions of the incumbent. Furthermore, it is very hard to replace these individuals. Testifying to the importance of the RDSM is the difficulty that results in having to replace one of these individuals when they depart the incumbent's enterprise. Many staff and constituents recognized the degree to which these individual staff could become institutionalized over a long period of time. One of the best examples was a staff member from the senior U.S. Senator from incumbent C's state. In this case, the senator's district director was mentioned prominently by a

substantial number of the staff and elites when I asked them about whom they interacted with. To several constituents, the retirement of this staffer member practically implied that the senator's office had closed up and left town. Indeed, one of the constituents suggested that she was not even going to C's office because her expectation of service was so high. I also witnessed the departure of E's RDSM in the run-up to his campaign for higher office. The intervening period between the RDSM's departure and the conclusion of the campaign were marked by organizational drift and a lack of purpose that likely would not have occurred had the RDSM been able to retain his position. Given the timing of the departure, his absence was filled by an only slightly expanded presence of the Washington COS through phone conferences, a pale substitute to in-district leadership. In simple terms, staff members are able to develop their own name recognition over time. When two of the three staff mentioned above left their offices, there were clear voids to fill. Constituents mentioned both staff members by name (in one case two years after the staffer departed) and said they were more likely to start their search for assistance in offices with other staff. In one of the offices, the departure of several qualified staff that had "reputations" caused a larger scale loss of confidence within the elite community. One of C's staffers said that he had replaced a competent staff with "a bunch of people (my) age". The end result of this was that he no longer had any confidence in the district office and now called Washington directly to deal with the COS on most substantive district issues.

The risk to incumbents comes from the staff member who decides to capitalize on the institutionalization and begins to work the job for his or her own political career. A number of constituents in E's district were under the impression that his RDSM was

frequently maneuvering himself to replace the incumbent once he moved up to higher office. The 'maneuvering' staff is not necessarily a problem for the incumbent. Just as with the three staff above, the 'maneuvering' staff member is connected to the incumbent and by completing the aggressive representation throughout the district, both the incumbent and the staff member can benefit. The risk, however, is that the staff member damages an incumbent's reputation, alienates constituents through their actions, or in the case of a primary, can be put the incumbent in an awkward situation of appearing to coronate his successor.

#### Ambition in the Service of Ambition

As could be deduced from the previous section, there is a set of staff for whom politics and/or political power are the driving motivations. It really should not be surprising to learn that a driven group of people (incumbents) often surround themselves with other similarly driven individuals (staff). When Macartney conducted his examination of district staff, he found that sixty of the one hundred and twenty-five legislative staffers expressed an attachment to exercising political power (1975, p.91). Parker (1992) suggested that incumbents stay in Congress not because of their salaries but because of the power they exercise and the potential of future options. I would speculate that similar motivations are at play in the minds of many staff. Some seemed to arrive this way (young and hungry) while for others it was a process that occurred as they became institutionalized figures in their local political scenes. The motivation driving the young staff was frequently a simple desire to be close to or to exercise political power. This ranges from the newly hired staff member who wants to be in the presence of the incumbent as frequently as possible to the individual who wants to 'make things happen.'

I would speculate that a significant factor in the high turnover of legislative staff, both in Washington and the district, stems from the disappointment of young staff that do not become institutionalized as rapidly as they had hoped. It was apparent from my observations that the younger staff members were disproportionately eager to acquire more political power. A's DD and C's RDSM were two individuals who seemed to express such attitudes during the interviews and both individuals departed the offices within the next year, despite their high positions in the offices. In both cases, the individuals expressed a frustration with the hierarchy and management style and the inhibition it placed on their ability to "get things done." Another of C's staff clearly desired to move on Washington where he could work on "real policy issues" and only half-jokingly laughed at my inquiry of whether he wanted a future political career. His colleague in the office also wanted "a political career in Washington, maybe in the White House eventually." Staff members who were hired at a later point in life seemed more content to ride the political waves of the district. It seemed that they were content to ride the political waves of the smaller pool and be closer to their homes and families than were younger staff.

For some staff the ambition is an even more naked desire for power; these staff members desire an eventual run of their own for office. There is a growing body of literature about legislative staff that use their positions as "launching pads" for campaigns. In their study of Washington Senate staff, Fox and Hammond (1972) found that roughly 2/3 of all staff retain their home state residence. Clearly their employers are glad to have their confidence and votes. But later research has confirmed that many staff probably keep their home residences in case they decide to return to run for office.

Macartney (1975, pp.246, 266) confirmed that this “launching pad” also existed with staff in Los Angeles, where twenty percent of top staff aides expressed a desire to run for office, and that those were typically the younger, white-male staff members. In general, Malbin (1980) found that many Washington staff had “progressive ambition” and that their career goals tended to shape their behavior. It impacted how and with what groups they interacted. I found this also to be the case with those district staff that seemed more likely to be positioning themselves to run for office. In the case of C’s RDSM, while he was not expressing an interest in running for office, his activities as a federal and campaign staff member demonstrated the practical side of Malbin’s finding. This particular individual was doing the right things if he had political ambition. He was described as being an “excellent campaigner and contact” by a chamber official from his district and that it would be “helpful” for the constituent to have had a chance to contact him on the issues during the campaign. One might interpret this to mean that it would ultimately be “helpful” for the staff member as well.

Recent literature on legislative staff (see especially Hernnson, 1994) suggests that staff are highly successful candidates for Congress because of their experience on the issues, their contact with fundraising sources, and their poise to run at the right time. Hernnson calculated that while former staff comprise only 4% of the candidate pool, they ultimately comprise 15% of Congress. In short, former staff members are collectively the best group of candidates that parties can recruit to run. Yet, this discussion suggests that little recruitment is necessary, former staff members are largely self-recruited to run in the right place at the right time.



Some staff seemed to grow into their ambitions. The best example of this was E's RDSM. A number of constituents and one E staffer said he was interacting with constituents "as much for himself" as he was for E. He was going to the right meetings, interacting with the major constituency groups (the military and the state university) and the important people knew him. A number of conversations with elites suggested that they simply assumed that he would step into the seat if the incumbent were to leave for other opportunities such as a job in the presidential administration, or a run for higher office.

Staff can build their own reputations by working on projects or issues for the incumbent and are often well placed to take over when the incumbent steps aside because: 1) they have spent long periods of time relating to the types of issues that the previous incumbents have (un)successfully spoken to; 2) they have interacted extensively with the relevant individuals in the district who know and care about those issues and; 3) they have connections to people who are important at the local level, like elected officials, interest group leaders and campaign contributors. Even the staff that do not desire to run often realize that this process is occurring. One of B's staff suggested, "to most working in district office is a stepping stone...there's a lot more name id that comes with it. Also it's a good thing (we) do run...if I did for example, I already know the people and issues and have a wealth of knowledge...being a staff member is like training." Although she expressed no desire to run, she indicated that a friend was a mayor of one the cities in the area, and that she could easily do the job based on her contacts, training and willingness to work.

There was a mixture of each of these types of individuals within each of the offices that I observed. I would note, however, that the aggressive offices did tend to have younger staffers that were both more “entrepreneurial” for the incumbent and more politically motivated, as compared to the older and routine offices. I would conclude, however, that in the end, the incumbent enterprise was virtually always the primary motive. While staff may have had different medium and long-term goals, they were generally united in their short-term commitment to their employers. One hears only in the most rare case of a senior staff member who actually unseats their employer. The wise but ambitious will be better served to sit and wait for the open seat. To reiterate, this mixture of motives is not necessarily bad for the incumbent enterprise: bringing in a group of young, brash, aggressive staff and mixing them with older more service-oriented and loyal employees can often result in an efficient completion of work. But it can also result in individual staff discontent, as seen in both B and C’s offices. This mixture of staff types also serves to reinforce the contradictory impacts of congressional district staff. While some of their motives serve to enhance representation, the more ambitious and “entrepreneurial” goals bias the pool of constituents that receive service and serve to restrict the ability of constituents to select their representatives through free and fair elections.

#### Why individual staff are hired

Balutis (1975) and Hammond (1975) concluded that the job types of Washington staff are influenced by their different career backgrounds. Yet, neither speculated about how these variant backgrounds affected the type of people hired for legislative offices or the impact that the backgrounds had on staff norms or motivations. These studies lead one to

want to know more about why members of Congress hire the staff that they do, both in Washington and in the district.

Some staff know the candidates before their first election

One of the most notable differences between visiting a Washington and a district office is the people you'll meet. Washington offices visitors usually encounter a young staff member who was recently hired, is often not from the district, and will likely be promoted or resigned within a couple months. In the district you'll more likely to encounter a long-serving staff aide who is a long-time resident of the area and is not likely to be leaving the staff any time soon. Many of the district staff enterprises that I observed were "closely knit...like a family." The closeness of these relationships is solidified by the significant number of staff in district offices that have ties to the incumbent that predate the run for office. One of G's field representatives had evolved from his secretary for ten years before his run into the second in charge of the district operation. B's RDSM was his personal secretary in his law practice and state senate for twenty years before coming to Congress, as was I's RDSM. I would hypothesize that many incumbents bring along personal assistants to fill key roles in their congressional enterprises because they are familiar with the incumbent-to-be. They know their friends, issues and style, and will provide a comfortable fit for the incumbent-to-be in the new setting. Ultimately these personal assistants can become firmly entrenched as key figures in the enterprise, simply through their longevity with the incumbent. While Macartney found that eighty percent of top staff aides in Los Angeles County were hired directly into their positions, I would suggest that there is more variation in staff recruitment and advancement that is worth examining (1975, p.246).

Friends can also aspire to integral positions within enterprises. C selected a childhood friend, and someone who was intimately familiar with the home district to be his COS, rather than a young, aggressive, Washingtonian. The same held true for another incumbent, whose RDSM was the wife of one of his lifelong friends from the district. Both cases help to explain the weak district office that each member maintained. By hiring an assistant who knew the district was a long-time acquaintance, the incumbent could trust that the enterprise was in good hands.

Another variant of the personal connection is a familiarity with the job that the staff has performed. A new incumbent often keeps staff on from the previous incumbent if they are from the same party. K kept J's staff largely intact when he first assumed office, as did B when he was elected to Congress. While K moved to replace several staff after the first term, B kept on, and still retains twenty years later, staff that had been working for over ten years for the previous incumbent. In this case B was a 'friend' of the office who knew that he could trust the staff that had already been doing their job for years. Often times, newly elected incumbents will have to make a decision about whether to hire people that they know and have worked for them in pre-politics. Or they can follow B's routine and hire people who had been working for the previous incumbent.

#### The "Circle of People" with campaign or political connections

Many staff are hired because they have a campaign or political connection to the incumbent. One of staffers from a senator's office in C's district suggested that he got the job because he was in the "circle of people" that got political jobs. He'd been volunteering and working on campaigns for the past ten years and ultimately hoped to be working for an elected official. This was the same biography as another senate staff

member who suggested that she had been “doing lots of local races” for the state Republican Party before she eventually settled down for her current job years ago. As these two cases suggest, there is a “circle” or pool of individuals who have ambitions to work in federal offices. This “circle” of potential staff is always shifting. My campaign experience confirms this pool of potential employees. However, I would also note that there are a limited number of people in the right place at the right time with the willingness to take low-paying legislative staff jobs. Often times, the “circle” is rather shallow. And sometimes staff who come from the “circle” never really leave; they continue to attend political meetings and work on campaigns outside of the incumbent’s enterprise. The other side of this coin is that with the substantial expansion of legislative staff jobs in the districts, thousands of people who would have been content volunteering for campaigns now have gainful employment.

Usually individuals who worked on the incumbent’s campaigns, or the campaign of a fellow partisan official in the area, have an inside track amongst the “circle” applicants. I observed that Macartney’s findings about the top staff aide seemed to apply to a fairly wide “circle” of all eventual district staff; that they volunteered on the initial campaign, tended to be a government or party staff member, and that they resided in the district (1975, pp.253-255). For example, from C’s office, four of the eight young staff members had at some point either worked on a campaign in the area or had been active in College Republicans and volunteered on a number of campaigns. This experience started with the RDSM and worked down to the scheduler. I would note that even safe incumbents will occasionally face stiff challenges, so it is useful for them to keep people around who can be plugged into their campaign enterprises. And because politics is a competitive

business, there is usually an incentive for staff to be involved in the campaign, even if it is a safe election. Here the promotion of C's campaign manager to acting RDSM suggests that loyalty to the enterprise is rewarded behavior. There is even greater reward for being in the first "circle." Campaign workers and volunteers who were there in the beginning, for the first successful run for Congress, are heavily represented amongst the ranks of the new incumbent's staff. Newly elected members seem willing to keep people around them who shared in that first joy, when it did not seem like they really could make it Congress. While some incumbents, such as D, conducted aggressive interviews for staff hires for that first office, most incumbents rely on the ranks of people who were in the campaign "circle". This is less the case in subsequent elections because the incumbents tend to have fewer staff openings after they are elected the first time.

There also tend to be fewer senior staff positions open with subsequent elections because people in the original circle work their way up to bigger jobs, like COS or press secretary or DD. For example, over time B's current RDSM worked her way up the hierarchy of his district operation, moving from personal assistant all the way up to his chief district aide. But this progression also means that even the long-serving safe incumbent will have a continual need for new staff for entry-level positions. These are usually the jobs that the "circle" of people that come from the ranks of the campaign employees or federal office interns tend to fill. Campaign employees seem to provide a healthy pool for the incumbent because these are people who have proven to be willing to dedicate large amounts of time and hard work for low salaries, which is a situation not unlike the one they will find in the federal office after the election.

When the potential staff hire doesn't have a campaign connection, the individuals tend to at least have an ideological connection with the incumbent. My findings confirmed Fox and Hammond's (1977) finding that staff ideology is similar to the incumbent's. I only found one district staff member who expressed even mild disagreement with the voting record of the incumbent. All were usually quick to tow the line nearly completely. When discussing ideal employees, there was some division on the importance of an ideological litmus test. While there were some RDSM's who were more likely to stress the importance of ideological affinity with the incumbent, it seemed that slightly more RDSM's were concerned about the potential staffers' connections to the local community and how they would fit in.

A final issue was the individual's degree of stylistic connection to the incumbent. It helps to "look like" the incumbent. The next chapter will focus on the individual styles of incumbents, but for now, it seemed that staff members often 'looked like' their incumbents in how they approached their jobs. Three quick examples provide the evidence. For B, district staff who were content and were sticking around for the duration were older staff, who had a more routine style of representation. They worked hard for the incumbent but without a lot of publicity. C's staff did their constituent work in compliance with C's ideological precepts that they work in relative obscurity, never seeking to do extra work for the constituents. One constituent remarked that they were "cerebral thinkers like C." And finally there were references to staff that worked for a senator from C's state and a fellow House member from B's state. It was commonly said about these two legislators that you should not "get between them and a camera." Constituents suggested that their staff were equally aggressive in obtaining press credit

for their employers. These observations led me to speculate that staff have to be stylistically like the incumbent or after a short period of time they will find themselves uncomfortably on the outside of the enterprise. The two young staffers from B's office were quite familiar with this exclusion.

Some staff hired because they have useful contacts for the incumbents

### Community Contacts

Incumbents seem anxious to hire the staff from the above categories of "professional" or service-oriented motives. These types of staff have contacts with their communities that predate their involvement in the incumbent's enterprise. It is precisely these contacts, and the willingness to bring that service-oriented mentality to the job that makes these desirable employees for the incumbents. One G staffer put it quite directly; "There is a reason for my activism. (It) is to help find community needs." Even the staff member who is active in what might not be considered electorally productive groups or areas is a valuable asset to the incumbent because they bring an attitude to their job that emphasizes service to others. For example, one of B's staff members was active in a group called People Attempting to Help (PATH), a program created to give vouchers to the needy of the community. Even if this staff member chose to highlight her connection to B, it would not likely win many votes in the poorest community. Instead, these staffers, and their employers, believe it is "needed" work. Incumbents like these types of people because they know that they are conscientious and will work hard to do their jobs (i.e. be "professional").

On a more electorally pragmatic level, incumbents might believe that such staff will build the incumbent's reputation as a beneficial part of the community. Here one sees the



G staff member just mentioned, who in addition to her work with the needy (Red Cross and Women's Shelters), was also active in the United Way and the NAACP. We might label her as a pure activist. As these staff become institutionalized in their political/social circles, the activism can benefit the incumbent. Newly elected incumbents clearly seek out these types of staff. The staff member who works A's distant district office, a part of the district where he had few community or political connections, had a military background and a community activism that "looked like" the area where she was hired. Unlike the rest of the original staff hires, she had not worked in the campaign, nor had she met any of the staff until after the election. It plainly appeared that the incumbent was moving to fill a need with a staff member who had ready-made community contacts that would allow him to build his reputation in the area quickly. In this case she was not only a community activist, but she also was interested in groups that A needed to reach out to. At the most cynical level, these types of staff might be recruited simply to underline the incumbent's enterprise. For example, A tried to hire Es' Economic Development staff member. Regardless of the fact that the staff member worked for an incumbent of the opposing party, her community activism was perceived to be a clear electoral benefit to incumbent A.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that incumbents value staff with community contacts is proven by the fact that a majority of the staff observed had some extracurricular involvement in community organizations. When incumbents cannot hire staff with a proven record of activism, it appears that they do not discourage their staff from getting "dragged in." As one of C's

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<sup>17</sup> The clear electoral benefit is based on the assumption that performing economic assistance and grant work for elite constituents has a higher likelihood in resulting of some form of payback, whether it be positive word of mouth discussion, a vote or contribution, or a more active role in the incumbent's campaign. I will examine this relationship thoroughly in Chapter Five.

staff members suggested, “the longer you’re here, the more you’re dragged in.” It was difficult to conclude whether civic involvement was always a matter of personal commitment to community, orders from the incumbent, or the recognition that they could help once they became staff. I would suggest that cynicism about staff involvement in the community is probably misplaced as most staff who are community activists seem to derive from the personal commitment group.

### Partisan contacts

In addition to hiring staff from their own campaigns and the ranks of community activists, incumbents can often find staff from amongst the “political hacks” of the district. These are people who are active in the local government offices, political parties or other campaign structures. B hired one staff member who had worked for the two previous incumbents, partly for her on-the-job expertise but also for her political savvy. According to B “she knew where the bodies were buried” in the part of the district he wasn’t from. Newly elected incumbents also have the need to develop access to their communities. In two cases (G and H) new incumbents hired locally elected part-time officials to run their district offices. When G was setting up his district operation, he found in the adjoining district that H’s RDSM had been a mayor for 25 years. He quickly realized that he “needed one of those.” In case of H (and G) this hire provides 25 years worth of contacts that he didn’t have. The hires did not necessarily need to be victorious incumbents. C hired an individual who had run for the state senate in 1985 and then went to work for C after she lost. She needed a job and he needed to fill a position. But more importantly, her political activism for a number years leading up to, and including, her candidacy, gave her political contacts that would likely be useful for the incumbent.

Sometimes the contacts don't need to have 25 years of experience. Instead, youthful vigor and a foot in the door may provide an apt substitute. After a redistricting, H needed to hire someone for a new and large county that previously wasn't part of his district. Consequently, he hired a student who had just founded the Young Republican chapter for the county. From the staffer's viewpoint, H needed "someone to find the movers and shakers" in that county and she had the political entrée to fill that need. C also hired two individuals who were active in College Republican chapters in his district and another staff member who worked for a presidential campaign in 1996 and then needed a job. All of these staff demonstrated the youthful vigor and came to the office with a foot in the door and a desire to work hard for an incumbent they respected. These staff are also useful for senior incumbents who have positions to fill, keeping in mind the previous discussion about youthful ambition and the low pay offered in congressional offices. Both the experienced officials and the young partisan hires permit the incumbent a measure of "leeway" to focus on things besides district politics. They are well suited to interact with the elite constituents of the district.

They look like their districts.

Macartney found a tendency for district staff to be "women, minorities, lawyers, social scientists, and P.R. specialists" but that the top aide was, on average, a white male, age 37, with five years on the job (1975, p.248). While I would echo Macartney's findings that there were more women and minorities amongst the receptionist, scheduling, and casework positions, there clearly were substantially fewer amongst the ranks of the more interactive staff; the field representatives and the RDSMs. Instead, I found that the more interactive members of the staff, with a few exceptions, were usually

demographic reflections of the incumbent, as opposed to the constituents. As in the corporate world, the glass ceiling still appears to exist in the political world.

Having noted that, I would also suggest that most of the cases that I observed tended to have staff that somewhat looked like the district. Macartney found that political incumbents in Los Angeles “can and do field teams that are like the incumbent” (1975, p.8) in terms of their background and ethnicity. One would not expect to necessarily find minority staff working in a district office where less than five percent of the district population were minorities. On the other hand, in the one minority-majority office observed (F), a large number of the staff members were African-American, clearly representing the district. And in the two other offices with substantial non-white populations (A and M) there was definite representation on the staff of these non-white constituents. It appeared likely to me that representation in both A and M’s office was symbolic in nature. While the non-white staff members in both offices had in-the-field interactive positions, neither was a senior member of the district staff. Also, as noted above by the C staffer, not only must staff look like their districts but it also helps for them to have “good community skills.” They should be able to function socially, talk and “listen” well with concerned activists, supporters and opponents of the district.

Looking to another demographic, B represented a large district with numerous small towns and an aging population, although the average district age was kept low by a portion of his district being inundated with younger people living near a metropolitan area. Five of his seven staff were significantly over the age of forty, the other two being new college graduates. A case might be made that he kept these staff because they were reflections of the older communities that they worked in. But as the district changes he is

feeling pressured to hire a “new face” for his office, or perhaps retire from the old district that he remembers. I would also note that there was no clear differentiation of staff importance by age group. While Fox and Hammond (1977) found a clear progression in age as one moves up the hierarchy of Washington staff, seniority was clearly not tied to age in the district. There were significant examples of young staff in positions of authority (C, A) and older staff continuing to work in the casework positions that they’d been in for decades (B and I). It appears that while age might be a demographic to determine who gets hired, it does not appear to have an impact on office hierarchy.

#### Laying the groundwork for themselves

Finally, certain staff are hired because they have the right credentials and they present themselves for the right job at the right time. These staff are “laying the groundwork” for themselves. They seek employment on district staff because they want to run themselves or bolster their own political positions in the district. Incumbents who are considering retirement might also seek a potential replacement through the employment of politically ambitious individuals.

#### Conclusion

While there are commonalities in the different types of staff that serve in district offices of incumbent members of the U.S. House of Representatives, there are differences in how those offices are structured. Following on previous literature on the functions of legislative staff, I found that all offices carried out similar routine levels of activity such as information gathering, casework and basic outreach. There were, however, certain offices that were much more aggressive in their interactions with constituents. These offices conducted the same functions as the routine offices but also did other, more

'political' tasks and even assisted the incumbents' campaigns. The aggressive staff often work right up into the "gray" areas of the law in the name of the incumbent. While loyalty to the incumbent enterprise is central to all staff, this chapter also showed that some staff have clearly different long-term goals that impact why they were hired and what they plan to do after their job as a district staff member.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine congressional district staff and understand the ways in which they are allocated and utilized to assist in the reelection of incumbent members of the U.S. House of Representatives. This chapter provided a profile of the individuals and functions of district staff. While I initially expected to find more universality in district staff operations, my observations suggested that there is not one ideal type of office structure utilized by incumbents. Consequently, the next chapter will switch gears and offer some hypotheses about the existing variations in district staff utilization and allocation.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Variation in district staff allocation: Potential variables for future exploration**

Incumbent members of the United States House of Representatives utilize their district staff in a variety of fashions. Chapter Three demonstrated that the district enterprise ranges between a routine level of activism and a more aggressive posture. This dissertation argues that the latter staff model has an impact on the act of representation and the outcomes of congressional elections. District staff offices stand apart from the literature's understanding of the functions and motivations of legislative staff based in Washington. As the previous chapter demonstrated, there also exists substantial variation between the perceptions, functions and types of people who work in the district offices themselves. Based on a number of field observations, this chapter shift gears from the contextual focus and suggests some variables for future exploration that might explain the varying patterns by which incumbents allocate and utilize their district staff.

The previous chapter identified a number of distinct differences in the functions of district staff offices. A basic difference was the total number of staff members that are allocated to the district. This difference was much less consequential, however, than the differences in the basic functions of those staff. Here, notable differences between routine and aggressive offices were observed, where the number of staff members who were proactive (i.e. aggressive) clearly varied. While there were few district offices that matched the ideal types set out by this continuum, there did appear to be a clear tendency to vary to one side or the other on most factors. Variation in task was not confined to the

staff alone. My observations appeared to confirm the work of previous literature that concludes that individual incumbents have different attitudes and district “home styles.” Chapter Three also suggested that incumbents rely in varying degrees on the assistance and advice of political friends, surrogates, and “kitchen cabinets.”

### What literature says about incumbents, variation and the district enterprise

#### Personality

There is a substantial amount of literature on the variables that impact incumbent behavior. Unfortunately, much of it ignores their political behavior in the home district. A common area of study of incumbent behavior tends to focus on their personal attitudes and motivations. In one of the earliest studies of legislative staff, Matthews (1960) wrote that Washington-based Senate offices were organized like “personal Rohrschach tests” where the staff functions were determined by “problems, preoccupations and how (the incumbent) defined his role (p.83).” Fox and Hammond (1975, 1977) also found that Washington staff offices tend to vary by member “background.” They too hypothesized, but didn’t study in particular depth, that members’ perceptions, ambitions and goals may affect the number of staff and the organization of the Washington office. Studying eighteen incumbents in-depth, Fenno (1978, p.50) concluded that a mixture of personal and constituency factors, such as their goals and family life and distance from Washington influenced their “home styles. Davidson (1969) found that incumbent personal attitudes had an impact when he classified them as trustees and delegates. Parker (1986) surveyed constituents as to the preferred legislative behavior of their incumbents and found that they prefer incumbents who are delegates to their wishes while incumbents tend to prefer to be trustees. Based on a 1977 study, Parker found that



sixty percent of incumbents said they vote their own consciences over constituents and seek independence except when the votes were unusually visible.

It may not always be the case that staff allocations are elements of overt incumbent choice. Instead, Clausen (1973, p132) found that representation is an “involuntary” form of service where “constituency orientations are an integral part of (the incumbent’s) being... some of which become intertwined with (their) politics.” Mason (1987), on the other hand, suggests that ‘constituency orientations’ probably tend to be of a more ‘voluntary’ nature:

The number of caseworkers on a congressional staff will depend to a large extent on the member’s philosophy about casework. If a member insists that his staff give first priority to responding to the demands and requests of constituents, and that they do not leave a case unattended until it has been successfully resolved there will likely be more staffers involved in casework (p.26).

In order that they might be able to get beyond 435 individual types of district orientations based on personality, the literature does address other more generalizeable variables.

#### Political factors: Seniority

Perhaps the most common focus of the literature on incumbent behavior centers on the career. In general, this body of literature suggests that there are “life cycles” or stages in an incumbent’s career. The most notable of these works was Fenno’s (1978) identification of the “expansionist” and “protectionist” parts of a career, where the former typology tends to occur earlier in the incumbent’s career. Because of the demands that accrue with an enduring career, Fenno notes that senior incumbents go home much less often and are much more likely to depend on their staff than are junior members for much of their district behavior. In regards to their district behavior, most of the literature suggests that as the career lengthens, incumbents pay less attention, and devote fewer

resources to their districts. Instead, as Cavanaugh (1981) and Hibbing (1991) found, increases in seniority are highly correlated to increased legislative focus at the expense of district activity.

While there is general consensus that some aspects of incumbent's careers and styles change, the differences are notable. Fenno speculated that over the course of the career, changes in the incumbent's behaviors were brought about by contextual changes to the district, strategic changes in the attitudes and nature of the district voters, or by personal changes on the part of the incumbent. However, Parker (1980, 1986) found that none of Fenno's three factors resulted in changes to the amount of time spent in the district by the incumbent. Parker's earlier research suggested that increased tenure in office had little impact on changes in travel home. Instead, he found that an influx of a new cohort of members and the increase in travel allocation had an impact on the "district attentiveness" of incumbents, whereas seniority seemed to have no effect. Finally, while Hibbing (1991) agreed that certain elements of a congressional career do "cycle", he found their "district careers" to be largely constant.

The literature is not unified on the impact of seniority on the allocation of resources. Macartney (1975, p104) and Born (1982) found that variation in perquisite use was a function of seniority; more senior members were generally "less aggressive" in allocating resources back to the district (p.357). Alternatively, Bond (1985) suggested that a more efficient allocation of resources on the part of the incumbent resulted in less time being spent in the district. Schiff and Smith (1983) help to rationalize these seemingly divergent conclusions with their suggestion that as senior members acquire additional staff, usually through their committees, they are able to delegate other tasks back to the

district and accomplish both district and Washington goals simultaneously. These findings share in common a decreased personal attention to the district on the part of senior incumbents.

One area of consensus in the literature appears to be the expectations of the constituents. Macartney (1982) discovered that seniority results in greater volumes of office mail and congratulatory messages being sent to constituents (p.70). From the other side of the coin Polsby (1969) concluded that constituents believe senior incumbents are capable of providing more for their constituents than are junior members.<sup>1</sup> And a similar notion was found in Ripley's (1969) hypothesis that the power of a senator's staff is largely determined by the power of the senator. In each of these cases, constituents appear to expect more of senior incumbents.

An alternative theory of seniority focuses on the cohorts of incumbents. Tip O'Neal was quoted in the early 1970s as saying that "twenty years from now there won't be any home offices – all of (the younger incumbents) will be doing only what they're paid for (i.e., legislating)" (Peters, 1977). Analyses of district allocations tend to find differences between successive cohorts of legislators. Fiorina (1977), Parker, (1980) and Parker and Parker (1985) found a "new breed" of incumbents elected after 1964 were more aggressive in their utilization of staff resources. Smith (1995) had an interesting finding in that older incumbents allocated more of their resources to Washington as the legislative budgets expanded. When they were first elected (pre-1970) incumbents didn't have as many staff, so they just added more to their Washington offices as the budgets

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<sup>1</sup> Not only do constituents expect high levels of service from their incumbents, they also appear to believe that the positions of seniority that they attain can be passed to their successors. Exit polling data from the defeat of former House Speaker Tom Foley (D-Washington) suggested that a substantial portion of his opponent's supporters believed that his opponent would inherit the Speakership.

expanded and never sent substantial numbers of staff or resources back to the district (Smith, 1995, p.104). Smith found that younger cohorts clearly reject Tip's depiction and, in fact, go home more often and devote significantly greater levels of resources to their district enterprises. Tip may not have been wrong that the younger cohorts would have increasingly Washington-based attentions. What he could not have foreseen, however, was that later cohorts would find other resources that would allow them to make politics a "local" affair while devoting more attention to the legislative process. In short, there are now more to the "home offices" than was the case thirty years ago.

With the exception of Hibbing and Parker, the bulk of this literature seems to imply that district representation suffers as incumbents acquire tenure in office. The general view amongst academics and journalists is that politicians have a tendency to catch "Potomac fever" and lose interest in the politics of their home districts. My observations suggest that this is clearly not the case for all incumbents and staff as some district enterprises actually get more active and representative as time goes by. Furthermore, the bulk of this literature is limited to aggregate analyses of staff numbers and budgets and does not consider the variation in the types of tasks that district offices conduct. Therefore, the literature on seniority does not adequately capture the changing nature of district enterprises over time.

#### Political factors: Electoral vulnerability

The literature also suggests that the electoral environment has an impact on incumbent behavior. Perhaps the clearest statement of this connection is Davidson's (1969) belief that incumbents who perceive that they are occupying marginal districts tend to be more "district-oriented" than those who feel electorally "safe." Where

Davidson's findings focus mainly on legislative behavior, some literature has expanded to look at the impact of the electoral environment on the district enterprise. In crude terms Kingdon captured this finding in the words of one incumbent; "I have to run the cocktail circuit and go back to the district every two or three weekends just to stay in office" (1973, p.61). Fenno (1978) observed that incumbents structure their time and optimize their efforts in the district to increase their saliency and evaluations but that these efforts vary according to the individual incumbents' feelings of electoral vulnerability. Parker (1989) reached a similar conclusion; "Congressmen and senators who are politically atypical of their constituencies are most inclined to expand their voter coalitions. The focus, diversity and breadth of that attention may differ depending on whether the aim is to build or maintain (their) electoral coalition" (p.88). In addition to the incumbent's perceptions of their homes and constituents, the actual geography or nature of the home district is also found to have an impact on incumbent behavior.

### Geography

Several works find clear variation amongst incumbents based on the geography of their districts. Jacobson (1997) emphasized that congressional research should always take note of the idiosyncratic nature of each House district.<sup>2</sup> Some literature, however, attempts to find commonalities based on their geographic characteristics. In terms of simple staff numbers, Ornstein (1975) found that junior, northern liberal Democrats who represented urban districts tended to have the largest number of staff. Ornstein's results were confirmed in numerous studies of southern political culture, the most notable being the seminal study by Key (1949). Fenno (1978), echoing Key, found a distinct southern

‘home style’ where urban, southern and border state incumbents tended to have more “personal” styles and utilized smaller staff than their northeastern counterparts.

Interestingly, Fenno (1978) and Cavanaugh (1981) found that seniority, electoral margin, family residence and distance from Washington did not make a difference in the overall allocation of resources to the district. Fenno’s two key variables were the region that incumbents came from and the influence of their state delegations.<sup>3</sup> Given these uniform conclusions about the nature of southern and northern political cultures, it seems that the ideological disposition of both the incumbents and their electorates have an impact on staff utilization.

#### Other relevant literature about staff

As was noted in Chapter One, there is a substantial amount of literature on the functions and impact of Washington staff. For example, both Ornstein (1975) and Fox and Hammond (1977) found a correlation between staff size and the level of legislative or committee activity. Additionally, Hammond (1975) and Fox and Hammond (1977) found there to be variation in staff function based on partisanship and seniority in Washington offices. Yet, Hammond (1984) concluded that further study on the variation of Washington offices remained necessary. These citations and the previous several pages of literature frequently recognize the growing size and impact of Washington staff. Nevertheless, this literature remains overwhelming Washingtonian in nature.

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<sup>2</sup> Jacobson (pp.14-16) suggests that some of the most notable individual district differences are: size, population, political habits, economic base and income, communications patterns (number of media markets), ethnicity and age.

<sup>3</sup> It seems ironic that despite the qualitative nature of his study of ‘Home Style’ Fenno would categorize incumbents based on an aggregate measurement of staff budgets as opposed to a more personal or individual category of behavior.

There are a few studies based on the incumbents' home enterprises. Works such as Fiorina (1977), Fenno (1978), and Parker (1980) noted the increase in the number of district staff in the 1960s and 1970s. One of the other notable examples here is Johannes and MacAdams' (1987) finding of variation in the amount of casework performed by each district office. Like much of the previous literature, however, their hypotheses and investigations of variation are only weakly developed. Johannes and MacAdams offer no real rationale for the variation other than its existence. Similarly, Hammond (1981) notes that the distribution of staff resources tends to be based on the "collegial nature" of the House but also on the individual legislators' strength of ties back to the district, which seems to suggest that all incumbents would do it the same but that they do it differently. Smith (1995, p.105) hypothesized that constituents, interest groups and other incumbents, especially the dean of each state's congressional delegation, have an impact on staffing decisions in both the Washington and the district offices. Surprisingly, Macartney (1975 p.264-265) found the demographic profile of staff offices to be roughly the same for Democratic and Republican officials. While they may look the same, Zupan (1989) (in Jacobson 1990) discovered that Republican incumbents have slightly smaller total numbers of staff (13.9 to 14.5) and fewer staff in the district (41% of Republican staff versus 46% for Democrats). Consequently, Zupan offered the hypothesis that Republicans are less active "cultivators" of their district interests. With the exception of Fenno and Macartney, the findings in this paragraph were completed without solid contextual analysis or confirmation. Each of these studies are in dire need of contextual support.

Macartney (1975, 1982) provides the literature on congressional staff with its one few pieces of contextual analysis of district staff. Macartney was a trailblazer in providing a description of the fourteen basic roles of staff as well as the motivations of individual staff members who work outside of the main legislative institution. Furthermore, he deserves praise for his cross-institutional comparison of state, local and federal staff and the fact that he recognized variation in the size of district enterprises and suggested that there was variation in their functions. In his dissertation, Macartney put forth numerous “tentative” propositions on variables including: party, length of incumbency, electoral margin, urban nature, institutional change, and incumbent ambition. He was able to weakly conclude that incumbents who were junior, electorally vulnerable, Republican, and without committee staff were more likely to have “stronger” district offices (p.308). While I agree with his “speculation” that these “operative variables pull against each other” (p.150-153), this dissertation seeks to go further by comparing offices in different geographical settings in greater depth than Macartney achieved. He did not allow for much variation in his methodology given that all of his cases came from one extremely unique urban county and that he relied on one relatively brief interview per district office. An example of the need for further research was found in his speculation that northern, urban, less senior and more electorally vulnerable incumbents will have “more extensive field operations” (1982 p.67).<sup>4</sup> Given that his case set was Los Angeles County, this seems like an unwieldy assumption. Furthermore, he never elaborated on what “more extensive field operations” would entail and was generally quite vague about what a “stronger” district office implied. While Macartney

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<sup>4</sup> This finding is somewhat odd given his maintenance of the literature’s status quo with the suggestion in 1975 that “staff roles do not vary significantly between regions” (pp.95-96).



was indeed a trailblazer, his definitions often proved to be quite sparse. What is missing from the literature is a wider (geographical) comparison between district offices and a deeper contextual investigation of how and why incumbents allocate district staff.

### Potential avenues for future exploration of district staff differences

Chapter Three uncovered substantial variation in the functions and behaviors of congressional district staff. Based on a number of field observations, this chapter will offer some conclusions about varying patterns of district staff utilization. Following from the literature review above, I will propose several independent variables that, based on my observations, appeared to have an impact on the dependent variable; the routine or aggressive nature of the district enterprise.<sup>5</sup> While Chapter Two promoted the value of contextual analysis of individual cases, I admit that I am guilty of making generalizations in this chapter. Because of the impact of district staff on representation and election outcomes that will be detailed in the following chapters, I suggest that there is a need for further research on this topic. Therefore, in this chapter presents a starting point for future research and comparison of district staff.

### A potential model of district staff differences

In this chapter I will propose a number of variables that explain differences in district staff functions. Some of the variables are placed in charts with the dependent variable resulting in four ideal case types. In most cases I relied on contrasts between the four

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<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, I thought about a research design based on “most similar” cases. Given the literature’s presumption that congressional district enterprises are identical in nature, this research design would effectively serve to highlight the differences that existed between offices. However, with Przeworski and Teune’s (1970) advice that this research design leads to over-determined dependent variables, I utilized a research design that was guided by a “most different” case design where the routine and the aggressive offices were compared using a series of independent variables. I would accept, however, for this to truly be

primary cases from my research, but where appropriate I inserted secondary cases when the impact of the independent variables appeared to be in evidence. There is a need for future replication of this study so that these variables might receive systematic comparison in a larger data pool. Future research on district staff might measure the routine and the aggressive offices against the personal, career, and demographic variables mentioned below. Finally, future testing would allow for more systematic analysis of the causation and correlation of these variables.

#### The dependent variable

Incumbents have substantial discretion when deciding how to allocate their Washington and district resources. Unlike the pre-1970's cohorts, no incumbents today choose a wholesale neglect of their district staff operations. Instead it is, as was shown in Chapter Three, a question of degree, where some district staff offices tend towards aggressive styles while others are more routine in their numbers and functions. Throughout this chapter the dependent variable will be the extent to which each district staff operation is aggressive or proactive. The aggressive operation tends to spend more time on outreach functions, doing project work and interacting with constituents, while the routine office tends to be more office-bound and reliant upon well-established routine behaviors. While there are individual aggressive staff members in every office, these hypotheses will be based largely on the overall output of the entire office as opposed to individual staff members. Based on my limited number of cases I will hypothesize where independent (and intervening) variables appeared to have an impact on the utilization of district staff resources.

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a "most different" design I would need to take more highly diverse cases and look for commonalities that exist between them.

### Incumbent's disposition

The literature above noted that incumbent's personal attitudes and motivations have an impact on their legislative behaviors. The first independent variable looks at how the general attitudes and perceptions of incumbents are related to the nature of their district enterprises. As one of C's staff suggested, district staff have similar characteristics but "it is up to the individual member to determine who they employ and what they do", B's RDSM noted that incumbents construct their offices by "personality" and a senate staffer suggested that the "boss defines the tenor of the operation." A comparison of two incumbents who held the same seat and employed a number of the same staff (J and K) suggested that the individual preferences of the legislators were probably key to the differences that existed in the number of staff who performed aggressive behaviors, and the authority that the individual staff wielded when they acted as surrogates for the absent incumbent.<sup>6</sup> J maintained a very decentralized and personal staff. Local constituents felt very comfortable and familiar with his staff in the area. One constituent remarked "you knew you were talking to (J) when you were talking to his staff." Incumbent K, on the other hand, refocused the staff's activities to suit his personal needs. While he retained three of J's five district staff, they conducted their jobs in a much different fashion, with what the staff felt to be higher levels of "micromanagement" by K than had been the case by J. This perception also worked its way into the staff's relationships with elite constituents, who seemed to notice the change in the staff enterprise. One way to operationalize this variable might be to look at the statements and behaviors of individual incumbents and determine whether they tend to act more as trustees or delegates in their

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<sup>6</sup> Given that J and K were from the same party and represented the same district, these two variables are largely controlled in this instance. Therefore, their individual differences seem a logical place to start.

legislative behavior. A delegate would be defined as a legislator who is relatively more attentive to district preferences than a trustee. This distinction is clearly notable in their voting behavior but it might also be observed in their attention to district affairs.

Individual motivations vary

Hypothesis 1: There are personal motivations other than being a trustee or a delegate that govern the allocation of district staff.

My observations suggested that the trustee-delegate distinction that is so often used by the discipline is of little help in comparing the nature of incumbent’s home enterprises. Figure 4.1 implies that both delegates and trustees are found to employ routine district operations. Within the categories of trustee and delegate I observed four types of incumbents who utilized their staff in different manners. Instead of the traditional trustee-delegate dichotomy, my observations painted a portrait of four different motivational styles at work in congressional district enterprises. The partisan, personal, policy and electoral incumbents each utilized district staff in different fashions and with a variety of motives.

(Figure 4.1)

| <u>Independent Variable</u> | <u>Dependent variable</u> |                       |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
|                             | Routine                   | Aggressive            |
| Delegate                    | Partisan – H, I           | Electoral – A, D or F |
|                             | Personal – B, G           |                       |
|                             | Policy – C                | No observations?      |
| Trustee                     |                           |                       |

Partisan

Incumbents G and H represented adjoining urban districts with nearly identical constituencies in the same county. Yet they had notably different district staff

enterprises. While they also share similar political ideologies, their tactical dispositions and attitudes about their constituents appeared markedly different. H most clearly portrayed what might be called a partisan model of staff allocation. While his behavior might be less delegate-like than others listed in Figure 4.1, his behaviors still suggest that he tends toward that side of the continuum. Occupying a homogenous district, especially in partisan terms, affords H the luxury of interacting with the constituents of his choice. A substantial number of incumbents likely share this setting; they occupy safe seats and have homogenous social, political and economic interests to represent. In these situations it would be highly irregular for the incumbent not to be considered a delegate of constituent interests simply because of the fact that their ideological positions are heavily consistent with their constituents' beliefs. If it is true that most incumbents share this partisan orientation and lack of involvement in their district enterprise, then it gives further impetus to the need to study and understand their representatives at home.

At any rate, H and his staff provided an excellent illustration of how a district staff operates according to the partisan model, which tends to be routine in nature. Given that incumbents who practice this model are probably electorally secure, there is little need to reach out to new groups or issues within their districts. A staff member noted their relaxed approach in regard to the large employers in the district. She remarked frankly that they "do not pursue them so much anymore. H used to seek out and court the large employers and see if they had problems. Now we are entrenched in the district and are so well known that he turns what there is over to the staff." The experience of H suggests that increased seniority and the loss of area through redistricting (see below) inevitably result in the routinization of district behavior. Of all the district enterprises, H's office

was perhaps the most sterile, issue-oriented, reactive group of staff observed. Their behaviors were almost entirely office-bound with few efforts to employ new tactics or ideas to reach new faces in the district. Many of the old tactics that they employed became institutionalized as virtual non-political events. The most notable example here might be the advisory system structure that H had long practiced. The advisories were once a system where H and his staff interacted with key district constituents in intimate settings. These intimate settings were once part informational for the incumbent, but also partisan or electoral in the sense that the incumbent would hope to recruit these elite constituents into his enterprise. One staff member noted that in the beginning they invited “certain key people...who then recommended five more each...(but it then) grew until there was not so much invitation or activity.” By the time of my observations, the advisories were large public forums that featured notable guests from the community and drew crowds that averaged about eighty constituents. The advisories had become less about personal interaction with key constituents and more about advertising basic partisan positions to roughly the same group of constituents on a regular basis. One staff noted that these meetings only occasionally draw “some outreach where constituents will develop a relationship and ask for help.” Usually the regular participants are the same supportive types, usually “bankers and elected officials.”

As noted in Chapter Three, the ways in which staff members come to an office have an impact on how they do their jobs. With the exception of two individuals, H’s district staff began their involvement with his enterprise as campaign volunteers or employees. The fact that H’s staff appeared more partisan in their activities, contacts and remarks appears to logically follow from the fact that so many of them have a partisan connection

to H. His RDSM, main field representative and press secretary all had ongoing and active contacts with his campaign and other Republican campaigns in the area. These connections were especially notable in the highly partisan attitude of his press secretary. While these activities might be considered aggressive based on the description from Chapter Three of offices that also do political and campaign work, the contacts and activities of the partisan staff seem to be largely concentrated on the same group of elites and supporters. In other words, they take a routine tack to their campaign and political activities. I would speculate that incumbents such as H likely employ the routine partisan staff enterprises not only because they have staff with campaign experience but also because they have fewer electoral demands to be proactive.

Ironically, the staff enterprise might also function in a partisan manner when the incumbent has progressive ambition. Macartney (1975, p.104) vaguely suggested this when he offered that district staff members send heavier volumes of congratulatory mailings to constituents when the incumbent has progressive ambition. This finding runs against the bulk of the literature which suggests that increased tenure in office results in diminished district attention. In the case of H, his RDSM noted that H is “heavy into (state) politics...and is pondering a Senate campaign.” To fulfill this ambition, H spends a great deal of his personal time in other districts throughout his state and encourages his staff to help constituents and other legislative offices ‘outside’ the district. H’s extra-district commitments also meant that he was more reliant upon his staff to ensure that his current constituency stayed loyal and satisfied. As one of his staff noted, “99% of his time is scheduled” with fairly routine-style meetings when he is back in the district, so virtually all of the proactive contact and surveillance with the community needs to be

done by the staff.<sup>7</sup> His two key staff members divided the district geographically. One of the district representatives was hired directly out of college where she had worked on H's campaign and had formed a countywide political organization. Because this was shortly after a reapportionment, H had few political contacts in that part of the district and needed a party contact. The RDSM was an old acquaintance of the incumbent, who was also a small business owner, Republican activist and formerly a mayor of one of the towns in H's district. This staff member came from the other part of the district than the field representative. Together, these two staff members provided access for the partisan friends that they established over the years as H himself has less personal time to devote to constituents. Regardless of the direction of the incumbent's ambition, the partisan model suggests a staff that is largely devoted to maintaining the incumbent's loyal core of supporters.

### Personal

The personal model is not unlike the partisan model in that neither type of incumbent seems to confront pressing threats at the ballot box. The difference between the two lies in the personal attention of the incumbent. The personal incumbent, here best seen in B and G, takes a more active role in district affairs as compared to other incumbents. The personal incumbent goes home more, and when they are at home, they attend more meetings and deal with more individual constituent issues. Some personal incumbents, with B as a clear example, even assist their staff with individual casework requests.

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<sup>7</sup> The progressive ambition of the "partisan" style probably drives offices that are regularly routine in nature to become more aggressive in support of their employer's electoral motivations. In contrast to H's staff, I's enterprise would also be considered a "partisan" operation and because he was extremely content in his office, his staff members were not under the extra-district pressures seen in H's office.



Incumbent B demonstrated a clear personal commitment to his district enterprise. Despite his advancing age and apparent slowness, there was a consensus of opinion about his active involvement in the district. His staff and constituents, as well as his own observations, noted his commitment to Saturday morning meetings in his district office and his travel around the district on Mondays and Fridays when Congress was session. "I go see them or tell them to come see me on Saturday mornings. I take every invitation that I can squeeze in." Incumbent G had a similar drive to meet with constituents individually in his solo weekend drives around his district. He also spent many of his district work periods engaged in individual meetings with constituents throughout his district, with no staff to be seen. G and his staff seemed to more embody the personal commitment to the district than any other office. They spoke of his frequent interaction in the community with his family and staff and how that personal interaction made him a better representative of his district. B had a similar style. The editor of his hometown newspaper noted that it was B's style to "do it all" from meetings, to travel around the district, to casework to legislation that helps individual constituents, even including assistance on cases of individual Social Security checks for senior citizens. This constituent expressed that B's staff are "a reflection of himself but (that) they really aren't out there doing politics - - he is." Another journalist on the other side of the district reflected that it was B's "work" that was largely responsible for his consistent reelection. "Work" here was a reference to his travel and personal attention to meetings and individual constituent cases. B's behavior was further confirmed by a Chamber of Commerce employee in a medium-sized city at the far end of his district. This constituent noted that B had public meetings at least monthly at that end of the district,

and because these were publicly announced meetings it was likely that B was in town on a much more regular basis. Finally, even B's staff noted his personal commitment to office activities and that fact that he regularly attended meetings and worked with constituents by himself. One field representative conceded that virtually all meetings, contacts, outreach and speeches were "done pretty much by B himself. They call him and he'll either get the answer to their question or come and speak to their group.

Incumbent B's behavior was notably different from what I observed in other offices. Despite the multiple and competing pressures from family, political parties, congressional committees, constituents, and personal interest, the 'personal' incumbent is likely to dedicate a larger portion of their own personal time to district affairs. Other incumbents appeared more likely to focus their time and energies elsewhere, as was the case with H and the partisan interests of his district above, or with C and the policy interests of his district. The 'personal' incumbent perhaps derives a sense of achievement from participation in the actual maintenance of the community.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, B was much more active than any of his counterparts with his involvement in numerous local institutions. Numerous constituents noted his participation in groups ranging from a Water Resource Board, to the Methodist Man and the YMCA Board to the Masons and the usual gamut of Chamber and Rotary gatherings. Again, I did not observe that other incumbents were as continually engaged in their district communities, as was B. Because of their personal involvement, incumbents like B and G are able to keep routine district operations that help them carry out their participation in the governance of the

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<sup>8</sup> B's case also suggests that the personal incumbent's district and policy interests are driven by their personal lives. B took an interest in a major state hospital within his district not so much because it was a major employer but because he and his grandson were inflicted with serious disease in the same summer.

community. The personal incumbent might actually feel that proactive staff would be interfering with his or her district activities.

It is difficult in the case of G to completely disaggregate the incumbent's personality from the types of people employed on the staff. It seems that both G and his staff have a desire similar to B's to be engaged in the maintenance of their community. G's staff was more involved at the community-level than were other staff enterprises. Because of G's personal disposition, his individual activism and interaction in the community, it is difficult imagining that he would not employ a staff of similarly involved individuals. The difference between G's personal staff members and other district staff is that G's staffs' extra-curricular involvements appeared to be much more communitarian and less politically motivated. Their activism was distinctly less political in nature than other district enterprises given that the bulk of their involvement was with charitable groups and, in most cases, predated their employment with G.

The personal incumbent operates with a staff "as needed" rationale. B's staff members, like H's above were clearly reactive in their daily routines. One constituent noted the staff's reactive, or routine, style in suggesting that other offices she had worked with were more "proactive". B's staff generally waited to be asked to get involved in district projects. His staff themselves recognized this extremely reactive mission. One field representative noted that they did not regularly contact the large corporations of the district because the groups have a "long established" relationship and can call Washington or B directly when they need help. Because B visits them regularly, she felt that her role was simply to be available to assist B "as needed". A district journalist

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Both he and his staff noted a subsequent increase in the amount of attention that he paid to medical issues and this particular hospital.

noted that B's staff did a good job of packaging and announcing B's personal appearances throughout the district but that they were not as aggressive as other staff in creating stories or coverage, especially as compared to the two United States Senators' staff that he regularly interacted with. The personal staff enterprise tends to highlight the activities of the incumbent to the virtual exclusion of the staff themselves.

Yet, constituents seemed to largely approve of B's personal style. He seemed to be more likely to respond to them personally through meetings, calls, drop-bys to the courthouse, personal notes of appreciation or contact than I noticed in other offices. One constituent compared positively his personal style with meetings and attention to emails with quick phone calls, to the relative lack of personal attention he received from other politicians. An executive for one of the large corporations in the district noted B's personal attention in responding to his calls and letters, giving an example of a two page thoughtful response where a form letter would have done for other incumbents. Finally, a journalist noted his close personal relationship with another incumbent from an adjoining district where he and that incumbent took regular trips to baseball games to relax and chat about politics on a regular basis. The journalist suggested that B had a similar personal style, but wasn't quite the personal friend that he was with the other incumbent, where he would be able to blow off an afternoon and head to a ballgame. While one might suggest that personal contact with the incumbent leads constituents to believe that the incumbent has personal style, I would suggest that that was not the case with this incumbent. I found all this constituent praise to be notable especially given that this was a routine office and that B's personal activities were more limited in time, nature and number than

those performed by staff in other offices. In short, he alone cannot do as much as an aggressive district staff. But the constituent perception may be a whole other issue.

Constituents from other types of offices occasionally made fond references to incumbents who were more personal than their current representative. For example, one of A's constituents compared him to another incumbent that he had worked previously with who fit the personal profile. For the other incumbent, his staff had very little responsibility to "get things done." This constituent gave an example of the personal differences between A and the other incumbent at town hall meetings. The other incumbent had a much more personal style where he interacted with the constituents "on his own", with one staff member "at the back of the room" leaning against the wall. A's excursions to public forums, on the other hand, were replete with multiple staff members, overheads, and books of facts and information to rely upon. The personal style suggests an incumbent like B or G who tend to get after district affairs under their own power with minimal staff assistance. They leave the routine affairs and follow-up for the district staff. The personal style is not limited to older incumbents. G appeared to have clear tendency toward personal activities in his staff-free weekend drives across his district, usually accompanied only by his daughter. In fact, a younger incumbent such as a G might even be a more logical fit as a personal incumbent because of their greater stamina and ability to plough through challenging weekend schedules. An active personal incumbent can undoubtedly have a greater impact with constituents than a multitude of routine staff members. Many constituents seemed to derive a greater level of fulfillment and pleasure from interactions with the incumbent than with the staff. As Chapter Five will demonstrate, however, this is not the case for all constituents.

Most incumbents pursue some activities in their home districts. The previous section does not necessarily imply that all incumbents who are active at home tend toward the routine or personal style. Nor does it imply that the personal incumbent who is personally active at home has an aggressive district enterprise. To the contrary, I would hypothesize that most personal incumbents have highly routine operations but that personal dispositions do not always determine how the staff are employed in the district. As Figure 4.2 demonstrates, D is an exception to this assumption. Like B, she has an active home presence compared to other cases I observed. Unlike B, she maintains a more aggressive staff enterprise.

(Figure 4.2)

| <u>Independent Variable</u> | <u>Dependent variable</u> |            |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
|                             | Routine                   | Aggressive |
| Active incumbent            | B                         | D          |
| Absent incumbent            | C                         | A          |

### Policy

“Some (incumbents) really need to rethink why they are in politics and others need to rethink how to get elected. I work for a guy who is more policy-oriented, while there are more and more ‘milk-the-money’ types in office.” Some incumbents seemed to be more driven by policy interests, with C being the most obvious incarnation of this incumbent personality. As the comment from his RDSM suggested, the issues and projects that he and his staff pursued in the district were tailored more to his personal policy interests than to any need for personal attention, ego fulfillment, electoral promotion, or partisan attention as was the case for the other three types of incumbents.

For example, Incumbent C had significant interest in low-income housing and heating issues that resulted in the allocation of significant personal and staff resources to the issue. One of C's staff members pursued community development but specialized in housing issues. Despite his personal interests and membership in local economic development groups, the majority of project work that the staff member pursued was of the low-income variety. His efforts seemed largely directed by the incumbent's personal interest in a policy issue rather than personal or electoral gain that he might have procured working on grants and project development for elite constituents. Consequently, he attended many meetings and did substantial amounts of cross-jurisdictional work devoted to low-income housing access, a clear reflection of the incumbent's personal interest. One of C's constituents emphasized the commitment to the very same "human service" types of issues that the staff member mentioned were pursued on a daily basis. A number of C's constituents confirmed that his staffers were "around" on the issue of "public housing for the poor and elderly." I did not witness any other incumbent with policy projects of interest that had staff resources devoted to this degree. Furthermore, C's office seemed to largely avoid more common, and electorally valuable issues such as transportation projects or military spending. A mayor and a chamber member from one of the larger cities in C's district both noted that C occasionally provided support on transportation issues but that it was done rarely and only in cases of "visible" public need, that it was always late in the process, and that his solutions were legislative in nature, not involving staff or extra-legislative arm-twisting.

Another example of a personal interest driving staff use was an incumbent from a district adjacent to C. This incumbent, a veteran, who served on the Armed Services

Committee, clearly had a personal interest in veteran's issues. Like C's housing staff member this incumbent also employed a local staff member with particular expertise to help deal with these issues. Additionally, his other staff members in Washington and in the district were cognizant of his desire that they serve this group of constituents.

Incumbents who develop a reputation for service on a particular type of issue can often drain the resources of their staff by generating requests for assistance from outside their districts. One of C's constituents noted that he regularly contacted the other incumbent on military and veteran's issues, even though he was not from that incumbent's district, or even state for that matter. Given the fact that they continue these activities suggests that the policy interests of incumbents can outweigh rational electoral calculations.

In the case of C, the interest in certain types of policy issues also meshed with a perceived "philosophy" about the appropriate role for district staff. As one of his staff members noted, C often uncovered problems through his own interactions with constituents and then "answers the questions himself." One of C's constituents suggested that he had a more "top-down" style of operation as compared to another incumbent that she had worked with whose orientation was more "bottom-up." The distinction implied that C is deliberate and that he thinks and acts "for himself" with staff playing a largely supportive role. The "bottom-up" style is more in line with the next type of incumbent, the "electoral" style, where the staff's preparations for the incumbent are more aggressive and seek to establish a "better feel for the district."<sup>9</sup> C's "philosophy" suggests that his staff should only take the appropriate measures to resolve those problems. His replies,

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<sup>9</sup> Both of types of incumbent rated favorably with this constituent, as compared to the "bottom-up's" predecessor. That incumbent was labeled, appropriately, a "party guy" who went to meetings and helped his core constituency but was not as "thoroughly" involved as the two incumbents described here. I believe that "thoroughly" was meant to imply a level of appropriate representation.



plus those of his constituents and staff suggest that C is rarely involved in government assistance cases for his constituents. Only one constituent suggested that C was highly active in the district on issues of concern to him, and this was logically explained by the fact his profession was directly affected by a major committee chaired by C. More commonly, one constituent noted C's "intellectual interest" in higher education issues but also noted that staff members were involved only to support or follow-up with initiatives that he uncovered in conversations. Another constituent, agreeing with this depiction suggested that the main purpose of C's staff seemed to be preparatory, as compared to other staff members who were more interactive with constituents. This "philosophy" will be explained more comprehensively below.

The policy incumbent rarely seeks to capitalize on the assistance that his or her staff members provide to constituents. One of C's constituents noted that C and his staff took a distinctly less "high brow" approach to responding to constituents and taking credit for their work than did the two United States Senators from the state. Similarly, another constituent mentioned that C and his staff were "less public" than the previous legislator who represented the district before reapportionment. This was further reflected in the comments of a leader from another community who suggested that constituents in his community were upset with C precisely because he "was not out front" on a highway project.

While incumbents that allocate their staff based on the "policy" needs of the district most likely run routine style enterprises, this does not always have to be the case. If an incumbent took a policy interest in an issue that was of common importance to his or her constituents, one can imagine the staff being sent out in aggressive fashions to deal with

the issues. For example, an incumbent from a poor district might direct staff to aggressively target community groups to assist with welfare or housing issues, while an incumbent from a district with a military base might have his or her staff members spend substantial time dealing with veteran's issues. In either case, the policy interest might be driven by needs of constituents who make up the bulk of the district's electorate. In any event, I would draw a distinction between the policy and the electoral incumbent based on the record, stated intentions and the behavior of their staff. The examples above of incumbents representing policy interests of constituents outside of their own districts confirm the personal motivation of the policy incumbent.

As the example of C's staff member who dealt with housing issues demonstrates, staff members usually come to reflect a policy disposition if the incumbent has such interests. I would hypothesize that this occurs either because the staff are hired with such interests and a desire to be like the incumbent, or because the incumbent demands that the staff play limited supporting roles and work on issues of personal importance to them. The final incumbent type acts more in the latter fashion.

### Electoral

The fourth personality type is the electoral incumbent. The electoral incumbent was observed, on occasion, to have some elements of the previous three types of personality. For example, D had a policy interest in senior health care issues, A completed partisan travel with his DD throughout the country for other candidates of his party, and A also worked as a youth minister to improve the community. The main motivation of the electoral incumbent, however, is a clear desire to contact more constituents out of an overwhelming concern to do a 'good' job. One of A's constituents noted that he and his

staff members seemed inordinately more concerned about “image” than the other federal legislators with whom he’d worked. This constituent also picked up on the fact that the staffs were primarily working to advance the cause of the incumbent and any assistance that could be given to constituents was of an almost secondary importance. In short, the electoral incumbent had the strongest desire to return to office and seemed to be commonly found in electorally vulnerable settings.

The frenetic activity of the electoral model was most clearly seen in F’s district where her staff was among the most aggressive in their style of operation. However, her staff activities lacked the policy or personal direction found in the examples above. Rather, F’s field staff were mainly procuring work and putting out the incumbent’s name for the sake of incumbent promotion. A and D’s district enterprises also tended to the more frenetic side of the continuum, albeit in different fashions. For D, a freshman incumbent, came the recognition that she would have to “make a mark” with constituents in order to attain reelection. Her RDSM suggested that there was an awareness of this vulnerability. Consequently they selected an issue, health care, and decided to make this issue the legislative and district centerpiece of the incumbent’s first term. While this might be considered a personal interest of the incumbent, the motivations for its selection and highlight in her first term were clearly different than those say of C and his interest in low-income housing issues. In short, they were more electorally driven.

For D this approach meant offering legislation and being vocal in Washington. But it also meant that she would be required to devote personal attention to rallies, press conferences and visits to hospitals and senior centers to underline her legislative efforts with district connections and publicity. The incumbent’s efforts were to be underlined by

the staff. Throughout the first two years the RDSM and the field representatives assisted this effort through outreach to groups in the health community. For the RDSM that meant visits with hospital administration and attention to funding for hospitals and programs. The field representatives were each given geographic responsibilities and instructions to hold office hours in the main communities in their areas. Ten of the dozen locations where the field staff regularly held their office hours were in senior centers, largely on the direction of the RDSM. And all staff clearly recognized that their presence in these centers to maintain contact with an active voting bloc of constituents and to emphasize where possible D's legislative efforts on health care issues.

While both A and D appear to have an electoral motivation to their staff allocation, A's staff members were more aggressive in their individual interactions with constituents. As noted in Chapter Three, A's enterprise was unique in the fact that his COS spent the majority of his time at home. Observations and interviews suggested that that COS' most important function was to serve as the incumbent's liaison with the multiple military bases within the district.<sup>10</sup> The COS described his responsibilities as being 40% legislative, 40% constituency (largely military) and 20% partisan; a ratio that was much more heavily devoted to constituency matters than any of the other COS's I observed. The DD supplemented the incumbent and COS in his responsibility for outreach with partisan supporters and the business community within the district. The DD noted that he spent, on average, almost two days per week out in the field interacting with constituents. A's field representatives were amongst the most aggressive in their office hours, drop-bys

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<sup>10</sup> The COS suggested that he was at home for three reasons; 1) because of A's personality and his choice to have his key advisers (COS and DD) both at home every weekend, 2) an ideological desire to have government "closer to the people" and 3) because the military bases in the district demanded a lot of attention that is easier to grant from the district than from Washington.

and outreach into the community. Because of their more geographic and individualized nature, A's field representatives and DD had more aggressive after-hours schedules than D's staff. While D's staff had specific requirements with the individual groups that they interacted with, and could schedule these meetings, A's field representatives and DD worked aggressively over geographic areas engaging multiple constituent groups, from agriculture to business and education, and even partisan groups. A quick flip of the calendar suggested that A's staff had the distinction of being the "busiest" group. Even his caseworkers had a distinctly aggressive posture in that they occasionally traveled with the field representatives out into the community. This was in part to more quickly serve and resolve cases, and also in part to make all of the staff members feel like an equal part of the enterprise.

In the case of each of the three "electoral" examples above, incumbent's district activity proved to be significantly more reliant on staff assistance than any of the other three personality types mentioned above. Especially in the case of the "personal" and the "policy" incumbents, the staff seemed largely restrained to supportive roles that emphasized their limited informational or preparative activities. The "electoral" offices, and those few aggressive staff in the "partisan" offices are likely the few district staff members who have what might truly be considered representational roles in the incumbents' enterprises. Ironically, I would also note that the extracurricular calendars of the "electoral" staff are more dominated by the demands of their employers. These demands are obvious in that the staff members are required to go to partisan and community meetings to surveil the landscape. Less obvious but clearly observed was the fact that the "electoral" incumbents had much greater staff support demands on the

weekends and work periods when they were home. From strategy meetings, to fund-raisers, to parades, to simple constituent meetings, the “electoral” incumbents seemed to place a greater emphasis on being staffed than did the “personal” or “policy” incumbents. I would suggest that this stems in part from the political necessities of staff support but also in part from the personality differences between the types of incumbents. To conclude on the “electoral” incumbents, unlike D and A, F had no apparent concerns about electoral defeat, having handily won a number of primary and general election contests. Perhaps it is their perception of the situation and responsibilities, then, that groups D, A and F into a similar group of incumbents who allocate resources in order to avoid becoming marginal.

### Conclusion

These cases suggest that there is indeed a relationship between the incumbent’s political motivation and the means by which they allocate their district staff. District staff were either compelled or restrained in their behaviors based on what the incumbent desired. It was also demonstrated that the delegate/trustee distinction is not a productive way to think about the tasks performed by district staff. I would suggest that future research on district staff pay close attention to the personality and motivations of the incumbent. This research might be able to examine the extent to which incumbent personality is causative or correlative to staff behavior. Research might also dwell on the degree to which incumbent’s “personalities” are shaped by their districts. Or, do incumbents project their beliefs and attitudes without regard to the nature of the district? For now, we should not simply follow Fiorina’s assumption that all incumbent (and staff) behavior is driven by electorally rational desires. The partisan, personal, and policy

incumbents described above each demonstrated behavior that is not entirely rational in an electoral sense. In detailing the personality of each incumbent, it also became clear that many, but by no means all incumbents had a philosophy of representation that determined what they demanded of their staff.

### Incumbent's district philosophy

For some incumbents, allocation of staff resources was more deliberate than staff interpretations of the incumbents' personal interests and dispositions. Rather, some incumbents had active philosophies about how their district staff should function. Hypothesis 2 – Incumbents have philosophical interpretations of what functions are appropriate for their staff to conduct.

The different philosophical orientations were perhaps best captured by one of B's constituents who noted that B and his staff were more "finishers" than "door openers". The implication of this statement is that B's staff members were more likely to involve themselves in cases that came into their office than proactively engaging themselves in the community. The "finisher" tends to focus on the constituent problem as an end in itself. The goal is to resolve the problem or question and then other motivations can enter the equation. The "door opener" is more likely to be proactive or aggressive in seeking out new "doors" of opportunity that might be pursued on behalf of the incumbent. In this sense, the individual constituent or problem often becomes a means to an end. The "end" being that the "door opener" will much more likely seek out situations that are likely to result in favorable resolution and maybe even media coverage for the incumbent. From

the case studies, B and C were more clearly “finishers” while A and D could be described as “door openers.”<sup>11</sup>

As the “finisher” and “door opener” categorizations imply, the different philosophies appear to be highly correlated to the routine and the aggressive office styles described in Chapter Three. Furthermore, interviews with incumbents suggest that the correlation is somewhat driven by the philosophical framework for their district staff members (i.e., C as a “conservative” and D as a “liberal”.) The incumbents who stated that it was perhaps an ideological or “constitutional” responsibility of the staff to merely handle constituent requests tended to have more routine offices. Incumbents who took more broadly defined views of their roles as elected representatives tended to free up their district staff to pursue more aggressive behaviors. Figure 4.3 demonstrates this correlation.

(Figure 4.3)

| <u>Independent Variable</u> | <u>Dependent variable</u> |            |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
|                             | Routine                   | Aggressive |
| Liberal Philosophy          |                           | A          |
| Conservative Philosophy     | B,C                       | D          |

This correlation seemed to be much more clearly defined with staff than with the incumbent’s use of their personal time. As noted above, the personal incumbent such as B who has a routine office can spend relatively larger portions of his or her time engaged in tasks of representation in the office, while the electoral incumbent might defer many of his or her district tasks to empowered staff members. It appeared that in most cases,

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<sup>11</sup> The “opener-finisher” contrast is clearly one of ideal types and does not imply that the “door opening” office does not follow through on constituent requests presented to their office. Rather, they are more likely to make proactive allocations of resources in order that they might generate more opportunities to



incumbents hired staff that reflected their philosophical orientations on the appropriate role of district staff. Here, one of C's staffers clearly noted the differences in philosophical orientation between the staff from the two United States Senate enterprises in his state. Where the office of the senior senator was staffed by older individuals who were from their areas and reflected the "aw-shucks, down-home" approach of their boss, the office of the junior, more aggressive senator was full of younger, more aggressive staff that seemed to be "all about business and more aggressive in trying to help out." To use the phrase above, the senior senator and his staff were more "finishers" and the junior senator and staff were "door openers." Staff resumes and daily routines seemed to reflect their employer's philosophies about how they should do their jobs as elected representatives, and how they should be recognized by constituents for that work. While A, his staff, and several constituents suggested that he had an ideological disposition to employ a routine district operation, the evidence of his staff behavior was contrary to this limited philosophy. This finding suggests that the philosophies of incumbents need to be observed in practice and not simply taken at their word.

Incumbent C's RDSM characterized his employer's limited philosophy as almost desiring a "part-time, semi-professional" district operation. This key staff member suggested that C is vastly distinct from the stereotypical Tip O'Neal version of a "local" politician. C does not view it as his, or his staff's responsibility to aggressively court the multitude of district interests. Rather, for C the emphasis is placed on a much more reactive and limited set of services. When asked how his use of staff are different from other incumbents, an elite constituent suggested that C used them "less so, it is more of a

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help constituents. The two U.S. Senators from C's states most cleanly approximated this "opener-finisher" contrast, and their constituents held both in high esteem.

personal touch.” One of his field representatives suggested the C is not motivated to use his staff “politically, to make sure they’re not out there cooking up work” by soliciting or advertising their services to constituent groups or organized forums. As was quoted in Chapter Three, C’s staff members do a lot of “referrals” and merely try to “diagnose” and move along the “patients”. In fact, one of the field representatives suggested that he “advocates” on the part of aggrieved constituents in only the most rare and obvious examples. To further the medical metaphor, C’s style appears to be much more the country generalist who helps everyone get along with little problems, whereas the aggressive office is much more like the specialist who advertises their unique abilities to the general public, hoping to help them out in more exclusive and rewarding manners.<sup>12</sup> C’s staff members did not “aggressively” represent the incumbent in the field. I do not believe that they would feel comfortable or be authorized to operate in such a fashion. Constituents noted that when C’s long-time district representative from his home city represented him at functions, she rarely did anything besides read a prepared set of remarks from C himself. One final indicator of the “part-time, semi-professional” manner of C’s district staff enterprise lay in the two vacancies that existed in his hometown office for nearly a whole session of Congress. For an incumbent with a ‘limited’ philosophy such as C, staff vacancies appear to be less vexing than for incumbents with greater levels of district anxiety.

One constituent provided an excellent contrast between these two styles in the form of C and the junior U.S. Senator from C’s state. In two separate cases, the senator’s office mailed letters to constituents notifying them first of assistance programs that were available through the federal government, and second, of a law enforcement grant that the

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<sup>12</sup> As Chapter Six will argue, such “specialized” assistance also imposes costs on the rest of the system.

senator had procured for the city. While this constituent noted that the senator “got the ball rolling” on both projects, he implied that C was also involved but in a manner more appropriate to his limited style. One of C’s mayors echoed this comparison in a discussion of the two officials’ work on transportation and river issues. From the mayor’s perspective, the senator was initially active on many projects and C only became involved at the later stages, and on “legitimate” projects when his seniority and influence might prevail. On most transportation issues, however, C and his staff took on nothing more than an “informational” role. These examples show C to be a “finisher” and the senator to be a “door opener.” Another illustration of this minimal philosophy came from one of the city managers in C’s district, who had little interaction with the incumbent’s enterprise. In the one instance where he did call about information on a government program, he received the basic information, but no follow-up or offer of further assistance. Follow-up assistance or pushing for constituent interests would have not complied with the “philosophical” direction of C’s staff. With the exception of the city manager, who seemed to prefer an incumbent with more interest and “clout”, C’s constituents seemed aware of and, for the most part, appreciative of C’s philosophical position and the fact that his staff were rarely seen. Of the primary cases, C was the incumbent most universally respected by his constituents. Virtually all the observations and interviews praised him as an “intellect”, “thinker” or a “cerebral” member with “integrity and compassion”. Others even gave him higher praise as being “intellectual and not partisan” or a member of “substance, not a glad hander.” In fact, the main issue raised by his opponent in two previous campaigns was the fact that C produced an inadequate amount of highway funding and other pork for the district. In turning back

this challenger, one constituent noted that she felt the voters were “connected” to C’s philosophy. In sum, C’s routine office often seeks old friendly faces and sticks with long-established practices of representation and his “philosophy” of limited government and reactive staff seemed to play well with his constituents. To wit, one constituent noted that C is a “long standing positive fixture (in his state) and he doesn’t need surrogates (to do his job)”.

Other incumbents, however, do utilize surrogates more aggressively. Recalling Chapter Three, the aggressive philosophy is based on more proactive tasks on the part of the incumbent and/or the district staff. They drop-by more, they go to more meetings, they contact more constituents, etc. This philosophy seems to be built on the assumption that the exercise of power on the behalf of constituents is justified on a number of levels. Intellectually, the aggressive incumbent justifies proactive staff functions as being more representative of constituent interests. One aggressive staff member from C’s office seemed puzzled as to how representation of district interests might occur if he did not regularly drop in on constituents to find out their perceptions and problems. Some staff, particularly Democrats, also suggest that this activity is more ideologically representative. F’s RDSM noted the one of the major purposes of her office is to expose constituents to the many programs that they may not have known existed. I did not always find this to be a Democratic versus Republican distinction, however, as the section on partisanship below will demonstrate. Finally, the exercise of staff power was electorally justified because staff universally recognized that their works benefited the level of name recognition and approval for their employers.

## Conclusion

The functions of district staff are impacted by the philosophical interpretations of incumbents. The political philosophy of the incumbent, however, is not deterministic of the district staff behavior. While conservatives are more likely to have routine offices and liberals' aggressive offices, there are clearly exceptions to this rule. Philosophical conservatives like A can be driven by electoral or partisan motivations that cause them to utilize aggressive district staff. On the other hand, a very senior liberal Democrat from a large urban area who was ideologically disposed to supporting increased government funding employed a similarly aged group of routine staff who did not aggressively peddle these programs to the constituents. As will be seen below, the philosophical distinction between incumbents is not necessarily an ideological dispute between visions of more or less government. Of the four primary case studies, a Democrat and a Republican could each be classified as routine and aggressive in their philosophical interpretations.

There has been exhaustive research conducted on legislators' perceptions of their responsibilities in terms of how they should vote or represent their constituents. There has been very little examination of how this specifically translates into what they do with their time at home and in what capacity they want their district staff to act as representatives. Consequently, future research might build on this variable and seek out incumbent comment on what they perceive to be both their role as representatives as well as what they think is appropriate for their staff members. One might also examine what written and training manuals exist from office to office to provide guidance for newly hired staff.

### Political factors

The literature often focuses on two political factors as having a substantial impact on legislative behavior: the incumbent's tenure in office and their electoral vulnerability. My observations suggest that these variables also have an impact on how incumbents allocate their district staff.

### Seniority

Hypothesis 3: Senior incumbents tend to allocate routine functions to their district staff enterprises more so than junior incumbents.

Of the four primary case studies, B and C are easily considered senior incumbents as each has served at least ten terms. Incumbents A and D were observed in their first and second terms respectively. Figure 4.4 captures this hypothetical relationship. It might also be logical to present Figure 4.4 as a continuum that hypothesized that seniority was correlated highly to routine office functions. As will be shown below, however, this correlation does not always exist!

(Figure 4.4)

| <u>Independent Variable</u> | <u>Dependent variable</u> |            |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
|                             | Routine                   | Aggressive |
| More Senior                 | B, C, E                   | F          |
| More Junior                 | G                         | D, A       |

### Evidence for routinization

A direct contrast of the two senior case studies with the two junior case studies seems to uphold Hypothesis Three. The senior incumbents' staff members seemed to: venture out into the district less, do fewer office hours, do fewer unannounced drop-by visits to local elites. In short, the senior offices did less. E's office was typical of the

district enterprise. He employed one field representative and one RDSM who did the necessary proactive tasks. The other five staff members were largely limited to casework functions or other informational activities.

In the typical office important outreach functions often “fall by the wayside” as the RDSM, COS, and incumbent become too busy with legislative priorities. C’s RDSM noted that issues of substantial importance often sat on his desk with only the most cursory attention. He believed that issues of such importance would have received more attention from the incumbent and COS earlier in C’s career, but now those individuals had more pressing legislative tasks to perform and the RDSM himself had to supervise the activities of the routine office. B and C’s staff members made the argument that they were largely “too busy” with casework requests that came into the office to go out into the field and do the aggressive staff functions. One of H’s constituents noted that the field representative for his part of the district was “overburdened” with responsibilities and rarely went out into the community. The staff members do not have to go ‘out’ into the communities to become overburdened. The community and its problems will often come to the office. As one of C’s field representatives noted, “the longer you’re here, the more you’re dragged in.” Properly rationing time increasingly becomes an important part of the district staff member’s job. Even when they do find time to go into the field, staff for the senior incumbent is often just trying to get by. The activities and attitude of E’s lone field representative further belie the diminished importance of meeting new constituents over time. He felt that “maintaining contact with the many communities of the district; their leaders and the voters” was key to his job as he was the only person on

staff to regularly fulfill this task for much of the district. Staff members from the more routine offices simply seem to get bogged down as time goes by.

Routinization can result from the dissipation of interest, as the case of C seems to suggest, or it can result from an actual instruction to reprioritize staff behavior. In the latter case, B's staff members were each initially required to spend at least one day per week in the field interacting with constituents. Over the years that outreach was scaled back to two part-days per month in the more remote parts of the district. Further evidence of the changing demands over time was reflected in the fact that both B and C transplanted their COS from the district offices to Washington to assist with legislative efforts after the first couple of terms. The transfer of the COS occurred as the incumbents began to travel home less frequently.<sup>13</sup> It seems quite logical that as the incumbent's career lengthens, so do the competing demands on their time. They are confronted with committee and constituency groups interested in legislative efforts, multiplying district groups and individual constituents that become familiar with the incumbent's record, not to mention the time pressures of staff, family and constituents that the incumbent must balance when he or she can return home. One must also consider that given the simple fact that the incumbent is re-elected, their popularity or name recognition is likely increasing throughout the first few election cycles. This publicity likely leads to an increased amount of communication and demand from the constituents. It can also lead to difficult situations where incumbents and staff confront demands from "old friends who are hard to turn down" and constituents who are new to

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<sup>13</sup> C's scheduler noted, with an amazing degree of honesty, that he came home on average once per month because of his legislative responsibilities. A constituent from a nearby city recalled that C seemed to visit there once or twice per year, but definitely "fewer" times than used to be the case. Even more honestly



the district and want to interact with the incumbent. Given these demands, it is not surprising that B and C's staff members increasingly became overwhelmed with the routine measures of district representation and were no longer able to get out and perform the proactive community outreach that A and D's staff performed.

The younger incumbents, on the other hand, tended to be personally engaged in their districts as well as devoting substantial staff resources to building district name recognition. For example, A and D's staff had considerably more effort devoted to office hours and group outreach in their first terms.<sup>14</sup> The total efforts of these incumbent enterprise make the term "permanent campaign" understandable. In their first term, A's staff conducted outreach and office hours in areas of perceived electoral weakness, even when these trips produced few visitors or casework requests. According to the RDSM, what was important was that they were putting forth the effort to build the incumbent's name recognition in the area. Notably, they did office hours in hometown of the challenger from the first election on a bi-weekly basis for the full two years of the first term. These efforts built towards the goal of increasing the visibility or presence of A. From constituent remarks in later visits, these efforts seem to have paid off. One constituent, not particularly a supporter of A, noted that the staff members "seemed to be more relaxed, campaigning less, but definitely around more" as the term wore on. Ironically, from the staff perspective, the first two years were notable in that they felt like they continued to "campaign" even harder for A, while from the constituent perspective the aggressive outreach began to increasingly feel like proper representation. An

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another senior incumbent's RDSM told me that while the boss used to come home for the whole summer in the 1960s, that he had not even come home for the entire current summer.

<sup>14</sup> It is also interesting to note that A's staff altered their behaviors after the first term and D's staff all mentioned plans to "look at" what they were doing after the election.

interesting paradox indeed! Even incumbents disposed to more routine styles feel pressure early in their careers to commit time and resources to learning the district. Incumbent I's RDSM highlighted the number of invitations that poured in during his first term from groups who wanted to familiarize themselves with their new representative. Ultimately the fact that I's staff viewed these interactions as a dilemma while A and D were more likely to embrace each invitation as an opportunity, confirms that some types of incumbents are quicker to routinize their staff behaviors.

#### Increased expectations often a justification

One of the contributing factors to junior incumbents conducting vigorous district operations lies in the fact that constituents have high expectations when a senior incumbent departs office. This situation is actually quite ironic when one considers that newly elected representatives must work hard to provide constituent services that in many cases the senior incumbent stopped providing years before. Nevertheless, these expectations were prevalent amongst G's staff. One of his staff members noted they had "tried to sustain the perceived level of service...it is a challenge more than an opportunity to replace a prominent member." She felt that it was a "challenge" because the constituent's perceptions of the service provided by the prominent incumbent tended to be inflated. Consequently, G hired more staff than the predecessor had in the district, opened an additional office and hired staff that were more involved in community groups to compensate for these inflated perceptions. Over time these expectations seemed to lessen, according to the perception of staff members. And because of the diminished expectations, the incumbent cut back on the number of advisories and town hall meetings that he and his staff were involved in, focusing instead on the more personal forms of

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interaction that suited his style. As Chapter Six will note, the ‘relaxed’ incumbent can also grow dangerously comfortable with the same set of elite constituents.

Comments about high expectations were also prevalent in interviews with A’s constituents. A was observed in a relatively junior and electorally marginal setting. His COS suggested that the first two years were dominated by a “siege mentality” brought on by the fact that they had 1) only marginally won their first election and that they were 2) living with high expectations of constituents who compared A to the previous incumbent and 3) that they faced the constant presence of a challenger who had announced just weeks after A’s first election to Congress.<sup>15</sup> One constituent who saw A as a “rising star” nevertheless suggested that he wasn’t as “committed” to the district as was his predecessor (E). To this constituent, Incumbent E “didn’t have to be told about district issues to take action, he and his staff knew, and they helped and rewarded themselves for such actions.” A number of the constituents did not think that A would ever have the level of “district connection” that E had because of his different style, purpose and ability. Another constituent who was also a supporter of both E and A noted that “it’s hard to think of anyone who would meet the requirements” of what E and his staff did for the district. These comments reflect the difficulties in fulfilling the high expectations of constituents. Consequently, A’s early district behavior was directed not only by what the Republican leadership and other legislators from his state delegation suggested would

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<sup>15</sup> From this point of view, the actions of first term district enterprises can probably not be put into tidy boxes. Because things happen so quickly and there are so many competing influences on the incumbent in structuring the district enterprise, perhaps it is the case that for the first term, the enterprise is simply expanding where it can, when it has the resources. As was observed with A and D and as comments from other staff suggest, the first session is often a learning experience for incumbents and their staff. Ideas proposed during this term often don’t survive the re-election. For example, A’s Medicare task force was formed in response to a substantial first term issue that dissipated after his reelection. Along those same lines, staff who are not cut out for the enterprise won’t return for the second term. One constituent noted

work, but also by a need to conduct the familiar activities of E and his staff and respond to the challenges of the next opponent. Visits to A's district in his second term suggested that he and his staff members were growing into their responsibilities and that the constituents were becoming more comfortable with the job they were doing. In fact, several constituents, in noting A's national position in the Republican Party, suggested that he was already on par or above E in his service to the district, or that he was at least overcoming "growing pains." This relatively rapid turnaround seems to confirm both the high expectations confronted by new incumbents, but also the secure positions that incumbents come to enjoy very quickly in their careers in the U.S. House of Representatives. As a sign of the inevitable transformation to come, one of A's field representatives stated that because of all the extra work generated by A's state and national visibility, that there simply "wasn't enough time" to do the same activities that he had done earlier in A's career.

#### An Exception

In allowing for the increased "routinization" of offices as an incumbent increases his or her tenure in office, I would also note an exception that might confound the utility of this variable. The literature on "life cycles" of incumbents largely presumes that as seniority is acquired, the district career invariably suffers, representation declines, the incumbent focuses more heavily on Washington behaviors, and their "resources" are more committed to Washington. What is often not explained, however, is that the "resource" equation begins to shift largely because increased seniority brings new staff to

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this as the probable reason for A's slow development; "(he) hasn't had time to weed out the greener people."

the personal office and committees in Washington. More importantly, the presumption is made without an analysis of district staff behavior.

The first part of the exception is a familiar one; that some incumbents continue their personal devotion to their district activities regardless of their increased tenure in office. B is the familiar example here. He enjoys going home and “pounding out a street on a Saturday morning.” While he admittedly moves slower than other incumbents and does a smaller mixture of activities, he also does things in his district that other incumbents do not do. Furthermore, B has a style that doesn’t seem to have altered over the course of his career. In his own words, his routine “hasn’t changed at all.” I would speculate that B’s behavior is explained largely because of his personal nature and partly because of his electoral security and lengthy electoral experience in the area.

The second part of the exception lies with the district staff. The presumption of the “life cycles” literature ignores the fact that simply because the motivations and behavior of the incumbent change as they acquire seniority, it does not logically follow that the behaviors of the district staff must also change dramatically. I would accept that increased seniority does have some impact on district staff behavior. The examples of B and C suggest that the longer one serves in office, the more work is automatically generated through mail and phone calls to the office. But I would also note that B and C were initially disposed to have less aggressive offices than either A or D and that F’s office continued to operate in an aggressive fashion even though she was going into her fourth third term in office. Therefore, it is possible that the activities of the RDSM and other district staff could actually become more aggressive as the incumbent’s time in office expands and his or her personal focus shifts to legislative matters.

Hypothesis 4: On occasion, staff for senior incumbents can actually increase or maintain aggressive outreach behavior for the incumbents who are often absent from the district.

Some incumbents seemed quite willing to allow the same individuals to stay on their district payroll indefinitely regardless of their proactivity. For example, three of five district staff from a senior urban incumbent had worked for him for over twenty years and they rarely left their office. These long-serving district staff members demonstrate that tenure alone is not a sufficient explanation for aggressive behavior. Instead, E's RDSM serves as a notable illustration of this hypothesis. Largely because of the fact that E was heavily invested in the legislative process and rarely returned home, his RDSM was entrusted to run the district operation with the aggressive assistance of only one field representative. The experience of E's staff suggests that while the numbers and responsibilities of district staff appear to become more limited as the career progresses, in actuality, power can be consolidated and expanded into one or two key staff members provided that the incumbent empowers those individuals and they desire the exercise of that authority. The accumulation of power in key district staff is perhaps most likely to occur in well-regarded incumbents of "substance". E's field representative suggested that his boss was "full of substance, so all (they) really have to do is make a presence." This status was also reflected in the expectations of the constituents. One local businessman remarked, "I'm a Democrat because E's a Democrat." The staff member later noted that this was precisely the type of substance that gave him the credibility to carry out his tasks as the lone field representative. This credibility extended to an even greater degree to the RDSM. One constituent noted that when they saw the RDSM, "they saw the incumbent." It might even be argued that as incumbents begin to learn about their districts and

constituents, they consequently need to perform less district activity and can have staff fill the holes that they discover. Here again, one can see E's RDSM growing more important as the surrogate incumbent with each successive term that E became more ingrained into the Washington community. Further evidence was provided by one of A's constituents who noted that A, in his second term, had "better access, less credit-claiming and more personal help" because of his knowledge and the use of his staff.

The conclusion to be drawn is that we should not automatically assume that seniority diminishes the district efforts of the incumbent. Some junior incumbents were less inclined to be aggressive and some senior incumbents maintained very active "home styles." To follow the stereotype eliminates the possibility that some incumbents and staff maintain, or even increase, the aggressive activities of the early career. Assuming that staff behavior directly mimics incumbent behavior also ignores the findings from Chapter Three that staff themselves are rational political actors, sometimes acting as much for their own political careers as for their employers. It is difficult to classify staff behavior simply based on the incumbent's tenure in office. One needs to look at the context of each incumbent's place and time in office. Seniority must be considered with the personal factors and goals mentioned above as well as with their current electoral status, future career ambitions and staff motivations.

#### Electoral status

Hypothesis 5: Incumbents that perceive themselves to be more electorally secure are likely to have more routine allocations of district staff.

The observations largely suggested a correlation between the incumbent's perception of his or her electoral status and the aggressiveness of their staff allocation. B and C

were long-serving incumbents who generally won their reelection with comfortable margins. A and D are younger incumbents who had not yet established that comfort. Although with two elections behind him, A's style suggested that he was moving toward a more comfortable attitude about his reelection prospects. Figure 4.5 suggests how we might think about district staff and their electoral status.

(Figure 4.5)

| <u>Independent Variable</u> | <u>Dependent variable</u> |            |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
|                             | Routine                   | Aggressive |
| Electurally Vulnerable      |                           | D, A       |
| Electurally Secure          | B, C                      | F          |

#### Evidence of the "safe" incumbent

In the case of electoral marginality, my observations confirmed what the literature suggests about incumbent behavior. Most particularly, Fenno (1978) found the personal behaviors of junior members to be more electorally vulnerable and have "expansionist" (aggressive) behaviors while senior members were more "protectionist" (routine) by nature. Other literature suggests that such behavior is performed to secure one's position against national "tides" that might sweep an otherwise "safe" incumbent into a competitive election. In either event, the important factor here is the impact of that perception on the incumbent's allocation of district staff. As Fenno and others correctly identify, it is not the actual margin of victory that is crucial to incumbent calculations so much as it is the feeling of uncertainty about the next election.<sup>16</sup> To gauge those perceptions, I asked and observed each incumbent what they, and their staff, needed to do to stay in office. My findings echoed the literature's understanding of widespread electoral anxiety.

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter Two for a review of this literature.



The staff members of “safe” incumbents, most notably B and C, generally were the most routine in their behaviors. The previous section suggested that these staff explained their routine natures as a consequence of an accumulation of work and contacts that naturally came over the progression of a congressional career. This variable suggests that the “routinization” of an office might also be arrived at by the choice of individual staff members; that as the incumbent becomes less likely to be defeated, it is less important for the staff to be aggressively engaging their communities. “Routinization” becomes self-fulfilling. This process is primarily reflected in the incumbent’s behavior. B was an excellent example of the routine and “safe” incumbent. He closely resembled Fenno’s (1978) portrait of a “protectionist” incumbent, comfortable with his reelection constituency and motivated by a desire to maintain that particular group of supporters. B explained that after he’d survived a few elections, there was a “slippage” as he grew more comfortable spending a portion of his weekend time in the district with his family, as opposed to meeting with groups of constituents. When in the district, B noted that he attended meetings by “invitation only”, had no town hall meetings and very rarely traveled to “new places.” One typical weekend saw B conduct a number of visits to familiar groups of constituents in his home and in local businesses, attend celebrations (e.g. anniversary and Eagle Scout commemoration) and speak before a group meeting (annual Rotary award dinner). This tendency to avoid “new places” was explained best by another incumbent’s staff member; “when you are a freshman, you get invited to everything in the district and must prioritize where to go.” Eventually, accepting or prioritizing these invitations leaves the routine incumbents and staff with a set of familiar individuals and groups.

B's staff members also demonstrated the extent to which the attitudes and behavior of the staff become routinized over time. His staff and constituents recognized that the staff members, most of whom who'd been with B for his entire House career, "don't seem to be going to new things and trying to visit with new people." One staff member suggested that they "have no time to meet new people... we attend other meetings by invitation only." B's staff, spread throughout the district in four small offices, appeared to be actively engaged in keeping up appearances, but not reaching out to new constituents. Even though B has an increasingly "new district" with new suburban faces, his personal schedule, as well as the daily activities of his staff, reflect a preoccupation with providing access to traditional supporters. Perhaps B himself summed it up best; "It's hard to turn down old friends."

#### The "marginal" staff is proactive

Staff for A and D, on the other hand, were much more aggressive in their behaviors. These incumbents perceived higher levels of campaign competition than did either B or C and their staff. It is possible that the vulnerability of the incumbent could cause a direct response from the incumbent or a voluntary increase in the aggressive nature of staff themselves. In the more direct situation, an incumbent or a COS might instruct the staff toward the more aggressive style of behavior to compensate for weaknesses. A's office was a better example of the former description. For A's staff, their purpose was clearly laid out by the COS and the DD. All staff indicated a frank understanding of their role as aides in the incumbent's electoral enterprise. Furthermore, this attitude could be seen in their regular behavior. For the COS, it was the wide range in individual interactions he

had with the military bases of the district. For the DD, it was the substantial amount of time devoted to business and community leaders. In fact, the DD spent one morning per week conducting “office hours” and “making the rounds” of the local officials in the hometown of A’s first campaign opponent. When the DD was in the field he frequently informed constituents of the staff’s availability and the services that they could perform. A trip to a large firm in the district provided an illustration for this advertisement; the DD asked if there was “anything from a governmental side of things that caused this (problem)? What about anything from the legislative point of view? Let us know if we can do anything.” This type of comment was not distinctive to A’s COS or DD. It was the anthem of his field staff as well.

Even for A’s field representatives there was a clear “aggressiveness” about the nature of their outreach and the necessity to prove to constituents that their boss was working hard to represent his constituents. The staff were simply “out there” more often than staff in most other offices, making sure that they were listening to constituents and offering all the possible connections and assistance that their office could provide. One of the clearest examples of this attitude was the staff member who had a time formula that ensured that she was meeting a mix of old and new constituents on a weekly, monthly, and quarterly basis. In fact, she is an excellent case for comparison. A staff member for A’s predecessor, E, also utilized lists to chart his outreach activities. The difference between the two staff members was that the E staffer’s list merely mentioned the names of individuals with whom he had come in contact over his many visits to the communities of his geographic area. There was no plan for re-contact of these individuals, or the suggestion that new names were added on a regular basis, clearly what

Fenno would refer to as “protectionist” behavior. Furthermore, while A’s staff member had goals to create and build relationships, the underlying justification for E’s staff member was to “maintain”; “dropping a note or a card, so as not to pick up any work, is just as good as putting in your face.” While the visits by A’s staff are highly time-consuming, they represent an important element of the aggressive staff enterprise; advertising their hard work and willingness to serve on behalf of the absent incumbent. Observations of A’s DD and field representatives revealed a qualitatively different approach to meeting people in the district than with E. Characteristically, one of the local elites remarked on the assertiveness of the staffer, “I’m truly surprised you’re here, is it election time?” Evidently this area or constituent had not been on E’s list of familiar faces. This was the most notable distinction between the two offices. E’s staff member suggested that there was a definite increase in office activity in the months before an election. In A’s office their statements coupled with my observations indicated that they performed consistently high levels of service throughout the first few years in office, regardless of proximity to election day. Finally, observations of A’s staff also suggest that they would be unwilling to grant the type of credit to local officials that B’s staff had farmed out to state and city legislators for projects or cases resolved. Rather, requests for local jobs and projects are deemed to be highly important objects to attain in the name of A alone.

The other possibility is an incumbent’s office that is aggressive in a more voluntary nature. In the case of D’s enterprise, the behaviors were similar to those observed in A’s office, but the rationales were not as explicitly political in nature. Rather, I would suggest that the staff in this case was instructed early in the term and came to understand

the political importance of the jobs they were to carry out. Additionally, much of the more politically sensitive work was confined to the RDSM, while for A the political work was spread out amongst a number of district staff. So any urgency expressed by the incumbent would be confined to the RDSM.

The most political work, the campaign, also suggests a distinction between marginal and safe incumbents that I observed in these district staff offices. With the exception of C's RDSM, who left the federal office to work on the campaign, A and D's staff were much more involved in the election campaigns than the routine offices. This clearly becomes the case when one examines the political nature of the activities performed by their RDSMs throughout the two years of their election cycles. For A and D's top staff aides, their job responsibilities extended to fund-raising, candidate recruitment, and in some cases even recruitment, supervision or management of the actual campaign. Their activities were much more aggressive and proactive than the limited campaign activities of H's staff discussed earlier in this chapter. Where the phase of the calendar appears to make a difference to routine offices, it does not appear to have a huge impact on the more aggressive offices. Incumbents who view the election process as a "permanent campaign" are almost certainly devoting federal staff resources to explicitly campaign-related activities, as was described in Chapter Three.

### Exceptions?

It does not always hold that junior incumbents are more aggressive than senior incumbents. There are differences between B/C and A/D that do not appear to be determined solely by their tenure in office. For example, C and D have similarly sized districts. While C who is the more secure of the two incumbents, he has four offices

dispersed throughout his district. D has only one office in the middle of her district. To use Fenno's terminology, such a disposition of resources might suggest that C is acting in an "expansive" fashion seeking to represent constituents even in areas where his electoral performance is not strong while D is much more clearly "protectionist" allocating her staff office to the center of the city with her re-election core. These two examples struggle against the hypothesis in some part because one would expect that the senior incumbent would want to consolidate his presence in the known and supported areas of the district while the junior incumbent would want to expand her efforts throughout the district, and geographically, these offices are not performing in such a manner.

A second exception to this hypothesis was observed in F's office. She had the most aggressive of any district operation, yet she had handily won each of her three election campaigns. F's case suggests that the simple act of acquiring seniority and general election security are not sufficient in explaining aggressive staff behavior. F was not a primary case so I was unable to acquire substantive information about her motivations and behavior but I speculate that because the district is highly ethnic in nature and dominated by one party, that she might actually be vulnerable to a primary challenge. Hence the notion of "senior" and "junior" needs to be specified to take account of districts such as F's where the electoral security of seniority takes much longer to establish, if it ever can truly be made so. Related to this exception would also be the time and behavior of personal incumbents like B or G who are individually aggressive in their activities in the district but have largely routine staff enterprises.

A final exception to this hypothesis is the potential impact of a senior incumbent on a junior incumbent who share a city or region. In one mid-sized city that was largely in B's

district but also contained several thousand constituents of a newly elected incumbent, representation appeared to be entirely handled by B and his staff. While it would not have been logical to place a district office there, there was no evidence that eighteen months into the initial term that the new incumbent had staff who did office hours, stopped by or even made phone calls to the Chamber of Commerce, county courthouse or local newspaper. In short, the junior incumbent seemed to be entirely deferring to the senior incumbent. This case suggests that junior incumbents are not always the “expansionists” that the literature suggests. Perhaps it is the case that because the senior incumbent has represented this area for a considerable period, the junior incumbent has calculated that expending efforts to become known in the area would not be worth his or his staff’s time. This suggests an interesting future topic of inquiry; the extent to which offices defer to their neighboring senior incumbents.

### Conclusion

Seniority and electoral status are likely to be important factors in determining how incumbents allocate their district staff. Whether the aggressive allocations were specifically directed by the incumbent or were understood by the field representatives, the fact remains that the junior and more electorally vulnerable incumbents tended to have more proactive staff enterprises. As incumbents became more senior and/or electorally secure, their staff usually fell into routinized patterns of behavior. Therefore, future staff research should investigate both the place in career of the incumbent as well as how they perceive their electoral situation. One other area of future investigation might be how candidates with progressive ambition utilize their district staff to assist in their possible promotion to another higher office. While I tangentially encountered

incumbents making this transition (E) or pondering a run for higher office (C and H), I did not think to include questions about the impact of these calculations on staff behavior.

### Partisanship

Hypothesis 6: The incumbent's party affiliation has little impact on the manner in which they allocate their district staff.

While partisanship is a commonly used variable in measurements of the variation in incumbents' behavior, I would suggest that it had only a minimal impact on the allocation of staff resources in the district. In fact, I would suggest that this is one of the more notable findings of this dissertation. Of the four primary cases, a Democrat and a Republican could each be found amongst the ranks of the routine and the aggressive enterprises. Furthermore, there were no clear patterns amongst the secondary cases when divided by party. To the extent that there were partisan differences amongst the cases, they were found in the ideological orientations of incumbents. As conservatives, one might rationalize that C,H and even B would allocate small and reactive staff to remain consistent with their political philosophies. In fact, C's staff consistently suggested that his approach to representation was the main reason behind their reactive daily functions.<sup>17</sup> Further evidence was found in a contrast of G and H. While the two incumbents shared almost overlapping constituencies, their staff members performed different functions. While G's staff utilized more personal contacts with groups in the district, H's staff tended to rely on strict contacts with identified supporters and party contacts. Perhaps the difference in the level of assistance offered by each office was

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<sup>17</sup> C serves as perhaps an exceptional case here. He and his staff were the only observed case to be so steadfast in their commitment to limited government. This position also was reflected in his lack of pursuit of district spending and the refusal of PAC contributions to his campaign.



determined by their philosophical direction. The fact that F and D were amongst the most liberal of the cases and had aggressive enterprises further substantiates political philosophy as a variable.

In general, it appeared that Republicans, as conservatives, tended to have more routine district enterprises. Just as with the above variables, however, there appear to be exceptions that confound philosophy. Most notably, the aggressive outreach efforts of A and his staff suggest that not all conservatives will apply their philosophical directives of limited government to the size and functions of their district staff. Furthermore, while C would be considered a conservative relative to F or D, his ideological interest group ratings place him squarely in the middle of all incumbents.

The same relationship probably applies to the majority or minority status of each incumbent. It does not seem likely that the incumbent's electoral status and philosophical interpretation of staff functions would be affected by their party's place in institutional power. I would accept, however, that there might be clear incentives to utilize staff differently at the highest levels of party officeholders. The discussion of institutional leadership does lead to one final comment about partisanship and district staff. Speaker Gingrich made a notable effort in 1994 to reinvigorate the legislative Republican Party by centralizing its power in Washington. This effort had a clear impact on district staff. The year 1994 usually invokes memories of the Contract with America, but that year the Republican leadership also suggested to their freshmen members the utility of a staff model whereby the COS remained in the home district. More than forty of the seventy-three freshmen adopted this model on the selling point that it would help with their reelection efforts. For the Speaker it had the additional incentive of leaving junior party

members with less key advice in dealing with institutional leadership, and hence, more malleable to his direction.

As compared to the seniority and electoral status of the incumbent, partisanship is a weak determinant of district staff allocations. Nevertheless, future investigations of district staff should continue to look at distinctions between Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and liberals, and the majority and minority parties.

### Geography

#### Urban-Rural

Hypothesis 7: Urban staff enterprises are more aggressive in their orientations than are rural enterprises.

Urban offices generally tended to be “busier” than rural offices. This functions at the obvious level where one would expect a greater population to generate more work for the office. But it also functions at a more subtle level where urban staff appeared to be more aggressive in their office functions even beyond the normal “business” associated with their office. In Figure 4.6, the case studies are ordered from most to least urban and from routine to aggressive. The figure suggests, however, that there is no more than a loose correlation between the nature of the district and their with their level of aggressiveness.

| Figure 4.6         |         |         |       |            |       |
|--------------------|---------|---------|-------|------------|-------|
| Nature of District | Rural   |         | Mixed |            | Urban |
|                    | *-----* |         |       |            |       |
|                    | J,K     | B,L     | A,E,C | D,G,H      | I,F M |
| Style of office    | Routine |         |       | Aggressive |       |
|                    | *-----* |         |       |            |       |
|                    | C       | B,I,J,K | E,G,H | A,D,L,M    | F     |

### The evidence is mixed

The evidence that drove this hypothesis was the stark contrast between a perceived ideal type urban (F) and rural office (B). The disparity was further driven by my initial impression that an urban office was more likely to: 1) confront a greater number of constituents on any given day and 2) that those constituents would have problems with a greater number of federal programs on which federal staff could assist. Furthermore, the cynical campaign pundit might suggest that an incumbent in a larger urban area, F for instance, is going to get less press coverage than an incumbent who is the only House member representing numerous small and mid-sized cities, say B or C. Consequently, the argument would be made that the urban incumbent needs to develop more individual-level connections with the proactive assistance of their staff to ensure that their coverage competes with the numerous other incumbents in the area. While observations suggested a slight tendency for urban offices to be more aggressive, the routine nature of several of these urban offices, especially C and I, suggest that Hypothesis #8 is a very weak proposition when compared to other variables and probably does not merit future study. The experiences of C and I suggest that simply occupying an urban office will not result in an incumbent utilizing an aggressive district enterprise.

### An exception: A rural philosophy?

Some constituents actually suggested a disparity between urban and rural legislators that ran in the other direction. These constituents argued that rural incumbents were more active than were urban incumbents, a disparity that might be called the Southern Paradox.<sup>18</sup> The paradox has been discussed repeatedly in this dissertation in the form of

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<sup>18</sup> Ornstein (1975) and Fenno (1978) both concluded that northern members employed more staff than southern legislators in their total enterprises. Both also referred to the fact that southern legislators were

B and G's personal activities in their districts. The personal incumbents mentioned above are philosophically more disposed to conduct greater amounts of district work. A state senator's staff member from B's district made this case most eloquently. Based on this individual's interaction with numerous state and federal legislators, it was his experience that rural legislators were much more likely to personally, or through their staff, handle requests that came to the office, while legislators from urban areas tended to more quickly refer cases to the appropriate state or local offices. Perhaps it is also possible that the personal incumbents are more likely to represent southern rural districts, whereas northern and urban incumbents, be they Democrat or Republican, are much more likely to have their staff simply dispose of casework requests. While this strikes me as an interesting question for future research, I would conclude that this "paradox" observed by a number of constituents is probably overstated. At any rate, while the personal style might happen to generate a slightly higher level of casework based on the fact that the incumbents are out in the field generating a few more cases per week, their efforts do not compare with the more aggressive field operations of incumbents A or F in terms of the numbers of constituents that would be contacted in a given week.

#### Size of district

Hypothesis #8: Small urban districts are likely to have more aggressive staff while larger districts have more routine enterprises because they are harder to represent.

How does an incumbent overcome the geographical dilemma of having a dispersed district? Do they have more offices and more staff? Do they allocate more personal time to the district? Do they take more aggressive tracks of elite contact? These are critical

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more reliant upon "personal" interaction with their constituents. As such, they tended to eschew the intervention of surrogates or the use of substantial office perquisites. This contrast seemed particularly apt

questions for incumbents from large districts. Hypothesis #8 seems more of a corollary to #7 than a brand new variable. At first this variable seemed quite intuitive. Early observations suggested that it might be the case that the overall size of the district had a greater impact than whether the district was purely urban or rural. It seemed intuitive that an incumbent from a larger geographical area would have a harder time interacting with the constituents and communities of his or her district. Fenno (1978) referred to large geographical districts as being “segmented” and that contact with the incumbent could be sparse. My observations confirmed that feeling of isolation. One of B’s constituents, who through business dealings had worked closely with a number of incumbents in the past, noted that one incumbent had a district so large that he rarely even came to this particular constituent’s portion of the district. Furthermore, this incumbent never called or interacted with elite constituents in the area. In the case of this incumbent a calculation appears to have been made that this was not an essential part of his district, and then the incumbent and staff consistently limited service there. Another explanation for why incumbents from larger districts avoid portions of their district was offered earlier in this chapter. The case of the newly elected incumbent who only represented a small portion of a city held largely by B suggests that incumbents from larger districts might also defer to senior incumbents who border their districts. The moral to both of these lessons appears to be that incumbents often go where people know, and like, them. Furthermore, they appear to use their staff to largely reinforce these relationships rather than to strike out and act as surrogate incumbents to the constituents who do not regularly interact with the actual incumbent. Both of the aforementioned constituents noted that staff were just as absent as the incumbents.

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in comparing the personal stances, office routines and campaign styles of B and G with those of C.

G and H's staff, in evaluating each other's operations, suggested that the size of the district does have some impact. Individuals from both staff noted that G's district was larger and that his staff had more "geographical" responsibilities, as opposed to H's "issue-based" office. Despite the fact that the larger rural districts appeared likely to have routine styles, this variable still seems to be confounded by the activities of routine urban offices such as C, H and I. Clearly the size and nature of the district have an impact on the style of representation. Larger districts are more likely to have multiple offices with staff dispersed between them. Yet, the size and nature of the district probably acts more as an intervening variable causing minor alterations in the incumbent's personal style and philosophy about district activities. Further examination of similar sized district enterprises is necessary to more fully gauge the impact of area on representation. It would also be interesting to more fully compare enterprises with multiple offices with those operating out of one central office.

#### Nature of district

Hypothesis 9 – Homogenous districts make it easier for aggressive representation while incumbents from heterogeneous districts will probably rely on routine staff.

Some congressional districts tend to have a dominant community of interests. In most cases it will be a driving economic interest. A state capitol, large university, military base, or an international airport provide some common examples. The community of interests might also be social or cultural in nature. For example, a rural district that is dominated by small towns of a particular ethnic heritage or a shared political or religious identity will influence staff behavior. An incumbent who represents such a homogenous community of interests will have an easier time allocating an aggressive staff because

they are less likely to miss important issues in the district or fail to identify important community leaders that are willing to work with the incumbent. Incumbents, constituents and staff members all noted that there are “areas” within districts that are more or less favorable to the incumbent. Combined with the communities of interests, one can see how the homogenous district is easier for the staff to navigate, while the more heterogenous districts provide representational dilemmas for staff and incumbents. It might also be possible that homogenous districts produce more aggressive offices because of an extraordinary need for service in a district that is commonly shared by a large number of constituents. This could range from welfare, housing or health assistance in a poor urban district to veteran’s benefits in a district with military bases to government research grants in a district with a large state university. In each case the aggressive office has a large community of interest to target. This focus might seem ironic to the extent that an incumbent from a more heterogeneous district should logically be expected to be more proactive in interacting with the multiple communities within his or her district. Indeed, Fenno implied that incumbents with a “poorer sense of fit” will “need to spend time at home cultivating constituencies” (1978, p127). This would seem intuitive given that the “poor sense of fit” also comports with an electoral challenge to the incumbent. My observations suggested the opposite; that having a natural community allowed the incumbent to be proactive, while having a greater number of groups to interact with resulted in most incumbents and staff doing their jobs in a much more conservative manner. This is not to suggest that incumbents from heterogenous districts are not active. Rather, based on my limited number of observations, incumbents and staff who had more homogenous district interests appeared to engage and solicit those

communities much harder than the enterprises from heterogenous districts. Perhaps this is best explained by the fact that incumbents from heterogenous districts were well established and less electorally vulnerable. Hence, the very fact that the district contained multiple interests served to protect these incumbents because even the incumbent with a number of district staff cannot adequately address the needs of all the important communities of a heterogenous district. Without the assistance of staff, the potential challenger faces an incredibly daunting task in taking his or her message to the all of these different communities.

The primary case studies appear at first glance to reflect this hypothesis. A and D's districts were centered on military bases and a state capitol and large state university respectively, while B and C represented districts that had much greater economic, social and political diversity. A and D tended to utilize their staff "aggressively" in courting these dominant constituency groups. For A's staff a "pretty big chunk" of their time was devoted to military casework and projects, but I would also note that A utilized his staff courting the small communities throughout the district. In fact, A, as a younger incumbent, seemed to fully grasp the changing communities of the district, or at least his changing perceptions of the communities during the first term in office. The office switched its organization from an issue-based division of responsibilities to a fully geographic-based organization after eighteen months because some parts of the district had "dramatically different" sets of issues and it "made more sense" for them to resolve things in a geographic fashion. In this case each of A's field representatives was able to focus on the parts of the district that weren't from the homogenous core. This was



notably different from E's office where staff were basically subservient to the demands of the military bases and the substantial amounts of casework that they generated.

The routine nature of B and C might also be explained by the fact that older incumbents have set styles and that older, more routine enterprises have a hard time dealing with changing communities. B was demonstrably frustrated with the growing parts of his district. "These aren't the people I grew up with...half of them wouldn't even know me on the street anymore."<sup>19</sup> Neither he nor his staff seemed engaged in new constituent groups or interests. He spoke constantly about how he was nearing the end of his career and that while he generally enjoyed most aspects of the jobs, the changing nature of the district would be a factor in his final decision to retire. Changed communities after redistricting also impact district enterprises. After the 1990 reapportionment, H closed two of his four offices as a number of his counties were drawn into other districts. Note that the offices closed after reapportionment, in advance of the actual redistricting, so that they could focus on a district that would become "more heavily urban and familiar." Consequently they "used to be out a lot more than (they were) now." A similar impact also occurred in both C and G's offices. The number of towns and counties in each district was reduced and the casework responsibilities for each staff member were tightened. In a way then, the process of redistricting serves to reinforce the "routinization" that seems to accrue with seniority.

Just as the urban nature and the size of the district appear to be problematic, so to does the "community interest" variable; not all homogenous districts are represented by aggressive enterprises. Here G, H and I come to mind. Perhaps it is the case that

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<sup>19</sup> An amusing comment. Most incumbents spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in their campaigns and still would not be recognized by more than 10% of their constituents on the street.

geography contributes to the incumbent's personal style and philosophy of staff allocation. In this, C provides an excellent case study: he divides his staff to some degree based on the interests of the communities where the staff members are located. For some staff this is a large state university, for others it is a mixture of ag-related industry or farms and small manufacturers. But for other staff the assignments are determined by factors such as their job skills or personal backgrounds (8/6 p2).<sup>20</sup> C can be considered a routine office in part because of the relatively heterogeneous nature of his district, but also because he hires specific staff to fill specific needs in his district. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the "community interests" of a district merit further examination. If nothing else, an understanding of this variable puts context on the jobs and perceptions of incumbents and their staff.

#### Region and Party Strength

Because my case set did not include east or west coast samples, I do not feel comfortable offering a hypothesis on the impact of region. Based on the stylistic and philosophical differences observed between north and south, I would suggest that region is a variable worth inclusion in a study of district staff. The personal incumbent style seemed much more prevalent in southern districts. Note the incumbents who drove themselves around the districts, attended meetings without staff, and focused staff resources largely on routine casework functions. In contrast, northern incumbents seemed more comfortable with surrogates and aggressive staff functions. I would note, however, that this was not universally the case. There were exceptions.

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<sup>20</sup> Here the veteran dealing with military issues and the economist dealing with community housing issues jump readily to mind.

Distance from Washington likely has an impact on district staff. As my case studies were roughly equidistant from Washington, I was unable to determine the impact of distance. Comparing a Maryland or Virginia staff enterprise with a California office would likely provide a very interesting set of data. How often is the incumbent at home? Do staff members function as surrogates more often in districts farther from Washington? Does distance clearly relate to whether an office is routine or aggressive? Previous research has studied aggregate allocation of incumbent resources to the district based on geography and the strength of political parties by region.<sup>21</sup> These studies should be complemented with contextual examinations of the district enterprises across these different settings. As compared to the individual personalities and philosophies of the incumbents, however, the demographic variables seem more likely to function as intervening variables imposing slight alterations on the style of incumbents.

#### Demography of incumbent

In looking at the incumbents as individuals, three variables for future research clearly present themselves. Age, race and gender are commonly used variables in the literature's examination of congressional behavior. Once again, my limited data set precludes me from offering anything beyond basic hypotheses about the impact of these demographic variables on the allocation of district staff. Nevertheless my observations suggest that these variables are relevant to the study of district staff.

#### Age/Generational factors

Hypothesis 10: Younger incumbents likely allocate more aggressive staff enterprises than older incumbents.

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<sup>21</sup> See Fenno (1978) and Parker (1985)

The incumbents cohorts are the one demographic variable where I feel comfortable offering a hypothesis. Macartney (1975) and Smith (1995) found that older generations of incumbents (those elected before 1970) were likely to use virtually all of their increases in staff resources to augment their Washington offices when perquisite increases came in the 1970s. Both suggested that this was the case because older incumbents did not have resources to staff both district and Washington offices. Consequently, allocations to the home district would have come directly at the expense of their Washington offices. Post-1970 cohorts, on the other hand, did not face such zero-sum choices. This finding seems logically supported by my observations. To wit, B and C, while not elected before 1970, but more clearly part of an older congressional cohort, seemed more familiar with their districts and more confident of their electoral status, and perhaps consequently, had routine district enterprises. Younger incumbents, on the other hand, were much more likely to devote important staff resources to the district. The fact that A left his COS in the district and that D's RDSM was an important figure in her overall hierarchy suggest the aggressive district orientation of the younger cohort. My observations suggest that it was more likely seniority than age that driving the variation between the primary case studies.

Furthermore, the basic impact of age and generational factors were observed in the types of people that each incumbent hired. With the exception of C (and to some extent M), the other incumbents hired staff that looked relatively like themselves in terms of age. Given that staff members are proportionally younger than incumbents, I observed that the junior members tended to have a much higher proportion of recent college graduates in their office than the senior members. Long-serving incumbents, most

notably B, had offices that were occupied by staff members with decades of service.

Future research should continue to look at the impact of generational cohorts on district staff utilization.

### Race

Like distance from Washington, race is a variable that merits inclusion. My case set included two African-American incumbents. While one of the districts was more urban in nature, both incumbents clearly embraced the more aggressive staff style. Further study is needed to shed light on whether there are geographic or stylistic similarities amongst African-American, Hispanic and Asian incumbents.

### Gender

Gender is another demographic variable that is important in the literature and certainly is deserving of future study for district staff. As with race, it would be informative to determine whether female incumbents more commonly utilize aggressive or routine staff and whether they are more or less likely to rely on surrogates in their district enterprises. Given that I had only two female case studies no hypotheses are warranted. All three of these demographic variables merit further study.

### The staff themselves

To understand patterns of district staff utilization one needs to appreciate the district staff members themselves, especially given the powers of representation that are often vested to these staff and the extent to which incumbents are absent. As was noted in Chapter One, the literature on district staff is sparse. Yet, as Chapter Three demonstrated, district staff members are vital components of the incumbents' enterprises.

For that reason, individual staff members should be considered an intervening variable in the equation of district staff allocation.

Hypothesis 11: Some district staff members are “rational actors”, seeking political power and/or utilizing their positions as “launching pads” for future careers regardless of the routine or aggressive philosophies of their employers. Consequently, they shape the routine or aggressive nature of the district enterprise.

As Chapter Three demonstrated, the reasons that staff members are hired and the motivations they bring to their jobs have an impact on the functions they perform at work. They approached their jobs in quite different ways; “the personality of each staffer is different. I do my job here (from the office) while others spend more time out looking at things...wasting their time.” Most staff would probably disagree with C’s field representative on this issue, but her attitude is indicative of potential variation.

Furthermore, if staff motivations are at odds with the functions intended by incumbents, then the personality or philosophy of the incumbent diminishes in importance in leading the staff enterprise. Future study of district staff needs to consider the goals and motivations of the individual staff, in addition to those of the incumbents.

The most notable example of this hypothesis was found in E’s RDSM. On the continuum of district style, E’s office largely tended toward the routine side. However, the activities of his RDSM clearly moved this office toward the middle of the range, if not even more to the more aggressive side. Numerous constituents remarked favorably about E’s district operation as compared to his successor, A, largely because of the community outreach efforts of the RDSM. E’s constituents and staff made note of the RDSM’s central role in managing all significant projects in the district. The constituents

were likely to seek him out to inform him of a dilemma or involve him in the project and the staff members were unwilling to proceed without his understanding or involvement. In short, he was a key political actor in the district. Recalling Chapter Three, E's RDSM was widely felt to be "doing activities as much for himself as for E." H's RDSM was similar in that he mentioned on several occasions his desire for a promotion to one of the ranking positions should H be elevated to a seat in the Senate. In the case of both staffers, then, individual motivations can be observed. And in both cases the RDSMs tended to be aggressive while the rest of the staff and the incumbent's desire seemed largely for the staff to be "routine." Based on these individuals one might speculate that district staff hang on to jobs with senior and/or powerful incumbents because of the perquisites that come from representing such an individual. These two individuals demonstrate that district staff can accumulate their own particular benefits from their jobs as district staff members. For example, for E's RDSM the benefits were personal to his potential bid for future elective office, while for H's RDSM, his position provided a vicarious connection to district politics, a feeling that he was among the key decision-makers of the area. While it is impossible to completely disaggregate individual staff motives from their job responsibilities, I would suggest that this is a hypothesis worthy of future study.

At the other end of the spectrum from the aggressive RDSMs, the disenchantment of C's staff ensured that they would remain compliant with his desire to operate in a routine fashion. While this example does not demonstrate how staff can act "rationally" opposite of the incumbent, it does show that staff morale and motivations are interrelated. C's staff was notable for its relatively high level of turnover. This turnover was probably

driven by staff desires for greater levels of autonomy and achievement. If the incumbent did not impose such a limited philosophy on how his or her staff should function, then C's office would confront some serious organizational difficulties. As Chapter Three noted, staff frequently become "institutionalized" within their communities and the loss of such key employees can severely restrict the incumbent's enterprise, especially if an incumbent is counting on that staff member to perform aggressive representation. Fortunately for C, the regular loss of "institutionalized" staff is not a problem because 1) his long tenure and name recognition grant him a large degree of electoral security and 2) his philosophy rejects an active staff enterprise.

Based on B and C, it might be the case that an incumbent who desire an aggressive office might be frustrated if they did not have a group of staff that were equally as motivated or talented. This is pure speculation, as I did not witness an aggressive incumbent without an aggressive staff. In fact, incumbents seemed most often to hire individuals with resumes, personalities, and extra-curricular activities that would comport with their job responsibilities. For example, there were the part-time mayors from H and G's office intended to keep a low-profile and personal contact with the elite decision makers of their district, as opposed to the young idealists who usually supported C's limited mission, and A's dedicated campaign workers who carried their aggressive campaign experiences right into their federal staff jobs. In these offices I also witnessed that older, less technologically savvy staff members tend to be of less use to incumbents in the aggressive sense. C's RDSM felt that the older staff proved to be "an organizational difficulty." I would hypothesize that this problem was even more



common in B's office, where his main caseworker still held out steadfastly against computers.

A corollary to this hypothesis is found in district staff such as E's RDSM. The corollary would suggest that it is possible that one, or a few, key district staff members accrue power over time when an incumbent develops a "Washington" focus and increasingly has a tenuous personal connection with the district. This corollary is in part suggested in literature that finds that resources to the district might diminish over time (Schiff and Smith, 1983) but also that the position of staff are reflected by the status of the incumbent (Ripley, 1969). In the case of E, his RDSM clearly became empowered as the terms accumulated and he began to exercise in a more aggressive capacity. He did this **while** E's attentions and resources were increasingly committed to a legislative career, but ironically was assisted **because** of E's esteemed status in the district. This corollary might be justified or explained as filling the shoes of the absent incumbent. As in the case of E, there is a need to fill as a senior incumbent is around less and the more 'senior' staff member can often step into that void. This staff member suggested that it was his job to "fill in for the boss, who's not around very much." The district staff member's position is heavily reliant on their personal relationship with the incumbent. It is hard to imagine a scenario whereby an incumbent would invest the kind of trust and authority that E did with his RDSM, without counting the staff member as a long-time confidant.<sup>22</sup> Yet, these relationships do occur and they are inadequately appreciated by the literature, leaving a selection of representational activities and the possibility of

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<sup>22</sup> Fenno notes the suspicion of some incumbents as a reason for their purposeful limitation of district staff (1978, p30). While I did not observe this finding in my limited number of cases, I have seen instances in my professional and campaign experiences of incumbents who come to mistrust the motivations of their subordinates. So to that extent, I would affirm Fenno's suspicions.

individual staff motivations unstudied. The void also exists in the reality of the absent incumbent, especially in terms of the incumbent enterprise's contact with elite constituents, which will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

#### Other potential variables

There are a number of other potential variables that I encountered briefly that would seem to merit further study in future research on district staff.

#### Institutional/Office experience

As noted above, A's district enterprise underwent a transformation roughly eighteen months into his first term. His staff members perceived that certain parts of the district were not adequately engaged by the enterprise. Consequently they shifted the staff from a model based on issue responsibilities to a model where each of the staff had largely geographic responsibilities. This transformation allowed the staff members to more directly engage their local communities of interest. Because most of my observations were collected at one point in time, it was difficult to accurately assess how the staff enterprises changed over time. While I did ask this question of all offices, I think that a longitudinal study would provide better analysis of staff transformations. The pattern of geographic versus issue-based representation is one such variable that would profit from a study with multiple observations.

#### "Collegiality" of the House

Hammond (1975) found that House members often follow a norm of "collegiality" in organizing their Washington offices and overall management styles and Fenno (1978, p46) suggested the incumbents "probably" structure their district staff operations based on conversations with other delegation members and state tradition. The "collegiality" of

their home state delegations was found to be especially important in making these decisions. Based on limited observations in this study, incumbents and staff noted the staff utilization of other incumbents in nearby districts. It seemed that their experiences were also shaded more heavily by incumbents from their own party, even sometimes to the exclusion of the predecessors in their particular seats. For example, when D assumed office, she followed a Republican incumbent whose staff provided virtually no advice, manuals, casework history, or even furniture to get started. Instead, she and her staff looked to other Democratic incumbents from her state. Coming from the same state delegation, staff from B, G and H all referred to similarities in how incumbents from their state set up and ran their district enterprises. Ranging from the number of staff to the types of activities they performed, there did appear to be some degree of uniformity between them. In addition to partisanship and state delegations, B's experience also suggests that seniority has an impact on collegiality. Studies of incumbent behavior suggest that they look to senior legislators for voting cues. Anecdotal evidence provided by one of B's staff members suggested that junior incumbents and their staff did the same thing in regard to questions about staff utilization. Based on the experiences of B and D and the comments of other incumbents and staff, I would suggest that "collegiality" has some impact on staff utilization, but that most incumbents appeared to leave themselves the ability to modify their staff allocation patterns to their own personal desires and electoral situations. Nevertheless, future study might investigate the varying degree to which enterprises within one state look to each other for organizational design or ideas about new means of representation. In fact, comparisons of district enterprises within states would seem to be highly suitable subjects for most similar case designs.

## House versus Senate

To add to the bulk of literature comparing the House and the Senate, there were clear differences in how district and state staff functioned. One of A's constituents noted it best in his comment that the Senate is "often thinking about big prominent issues and don't take the time to focus on all local issues like House members and their staff do." I also witnessed this statement in the efforts of G and H to work with an extremely large district employer (an international airport) on more local issues such as zoning, and health and wage laws. In the terminology suggested by A's constituent, House staff members are more "local". What they lack in the "clout" to "get things done", House staff are more likely to be around and engaged in community issues. Since there are relatively more House staff and they are "locally" based, they have the time (and the electoral interest) to involve themselves with these types of problems and assist constituents. This is not to suggest that Senate state staff do not do the same types of constituent work. Rather, simply because there are fewer of them (especially in larger states where there are fewer than 1 senate staff members per congressional district) and because they are not as "local", I observed them to have different priorities. As E's field representative speculated, there are undoubtedly Senate staff who do little more than "politick" throughout the state, never involving themselves in the daily grind of casework. Based on my observations and experiences, however, I would suggest that there would not likely be more than one or two such individuals in a Senate office simply because Senators too are forced to allocate substantial resources to the routine tasks of scheduling, casework and press. The distinction is further driven by the fact that the staff's bosses, the senators, often have more national issue interests and are less able to

utilize personal time to deal with constituent issues. Future study of House and Senate staff would provide greater detail and clarity to the basic differences that I have identified.

### Constituents matter

The demands of constituents are one final variable that merit inclusion in future study of district staff. What kinds of access do individual constituents and interest groups have with the incumbents and their district staff? I observed notable variation in the extent to which individual incumbents received (and courted) constituents in their districts. This partly seemed to be a reflection of the incumbent's personal style. Here B rationalized much of what he did as an incumbent with a justification for why he attended a small oil producer's luncheon, and why he empathized with them as a fellow small businessman. He suggested that because he "makes payroll" at the two banks that he owns with his sons, he empathizes with small business issues and takes care of them almost as much out of personal connection as because of the fact that they are constituents. Two of C's constituents suggested to me that the stylistic differences between C and an incumbent from a nearby district were largely explained by the different socio-economic natures of their constituencies. While these views are probably overstated, they do suggest that constituents matter to a much greater degree than previous literature has given them credit. The extent to which incumbents deal with and respond to constituents must also consider the demands of others, a factor that Fenno and the literature seem to not consider in their exclusive focus on the behavior of the individual legislator. In this case, the demands of A's elite constituents were notable. One particular elite expressed that A's COS was spending too much time at home, and

wanted him to shift resources to Washington to more adequately protect district interests. This transformation began to occur in A's second and third terms, largely in response to the perceived demands of the constituents.

This might also be an explanation for why incumbents generally devote more time and resources to Washington as their career progresses; because their constituents demand better or "more" representation. Future research on incumbents and district staff might more adequately address the question of whether "home style" is defined by the trust and access to locals rather than the incumbent's interest in national issues. At any rate, the next chapter will begin to examine the means and rationale by which staff members interact with these "elite" constituents at the local level.

### Conclusion

This chapter introduced a number of variables that begin to explain the variation in district staff utilization that was detailed in Chapter Three. To start, incumbents appear to have four basic orientations that result in different modes of function for district staff. While it is likely that there are more than these four orientations in effect, or that some incumbents possess shades of each of the types, I would hypothesize that these orientations provide an excellent starting point for appreciating the manner in which incumbents think about district staff utilization. The orientation of the incumbent appears to be determined in part by their individual motivations and psychological make-up and in part by a number of other variables. Some incumbents had more fully developed "philosophies" about the appropriate role for their district staff. My observations also suggested that increased tenure and the margin of electoral victory were likely to induce incumbents to "routinize" their district operations. Numerous exceptions, however,

suggest that other variables must be considered in determining how incumbents utilize their district staff. Additional variables that appeared in some cases included partisanship, the urban nature and size of the district, and the communities within the district. Because of my limited number of cases, I was only able to offer hypotheses about the possible impact of region and the demographic variables of the incumbents themselves. Finally, the motives of the individual staff members themselves likely act as an intervening variable in the staff equation. While the personality and philosophy of the incumbent and the individual staff members have a noticeable impact on staff allocation, I would suggest that further research on political, demographic, and a number of other variables remains necessary to understand why district staff do what they do. This dissertation examines the functions and variation of congressional district staff and how that impacts representation and incumbent election efforts. In the next chapter, I'll lay out the one function where district staff members have the most notable impact on election outcomes.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Protecting the incumbent: Incumbent-staff-elite interaction**

This dissertation is about the varying ways in which district staff are allocated and utilized. This chapter will focus on a specific and very important function of district staff; the manner in which they interact with elite constituents. The literature recognizes the value of service and its impact on name recognition but as previous chapters have shown the overall utility of district staff are usually neglected in those studies. The argument of this chapter, and one central to this entire dissertation, is that the behavior and electoral advantage of incumbents are best understood with an appreciation of district staff. The numbers of staff allocated and the functions that they perform appear to increase the likelihood that incumbents will be reelected. This is the case partly because constituents are served, happy and content, partly because of the resultant increase in incumbent name recognition, and partly because constituency service has an impact on which challengers choose to run. In sum, a significant part of incumbency advantage can be traced to service to elites, which engenders future support and decreased opposition at the polls.

This chapter will first explain the rationale for a focus on incumbents, which in large part is explained by the fact that elites provide a ‘cheap’ but effective form of interaction. Next, the chapter will discuss the motivations of incumbents, staff and elite constituents, and how those motivations impact elite service. Finally, it will then explain four ways in which the incumbent/staff/elite constituent interaction is useful to the incumbent’s enterprise. Once the staff members have identified district elites, they recruit them into



the enterprise where they assist the incumbent with their resources and then, later, allow the incumbent to focus on other activities outside of the district.

### Literature on constituency service

#### Incumbency advantage

There is a broad collection of literature that deals with incumbency advantage. As Chapter One detailed, incumbents enjoy high rates of name recognition and even higher rates of reelection. Several decades ago, as voters became “dissatisfied with party cues, they turned to incumbents” (Mayhew, 1974, p.33). They had turned to incumbents who were more acutely aware of their electoral status than had been their predecessors. Moreover, the incumbents had increased the resources available to help them serve their constituents and run for reelection. Additional evidence of these resources and their impact is seen in the fact that incumbents began to draw party defectors at a much higher rate than challengers (Smith, 1995, p.63). In 1958, incumbents outpolled challengers amongst this group by only 9% (16 to 7%). That number had grown to 35% by 1984 (46 to 9%). One might speculate that the margin grew because of increased contact with the incumbent enterprise over these decades.

#### Personal vote/constituency service

The literature has long done a good job of demonstrating how the perceptions of incumbents have led them to allocate resources to counteract their perceived vulnerabilities. It was speculated that these efforts “generated positive evaluations” from their constituents (Mayhew, 1974; Burnham, 1975; Cover, 1977; Cover and Mayhew, 1977; Mann and Wolfinger, 1980). The most cited example of this literature is Fiorina’s (1977) suggestion of a definite electoral connection between constituency service and

reelection prospects. In fact, he hypothesized that members of Congress did more service to attain electoral security. Later work went on to show that this service actually produces a reputation upon which an incumbent can procure a “personal vote” from constituents who have contact with the incumbent enterprise. Here, Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina (1987) found that with the decline of partisanship as a voting cue, incumbents pursued a “personal vote” which they believed could be attained through increased levels of constituency service.

#### Debate about value of service

While the literature largely recognizes that incumbents and their staff perform service, and largely agree that it has some impact, there is a contentious debate in the literature as to the actual value of constituency service and how much of a “personal vote” accrues from such service.

#### No real impact

Some argue that most service is simple, routine behavior and has no real impact on voter’s impressions of the incumbent. Johannes (1984) was the first to argue with the growing body of service literature with his finding that voters are essentially ungrateful. He further argued that even if they were grateful that relatively few voters ever made formal requests for service to their incumbents. This position was supplemented Bond’s (1985) conclusion that staff enterprises conduct stable long-term patterns of casework, not impacted by factors such as electoral status. Johannes and Macadams (1987) restated the early finding and concluded that staff members are not much more than “agents of constituents displeasure”; constituents have come to expect service. They further found that service is largely confined to the ranks of incumbents’ supporters. In other words,

the staff did not aggressively advertise their services and opposition constituents did not often request service. Finally, Mason (1987) concluded that even constituents who received casework assistance placed little value on their interactions.

#### Mixed evidence

There is another body of literature that suggests perquisite use by incumbents is of mixed value (Fenno, 1978; Cover and Brumber, 1982; Bond, Covington and Fleisher, 1985; Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1989). Specifically, Fenno argues that while some incumbents have more active “home styles”, that overall the value of perquisite use is of mixed electoral value. Cover and Brumberg reinforce that finding with their study on the mixed impact of pamphlets mailed to constituents.

#### Service clearly helps incumbent

Other literature more firmly supports the contention that constituent service is a valuable electoral supplement for incumbents. The basic conclusion is that those who receive service are “grateful” and offer higher evaluations for incumbents (Yiannakis, 1981; Epstein and Frankovic, 1982; Fiorina, 1989; King, 1991; Serra and Cover, 1992; Kean, 1993; Jacobson, 1997). In fact, this body of literature suggests that incumbents perceive this value and aggressively utilize their resources to procure constituent satisfaction. Epstein and Frankovic (1982) found that marginal incumbents have more district staff doing casework. All of this literature agrees that constituency service helps with the voters. More particularly, some research has focused on who is best served and whether it creates an obligation on the part of voters. While Jacobson (1997, p49) suggests that service is a “non-partisan” behavior that helps with “independent voters and

others”, King (1991) concluded that constituency service is a “partisan vote-getting opportunity.”

Ansolabehere, Snyder & Stewart (2000) concur with Jacobson’s finding that incumbent service appeals to defectors, independents and elites. Over the course of the past century, these authors suggest that the value of the “personal vote” has risen to now constitute between one-half and two-thirds of the overall incumbent advantage. As opposed to challenger quality, they speculate that the value of service has grown from 1% in 1900 to 4% in 2000. Yiannakis (1981) and Serra and Cover (1992) speculated that it would most electorally productive to focus on elites of the opposing party. Serra and Cover found that of all voters receiving service, 96% of the incumbent’s party voted for the incumbent, as do 56% of service recipients from the opposition party. This finding suggests that there are many votes to be gained through serving a few thousand constituents per election cycle, especially by seeking out and serving the opposition party. Finally, Cialdini (1985) and Regan (1971) suggest the voters repay favors quickly as they find it disagreeable to owe politicians.

On balance, the weight of the evidence seems to suggest that constituent service has at least some impact on voting behavior. But perhaps more importantly, some authors (and my observations) found that incumbents perceive vulnerability and allocate resources regardless of their actual impact on voter evaluations. Furthermore, my observations suggest that opposition elites do not seem to experience the kind of dissonance that Johannes and McAdams discussed. In fact, I observed a great deal of interaction between incumbents and staff with elites who were either non-partisan or were even elected officials/supporters of the opposing party. The incumbents appeared to

be especially interested in recruiting elites from the opposition party into their own circles of support. Therefore, Cialdini and Regan's findings seem to be more relevant; even opposition elites need service, and they are likely to repay their favors if they think the incumbent is going to be in office for a long period of time.

#### Elite focus

While I agree with the findings of the bulk of the literature on the value of casework, I would reiterate that past literature focuses almost exclusively on aggregations of casework and under-appreciates the magnitude of staff-elite interaction. While not disputing these findings, one must realize that this data relies on large surveys with relatively small and dispersed populations of actual casework recipients. This dissertation presumes that it would be more instructive to identify actual individuals who have interacted with district offices or would have reason to. Rather than relying on the one or two service recipients per Congressional district, this dissertation goes out into the field and examines interactions with business owners, journalists, and elected officials. It uncovered a variety of types of activities ranging from personal interaction to advisories, town hall meetings and large project assistance, types of interaction not previously examined. Given the relatively higher levels of interaction with congressional district staff that I observed, I argue that it is important to focus on the elites that are likely underrepresented in large-n surveys. In fact, my observations suggest that the more aggressive elite interactions provide a far better mechanism to serve, communicate and derive campaign resources from than do routine casework service or mass mailings.

This dissertation underlines the important finding by Fowler and McClure (1990) who suggest that “**unseen**” (non) candidates have an important impact on the outcomes

of congressional elections. I further argue that the interactions of “unseen” staff with “unseen” elites need to be examined. My observations suggest that incumbents, staff and elite constituents have regular interaction in virtually all congressional districts, although they differ in the extent and the type of activity that they pursue. As Chapters Three and Four noted, some offices are more aggressive in promoting the incumbent than others. Furthermore, I observed that elites have important resources that affect the outcomes of congressional elections. The contributions, endorsements, and volunteer support by elite constituents are crucial for incumbents in tight election races. My finding also parallels Jacobson (1983) or Fowler and McClure in that “unseen” candidates are also extremely reliant upon elite constituents if they are to make anything more than token runs at incumbents. In sum, this chapter will argue that the actual impact of elite constituents is underrepresented by the literature; that well “hidden” staff and elite constituents have an important impact on the outcomes of congressional elections.

Elite service is perhaps the most notable staff function because it is cheap and because it is effective. It is cheap because it provides incumbents and staff with a quick means of interacting with large numbers of constituents and it is effective because there are multiple payoffs that come with elite interaction. The remainder of this chapter will detail the cheap and effective practice of incumbent/staff/elite interaction.

#### The rationale for elite interaction

My observations indicated that some incumbents allocate considerable amounts of staff time and resources to their interactions with elite constituents. Before I turn to a description of those interactions it is necessary to briefly touch on the nature of elites again. This section will provide a rationale for elite interaction based on the answers to

three questions: Who are elites? Why do incumbent enterprises focus on them? And why are some offices more aggressive with elites than with other constituents?

### Who are elites? Again

The elite constituents came from a variety of occupations and backgrounds. Elite constituents come from both the public and private sectors. They are both rich and poor. Others recognize elites in their community. While I would also suggest that the bulk of the elites that I observed and interviewed came from relatively higher socio-economic status, it is not a precondition of the definition of what makes an elite constituent. The most shared characteristic of elite constituent tended to be their involvement with the community. In either their job or in the spare time, elite constituents are notably more engaged in the social, political and economic affairs of their communities. It was performing this community involvement that I mostly encountered elite constituents. Remember from Chapter Two that I accumulated my data from three settings; incumbent and staff interviews, observations of incumbents and staff interacting with each other and with elite constituents, and finally from roughly twenty interviews with elites in each of the four primary case studies. I collected the data in each of the three different settings so that I might inquire about each of the actor's behaviors and motivations. It occurred to me that I would properly need to understand elite motivations in order to more fully grasp the relevance of district staff behavior.

### Incumbents and staff interact with different types of elites<sup>1</sup>

The most common group of elites that I observed staff and incumbents interact with tended to be political elites.<sup>2</sup> And the most obvious group of district elites were elected

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<sup>1</sup> This list is not intended to be a comprehensive listing of all possible elite groupings. It is, rather, a reflection of the most commonly observed staff-elite constituent interactions.

officials. Generally, but not always, these individuals were from the same party as the incumbent. Down-ballot elected officials were usually amongst the incumbents biggest fans or supporters in the area. Incumbents and staff sought out political elites for more than greetings and sentimental support. A visit to a mayor or a state legislator also provides important information about constituents and their issues. Remember, the incumbent (and staff member) owes his or her job to the same constituents as the mayor or state legislator. These visits were not limited to partisan elected officials. My observations suggested that “non-partisan” office-holders were also important targets of staff. The “non-partisan” official was a target either because they were truly non-partisan, and hence a non-biased source of political information, or that the office was non-partisan in name only.

The political elites were by no means limited to office holders. In each city/area, incumbents and staff seemed to place more emphasis on their interactions with personal political supporters (or donors) as opposed to traditional partisan activists. As the discipline has long acknowledged, political parties in the United States today are largely supplemental to, or supportive of the candidates themselves. My observations of staff interactions at the local level provide further confirmation of the party decline thesis. Incumbents and staff were much more likely to call or stop by and see their personal supporters and donors than party officials. Rarely these two circles would overlap. Interactions to the personal supporters varied from visit to visit. Some were truly social interactions with old personal friends. Other interactions with personal political

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<sup>2</sup> As was mentioned in Chapter Two, in some cases these elites were partisan and less useful data sources. However, in many cases, it should be noted that elites who are political contributors are open-minded to the game of politics, are well informed about people and events, and tend to offer fairly objective criticisms and advice.



supporters were more business-like, especially if that particular constituent was designated as an important source of surveillance for a city/area. This could especially be the case if it was an area where the incumbent didn't perform well or the elected officials were hostile. On occasion, the staff and incumbents would seek out the partisan officials in the area. I would suggest that this was more often the case for incumbents with greater electoral concerns and for all incumbents as the election date loomed; most incumbents and staff expressed a concern with keeping party activists content.

A second group of elite constituents were those who were politically active concerning specific community issues. Some of the notable issues of community activism in my case studies included the military, higher education, and agriculture. The list of possible sources of political activism is clearly not limited to these three examples. Nevertheless, these examples provided an excellent illustration of the types of politically elite constituents and the causes that they pursued. Staff and incumbents interacted with these types of constituents for numerous reasons that will be detailed below. Suffice it to say here that this group of elite constituents is important for both their information and the electoral support that they can provide.

A more 'average' set of elite constituents were those who were more generally active for the overall economic benefit of the community, as opposed to a particular political issue. These elites were usually to be found in Rotary/Kiwanis meetings, involvement with the Chamber of Commerce, or with local government/community development groups. Business elites are not necessarily politically active in partisan circles. In fact, it was my observation that this type of elite was usually much less partisan, or even much less politically interested than the first two groups of elites. Nevertheless, this group was

equally important for incumbent and staff interaction. Staff members were quite often found to be in attendance at meetings of these types of individuals regardless of their ability or boss's inclination to help. Like the political activists, this group of elites is also important because of the information that they can provide about the community and the resources that they can provide to an incumbent's reelection campaign. In fact, incumbents and their fund-raisers would prefer this group of constituents because they focus on substantially less contentious issues than do the more political elites. What incumbent opposed the economic development of their district's communities? Here you will find many business owners, attorneys, newspaper publishers, etc., who over time develop personal and campaign connections with the incumbent, often with little to do with partisan background.

Amongst the ranks of the community activists, attorneys are a distinct sub-category. They are a relevant group of elites for staff interaction for a variety of reasons. First, they are commonly found in virtually every city and township. Second, because of the interactions with private and public entities, they are usually some of the best sources to take a political or economic pulse of a city or neighborhood. This was the case for both the large firm and the sole practice. With the large firms, that tend to have a mixture of Democrats and Republicans, because "it sort of works out that way," the community is represented in aggregate. The solo attorney in a small town might be seen to function in the same fashion, representing the entire community. Third, attorneys tended to be elite in their socio-economic status. And fourth, they are the single most politically active profession, especially when measured in terms of campaign contributions.

Like attorneys, journalists are found throughout the district and are generally in-step with the political and economic affairs of the constituency. They are obviously different in that they usually tend to be non-partisan in nature and because they are much more clearly a two-step loudspeaker to the average constituent than is an attorney or a business owner. Consequently, staff members generally have a different type of relationship with journalists. The press secretary more commonly does interaction here over the phone, fax, or e-mail message. I did, however, observe some staff members interact with journalists in fashions similar to how they would interact with other elite constituents that they were hoping to co-opt into the incumbent enterprise. They would drop-in and give an update about the incumbent and inquire about news and editorial positions in the same fashion that they might ask a barber or a mayor about the community.

Employees and officers of the corporate citizens of a district also are a source of staff-elite interaction. Corporations have a clear interest in the economic and social health of their communities. And because they are most commonly interested in maintaining the status quo, they generally support incumbents. This is especially the case for the local corporate officers, as opposed to the national or associational corporate types who are much more Republican-leaning with the political support and campaign contributions. At any rate, local corporate officers provide another potential source of information and support for the incumbent enterprise.

Finally, social volunteers provide a source of elite-staff interaction. This group of elites can be found amongst the ranks of religious, environmental, or gun-owning activists. Like the previous groups, social volunteers are a source of both information and resources for the enterprising staff member. They provide information about the

relevant social issues in a constituency (and whether an incumbent needs to be involved or wary of such issues). If an incumbent chooses to become involved in such issues, these elites can often become individual volunteer or contributor resources in the campaigns of the incumbents. My political experiences also suggest that these individuals are increasingly the rank-and-file volunteers on which both Democratic and Republican candidates will rely to complete what were previously the tasks of partisan organizations.

#### How do they differ from regular constituents?

In addition to their generally higher socio-economic status, elite constituents appeared to share three common traits as individuals. Elite constituents had more knowledge about the incumbents, staff and the political process. They are more involved in their communities and they have a lot more access/contact to incumbents and staff.

#### Greater knowledge of political process

My finding that elites possess greater knowledge of the political process is not entirely a new finding. Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960) clearly identified elite-mass differences in the measure and content of political attitudes. While Nye, Verba and Petrocik (1976) suggested that the previous work underestimated the sophistication of the masses, the debate remains contemporaneous. Neumann (1986) suggested that American society was contoured in an “s” curve of “stratified pluralism” with 5% of elites directing opinions, 20% acting indifferent to politics, and the remaining 75% in the middle relying on cues provided by elected officials and elites. Finally, Stimson (1991) and Page and Shapiro (1992) show that masses generally acquiesce to elites but in certain “moods” will pay greater attention to candidates and the process. The

sum of the literature seems to suggest that elites possess greater command of the personalities and political process and matter at least as a cue for average constituents, although it would disagree on the extent to which elites direct opinions.

The observations of this dissertation confirm that general finding. Based on the perceptions and behaviors of incumbents, staff and elite constituents, there was an interaction that seemed to be based on the assumption that talking to and helping elite constituents had an impact on average constituents because of the manner in which elite constituents shape local politics. In short, elites are held to be opinion leaders in their communities. Katz and Lazerfeld (1955) found that opinion leaders and primary groups structure opinions for the masses in a “two-step flow” of communication. My observations of incumbents, staff and elite constituents suggest that these actors’ behaviors are driven by the assumptions of the “two-step” model; that average voters often look to opinion leaders for personal influence on their political attitudes and voting behavior. For these actors it seems that academic disputes about the existence of the two-step flow are meaningless, for they largely perceive it to be a functioning concept.

Herein lies a key difference between the elite and average constituent, the elite understands and utilizes the process, while average constituents are more likely to interact as a last resort without understanding how the process can assist their interests. The difference between elites and masses here is multi-dimensional. First, the elites are aware of the fact that incumbents employ staff in district offices, while average constituents often had very fuzzy ideas, not only about government in general, but about the specifics of what a member of congress and their staff do. As one of B’s elite constituents stated, “most constituents don’t even know that congressmen have staff who

work for them.” C’s RDSM noted that the “misconception of people and journalists is due to a lack of knowledge about government. Most people just don’t ask or care to find things out.” I had minimal interactions with elites who did not have above average grasp of the political system. Of these less interested elites, one of C’s constituents, a small town business owner, suggested “he had a lack of interest in government and can track a bill but anything else is confusing.” Second, elites more clearly recognize officials that can assist them. I commonly interacted with elite constituents who suggested that they sought out incumbents and staff based on their “expertise” or “clout.” For example, several constituents pursued senators from the president’s party, members of Appropriations sub-committees, or chairs of specific constituency committees such as banking, agriculture, or veteran’s issues to facilitate their issues. Sometimes these were officials from their states, other times the elite constituents would utilize contacts within the incumbent’s enterprise to reach out to an out-of-state official. Third elite constituents more commonly knew at least the names of the district staff members. Finally, at the most sophisticated level of political understanding, are the elites who know and understand the specific abilities of both the incumbent and the district staff. As a Chamber official from C’s district noted, she checks her rolodex to assess which staff to call about issues and coordinates with the senators and representative’s offices to make sure that her issues are handled efficiently.

#### Higher level of community involvement

Not only are elite constituents more knowledgeable, they were also found to be more proactive with their knowledge of the process in order to protect the interests of their

communities.<sup>3</sup> Comprehension of the process means that elites were generally more proactive in defending their interests while average constituents will more commonly sit back and wait to be negatively affected by the initiation of government policies.

The literature cited above and my observations concur that not only do elites know more about the process, they tend to also be more interested and active on political issues. While Parker (1986) found that more than 8 in 10 constituents felt that incumbents can help them in some way, a contextual examination of his sample would have shown that perhaps 6 or 7 of those 8 would not have known who to call or write or what that official would be able to do for them. In short, I found that it was that 1 or 2 of the 8 who knew where to call or write that did, and did so with regularity! Furthermore, this 1 or 2 of the 8 much more commonly voted for the incumbent, and contributed or volunteered on their campaign. This 1 or 2 of the 8 was also more likely to belong to one of the elite groups mentioned above; lawyers, issue activists, Chamber members, journalists, etc. Chapter Six will deal with the larger consequences of staff interaction with the 1 or 2 of 8 constituents. This chapter will continue to examine the manner in which they do interact with those few constituents.

Enjoy greater level of access/contact

Elite constituents enjoy greater levels of access to incumbents and staff for a variety of reasons. As was put forward in the previous pages, these constituents enjoy better access largely because of their knowledge and interest in the process. They also enjoy this access because they often inhabit the same social circles. Therefore incumbents and staff will “bump into” them on a more frequent basis. This contributes to the distinction

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<sup>3</sup> This is not always the case, however. The Chamber example reflects an individual constituent who is acting on behalf of the general community. Unfortunately, most elites that possess this knowledge of the

between elite and mass constituents then in that the elites enjoy substantially more informal contact with incumbents and staff. As a result, they have fewer needs that ever fully become formal requests, projects, cases, etc. Several interactions and accounts suggested that some elites will call district or Washington staff for project assistance or they even “feel free to approach (the incumbent).” Elite interaction with staff often resolves issues proactively and are many times expedited by way of favor; the incumbent or staff member notes the problem and has the district or Washington staff “resolve” the issue before a paper trail has ever begun. There was a perception amongst some elite constituents that their involvement and attitudes were more important to incumbents and staff than were those of average constituents. One of A’s constituents noted that his input on policy issues was worth ten “tallies” to one for an average constituent. This perception derived from his greater levels of interest, knowledge and contact with A and his staff. The degree to which the staff sought out this constituent would seem to confirm his perception.

I commonly found elites who knew not only who staff members were and where to get a hold of them, but also how to use those staff to get directly in communication with the incumbent. Whether it was a phone number, meeting site or e-mail address, they commonly “will find (the incumbent) if they need him.” I am not suggesting that elites have untrammelled access to incumbents. Instead, elite constituents simply have a comparatively easier time communicating with incumbents and staff than do average constituents because they know how and where to call, largely because they do it more often. Given elites’ knowledge, interest and proximity, and their probable influence as

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system will probably be acting much more in the self-interest of a specific company or interest group.



opinion leaders, it is no surprise that staff choose to emphasize elite interaction as an efficient means of doing their job.

### Multiple arenas of elites

Chapter Four suggested that one of the variables that impact how incumbents utilize their district staff is the heterogeneity of interests within their districts. Specifically, districts that were more homogenous were found to be 'easier' to represent in the sense that there were fewer groups and interests that needed to be addressed. Nevertheless, the average congressional district has a multiplicity of economic, political, social, gender, race, occupational, cultural, and religious groups within its boundaries. In the words of Katz and Lazearfeld (1955) there are different arenas in an individual community, not one common setting from which everyone derives their information.

Despite the fact the elites share common traits of knowledge, involvement and access, these groups are by no means part of a cozy elite power structure.<sup>4</sup> For the most part they compete for the resources and attentions of the inhabitants of their communities, and that includes those of the incumbent and his/her staff. Because there are so many competing elite interests and because their time in the district is limited, incumbents are reliant upon staff to interact in a wide variety of arenas to make sure that different groups' interests are represented. As Chapters Three and Four noted, district enterprises are widely variant in the extent to which they pursue this representation. A few incumbents, here best seen in B, rely on their own social interactions with these elite

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<sup>4</sup> I did notice, however, that in small, relatively homogenous communities there was a tendency for some elites to speak more forthrightly about "us"; that they felt themselves to be part of a small number of town leaders who spoke for the interests of all. Even in those small towns, divergent interests could be identified with only slight effort. It is my contention that "us" exists in very few places. And incumbents/staff who rely solely on the advice of "us" in those communities put themselves in risk of failing to identify important constituency groups or interests. My observations suggested that the aggressive offices were much less likely to rely on interactions with "us" and seek out those other sources.

constituents to carry out the representative function. My observations suggest that this style is inadequate for less senior and more marginal incumbents. The presence of multiple staff members in the district makes it easier for the staff enterprise to reach out to the varying types, personas, times, places, and styles of groups that exist. From formal meetings to conventions, after-hours socials and morning coffees, staff can provide representation for the absent (or otherwise occupied) incumbent. In all forms the staff seemed to be operating on the premise of the two-step flow of communication; they interact with the elites on behalf of the incumbent and the necessary message would then be relayed to that community's members that the incumbent is aware of their issue and dutifully working to assist them.

Why elites? An elite focus in five steps.

With this background in mind, a pattern emerges that begins to explain why some incumbents and staff prefer to emphasize interactions with elite constituents as opposed to more routine methods of representation such as town hall meetings, office hours and casework. There are five simple answers to the question of why staff interact with elites.

#### Too many people

Throughout this dissertation I have highlighted two important perceptions of incumbents: first, that uncertainty about the next election governs many of their behaviors, and second, that they perceive their constituent demands to be fickle and ever changing. Given these perceptions and the fact that each incumbent represents over half a million people, there are simply too many constituents to serve. One of E's field representatives noted: "You want to have an open, good relationship with everyone like you do with (local officials) but you can't. There are five hundred thousand people in the

district...(it is) too much for me to cover. So you focus on the opinion-makers.” While not all incumbent enterprises share this focus on elites, those that do seemed to inevitably cite the fact that there were simply too many constituents to interact with on a regular basis. And as will be shown below, interacting with the smaller group of elites has benefits at a number of levels for incumbents, elites and staff alike.

#### ‘Cheaper’ to interact with elites

Consequently, many offices appeared to find ‘cheaper’ ways to interact with a select group of constituents. Their activities are ‘cheaper’ in the sense that they find ways to spend their time and resources by focusing on a smaller subset of constituents that they know and regularly interact with who can link them to larger portions of their entire constituency. Given the fact that congressional district offices usually employ between five and seven staff, the logic of finding a ‘cheaper’ style of representation is clear. A handful of proactive district staff members are able to substantially multiply the presence of the incumbent throughout the district. Nevertheless, there are limits to what even the most aggressive two or three staff members can accomplish. Rather than attempting to interact with massive quantities of groups and individual constituents, my observations suggested that the aggressive enterprises focused on people they perceived to be ‘opinion leaders’, thereby further multiplying the efforts of the incumbent. These behaviors are ‘cheap’ because the incumbents and staff regularly find themselves in contact with the easy-to-find elite constituents.

Elites are community leaders and are easy to find

Whether the elites are public or private officials, they are generally found in obvious settings for the incumbents and staff to engage them. Public officials are the easiest to

find. They have offices in advertised and central locations and are supposed to be available to their public constituencies. That makes them an obvious and easy target for interaction. A Chamber official from H's district referred to himself as the "intervener" for the community. In this position, members of the community viewed him as the focal point for all community development issues, be they local, state or federal. Because of his central position in the community, it was his impression that H's staff, and those from another nearby incumbent's office regularly called or visit to assess the status of the community.

Private citizens can be just as valuable sources of interaction for the district enterprise. C's key contact at a major state university in his district was one of the school's vice presidents. This constituent suggested that he was "a player in an important institution. (and C) seeks me out." This constituent and C probably sought each other initially because of their mutual dependence; C is motivated to represent the needs of the major employer in his district and the constituent needs help procuring federal assistance for his institution. In any case, the vice president was in an obvious place for C and his staff to seek out a source of information. Other elites are easy to find less because of their institutional presence than because of the fact that they are well known, or come from prestigious local families. An example of the latter was a small business owner from A's district whose family were "pioneers to the area" and whose father was a former mayor. He has continued the family activism and is recognized by other elites as a community leader. Then there was a member of G's "network", a newly retired businessman who kept busy with membership on nearly a dozen community boards. In each of these three cases the constituent's position and political activism in the

community were beneficial as long as they were willing to act as part of incumbents' extended enterprises.

Incumbents interact with elites formally and informally

Incumbent's formal behaviors during their periods at home emphasized elite interaction. Observations of their town hall meetings, forums, meetings in their offices and drop-by visits all had a distinct elite edge to them. Their scheduled behaviors and unannounced drop-bys or phone calls were much more commonly with elite constituents. A and his staff made deliberate changes in their district strategy towards the end of his first term so that they would be in greater proximity to the "opinion leaders." His COS suggested three groups in particular (oil, military, and religious communities) that they didn't seem to have open communication with initially. Consequently, A spent more time penetrating the leadership of these three groups so that he could grasp their issues and they could see his efforts to represent their interests.

But I also observed incumbents interacting with elites in their informal and campaign activities during their home visits. As was just noted, incumbents live in the same social world as the elite constituents so they bump into them in their ordinary routines. This was clearly the case in that incumbents come home for the political purpose of "running the cocktail circuit." Other incumbents sat on community groups' boards, were involved in church groups, and yes, were even soccer moms and dads. These activities brought incumbents into direct contact with significant numbers of elites, who in many cases were not shy about bringing up bills, budget items or other policy issues seeking the incumbent's opinion and/or support. In short, the incumbent's formal and personal district activities will bring them into contact with elite constituents. For the aggressive

incumbent this is obvious electoral benefit. For the more senior or routine incumbent, these interactions seemed to be more bothersome, except in the case of a personal incumbent like B who relied on his own personal interaction with constituents to get the pulse of the community.

Staff interact with elites as well

Staff activities, both formal and informal, seemed to be equally devoted to elite interaction. There was surprisingly little difference between the types of elites that incumbents and their staff would interact with. While heads of major corporations or community groups were more guarded with their time, the vast majority of district elites appeared to be as willing to meet with members of the district enterprise as with the incumbent him/herself. Staff members usually accompany the incumbents to their tours, meetings, forums, and town hall events. This gives them an obvious later entrée with these local officials, community and business elites that I observed staff to utilize in later follow-up visits. Additionally, efforts by the incumbent to penetrate community groups resulted in the increased access for staff members. There seemed to be sort of a spillover access for them. The instance of A interacting with church communities was directly followed up by numerous staff trips and calls to church groups on the issue of impact aid to the poor. A generated the issue and the interest and his staff moved in to capitalize on the open access.

Like incumbents, the personal activities of staff often bring them into contact with elite constituents. In fact, as Chapter Three demonstrated, staff members often find themselves increasingly engaged in the elite interests of a community after they start working for incumbents. One of C's district staff members noted that her community

involvement increased over the two years she had worked for him; partly by her own choice, partly because it was useful for her to go to meetings with groups that she worked with, and partly because she simply felt “dragged in” over time. Like the staff from G’s office or this particular C staffer, their extracurricular activities bring them into contact with elite constituents. Several staff noted that whether they were at dinner or at meetings of these groups that they were often approached by elite constituents for information about the incumbent’s position on an issue or how he/she might assist their group’s needs. This constituent, like one of A’s note then that they have never made a formal request for service because they have “no need to contact them” since they see staff in informal social settings on a very regular basis. And to conclude, staffers are people too. They have friends and personal relationships. As in the case of an accountant/chamber member from C’s state, she was a personal friend of one of the US Senator’s state staff. She emails and calls him regularly on a variety of issues. This is not to suggest that staff members don’t have friends who are average constituents. Rather, all of these examples suggest that elites are easy to find and are often in close proximity to the incumbents and their staff. Elites often appeared to be as comfortable in these relationships with staff as they were with incumbents.

#### Elites are comfortable with staff

As the previous sections seem to suggest, the incumbent/staff/elite relationship is also logical because elites generally seem to have a higher comfort level with staff than do average constituents. Elites are a class of people who know and are almost exclusively comfortable dealing with staff because they understand how the system works. A county judge’s assistant from B’s district suggested that there are three reasons

why elite constituents are comfortable with staff: they provide a way for elites to 1) communicate with the incumbent, 2) get service from the incumbent's office and 3) acquire other political information. My other observations seemed to confirm his logic.

Staff provide a way to talk to the incumbent

One of the obvious differences between elite and average constituents was that elites tended to understand the fact that incumbents work with very busy and odd congressional work schedules and are not regularly in the district. The most basic distinction was whether the constituent grasped the Tuesday-Thursday work schedule of Congress. A small business owner from B's district expressed an attitude that I did not commonly encounter amongst other elites; "if I had issues I'd just go over there and see (B) personally." Most elites, on the other hand, tended to be aware of the presence and job responsibilities of district staff members. Consequently, they seemed to grasp that they needed to pursue 'access' to the incumbent through the staff members in the district office. One of H's constituents put it most succinctly; "(the staffer) is not (the incumbent), but we value the favorable report" that she delivers to the incumbent. Because they value that "report" to the incumbent, elite constituents work with district staff to ensure that they have access to their community. A Chamber of Commerce official from A's district allowed his staff to utilize their facility for their weekly office hours suggesting that she appreciated their "accessibility" and that they "valued bending his ear." Another example of this was the aforementioned case of an accountant who would first email or phone her contact in a Senator's office; "I go there first when I have a question or problem." She gave different types of examples ranging from particular tax questions to community development issues for the chamber. In all cases she used her



channel of influence through the staff member that she knew to procure an answer or assistance from the incumbent enterprise. Then there was C's university official who utilized a "mixture of calls" to the district office (which he did "quite often"), Washington office and "directly" to C when necessary. This individual, perhaps even more sophisticated than most elite constituents, had a clear grasp of who district staff were and the hierarchy within their office. In sum, elites more commonly understood that they could get matters accomplished and maintain a close relationship with the incumbent through the staff members. The aggressive staff seemed to have a much better grasp on the rationale behind these relationships and the fact that they act as "communications links" to Congress as a whole.

Staff are a way to get service and information

Not only do elites understand that the incumbent is busy and that access is best procured through the staff, they also more likely have an understanding that quite often the staff members themselves are able to resolve their issues without any involvement from the incumbent. A less sophisticated view is built on the impression that incumbents are personally engaged on virtually all constituent matters, personally going to bat for every constituent that calls or writes the office. One of A's elite constituents put it best: "for me it doesn't matter as long as I know what I need to get done gets done. For the average joe, (the more personal style of the incumbent) is better because it seems more involved, more hands-on." This particular constituent had a clear understanding of the powers and responsibilities of district staff and "how they are good for him." The elite constituent was usually less concerned about gaining the attention of the incumbent than simply resolving the issue at hand. Elite constituents were observed to build relationships

with individual staff members that appeared to be more valued than contact with the incumbent. One particular example of a constituent who worked with a military issues staffer referred to him as the best asset and “political person in the delegation”, even ranking him ahead of the actual incumbents. While “average joes” were clearly impressed by the numbers and professionalism of many district enterprises, the elite constituents demonstrated a greater understanding of how to utilize the staff as intermediaries to the incumbents. Service to elites might then be explained by the fact that elites are simply more willing, or more informed as to how to contact the incumbent’s office. In other words, elites are served better because they know how the system works. For incumbents, the value of utilizing district staff appears to be justified in both the cases of elites and “average joes.”

Staff are “good political libraries” for the area.

The finale rationale for why elites are comfortable with staff lies in the political value of the staff independent of their work for the incumbent. The argument here is that because district staff members spend so much time interacting with different community leaders (political, economic, social, etc.) that they know what is going on in all parts of the district. This is especially the case for staff members who have longer tenures in office. Both B and one of his constituents referred to the value of one of his long-time field representatives as being that “she knows where the bodies are buried.” She was extremely familiar with all the relevant issues and personalities from her part of B’s district. Because elites comprehend that staff exist, are valuable means of access and service from the incumbent, and finally because they are valuable resources for the

community in general, incumbents are likely to be comfortable interacting with district staff.

But some elites are prickly

I should note, however, that not all elites were comfortable dealing exclusively with district staff. As Chapter Four noted, some constituents make greater demands for actual contact with the incumbent. I would speculate that some personal incumbents even had a tendency to spoil their constituents with an abundance of personal contact, while some absent incumbents were able to empower staff members over time who could be seen as surrogates. B and E's RDSM provide an excellent contrast of this point. A journalist from B's district noted that "people around here I think take all that contact for granted but they're for him for sure." While they may be "for him", one group demonstrated considerable disappointment at his failure to show up and deliver a speech to their annual award dinner. A surrogate for his campaign (not even a staff member) delivered his prepared remarks in his absence. E's constituents, on the other hand, were long use to the presence of surrogates or staff members delivering remarks, cutting ribbons and inquiring about the status of their communities. Incumbents who rely upon their own personal interaction with incumbents best be careful about changing this interaction over time.

Another group of elites are prickly in the sense that they prefer interacting with Washington staff. A banker from C's district typified this attitude; "the district staff are competent but they don't do my issues." As did one of B's constituents who noted that district staff "don't have the level of competence" to discuss their "legislative issues." I found these types of remarks most commonly amongst the most sophisticated ranks of district elites, with individuals who enjoyed considerable personal access to the

incumbent and represented important political or economic interests. These remarks were also more common in districts where the incumbent kept a very routine style of district operation. Elite constituents from B and C's districts had very little to interact with district staff about, seeing that these two incumbents kept the activities of their staff very circumscribed.

One other group of elites who more commonly would call Washington directly were constituents of the 'large association' or 'large-issue' types. These district elites are actually going to be more interested in dealing with staff members who deal directly with legislative or budgetary issues. As was just noted, the more routine style incumbents (especially B and C) probably encourage this kind of behavior through their personal efforts and their focus on the legislative efforts of their Washington staff. An example here was one of A's constituent who stated that he relied on Washington staff "90% of the time" because 90% of district staff work is related to "simple casework. Not that I don't use local people but the kinds of issues we pursue, we need the knowledge of current legislative issues and inside information. We don't need intermediaries to find out this info." This is an example of an elite constituent who fails to understand the important role that some district staff have on local/state/cross-jurisdictional types issues described in Chapter Three. This final group appeared to be a very select group of constituents, however. Most elite constituents appreciated the local office and understood the importance of building access and relationships through those staff members. While elites differed in the extent to which they called the Washington or the district staff, they shared a sense of appreciation when incumbents and staff contacted them.

### Elites like to be called on

Incumbents and staff also focus on elites and opinion leaders because these constituents “like to be called on.” Staff will often placate these individuals in order to meet staff goals and to ensure the future of the relationship.

Partly because incumbents and staff can help

Elites largely appeared to enjoy their interactions because of the fact that incumbents and staff were able to assist them. When staff members dropped by local elites their purpose was part to demonstrate that the incumbent enterprise was working hard and part to inquire as to whether there was anything that they could do to help the constituent. In a typical interaction, one of E’s field representatives inquired of a car dealer “how many cars are you selling?” This interaction meandered around topics of specifically how many cars he was selling, what the local economy was like, and what, if anything, E’s office could do to help the local economy. At the conclusion of the interaction, both actors could walk away feeling that they had gained from the interaction; the car dealer expressed a concern about the local economy and the district staffer emphasized that the incumbent was in touch with these concerns. A’s constituents appeared to “appreciate the access” whether they had a particular issue or not. On one occasion, a staff member made a surprise drop-by visit during a community meeting to discuss funding for a hospital expansion. The staff member was able to suggest several federal programs that they would not otherwise have thought to apply for. Constituents generally appeared to feel that the “incumbent’s help was a positive influence” in resolving issues. Because of this assistance they genuinely desired staff visits to the their communities and in one case

even fought to make sure that H did not close a local office and move his staff member to a more populated area.

Partly because they enjoy the interaction

Some elite constituents had more social motivations for their interactions with staff and incumbents. Hosting an incumbent, attending a meeting or giving a plant tour appeared to be highly anticipated and valued events. While interacting with the incumbent was a valued social event, meeting with staff also seemed to carry some social benefit. Most elites were generally appreciative of staff efforts and were interested in spending time interacting with these individuals. As compared to regular constituents who largely did not recognize or care about the staff, or even the incumbents for that matter, elite constituents generally seemed to enjoy these interactions.

Maybe even expect the interaction

For some elites, the interaction was actually more of an expectation than an enjoyable social occurrence. This seemed to be especially the case with a newly elected incumbent. One of G's staff reflected that it was "more a challenge than an opportunity" to replace a high profile leader as they had done three terms earlier. As comments in Chapter Four suggested, A's district enterprise struggled early to incorporate the relevant communities and elites that had been active during E's tenure. By the second term, it seemed that the 'right' people were on board but there were still mumblings of discontent from some elites who felt that they had not yet had sufficient personal attention from the incumbent and staff or that they weren't "filling the shoes" of the previous incumbent and staff.

Ironically, one constituent disliked the fact that the RDSM spent so much time at home.<sup>5</sup> This situation meant that he “looks to Washington staff or maybe even other places for information. It can be a problem when he needs to take them along on the importance of an issue.” He went on to express that “groups can be received and courted from DC” and that the RDSM doesn’t need to be in district to perform this service. Evidence of the expectations on new incumbents is also found in the fact that district enterprises often try to keep popular functions going from the previous incumbent. Incumbents from the same party may try to keep staff (J and K). In the case of A they even tried to lure a staff member from E’s office to continue the development of a program that was popular with district elites. The motivation here was quite transparent; try to effectively serve the business community, a particular group of elites whose loyalties are most malleable and based on successful contact with the incumbent. The successful continuation of this program might have meant that A could have used his district resources for other purposes. Because they were unable to lure the staff member and keep the program running, A was forced to devote valuable personal time to courting these elites who might assist his enterprise.

#### Elites are the right people

The argument “why elites” has centered to this point largely on the fact that elites desire and enjoy attention from incumbents. The final component to this argument is that elites are the right people for incumbents to pursue because they have valuable resources. They are the constituents that have the greatest impact on the incumbent’s success in the

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<sup>5</sup> Maybe incumbents allocate their staff based on the impression it helps with elite issues. But the most sophisticated elites actually don’t like the idea as it detracts from what the enterprise can accomplish in Washington. It would be interesting to further examine how many elites have this attitude? Do incumbents realize this as well?

district and the likelihood that they will be returned to office. As was noted above, elite constituents are more knowledgeable about the political process, more active in their communities, and more likely to vote, volunteer or contribute to campaigns.

Furthermore, staff and incumbent behavior was clearly driven by a perception that a two-step flow of communication between elite and average constituents remains in effect.

This perspective is not new to the discipline. Mayhew suggested “Congress serves the vocal, organized and active” (1974, pp30-31). One need not be as cynical in their conclusions to recognize that incumbents will serve those constituents that they are most likely to interact with, who have the resources to assist their campaigns (endorsements, media, contributions, volunteers) and the ability to influence public opinion (through two step cues to their neighbors, followers, friends and family members). Remember, incumbents don’t have time or resources to hear everybody, so they have to make decisions in how they utilize their staff resources.

#### So what is the value of service?

Literature says incumbents are uncertain and contact helps

The literature reviewed in Chapter One and at the beginning of this chapter suggests “the central motif in discussion about campaign strategy is uncertainty” (Jacobson, 1997 p66). Furthermore, the literature generally agrees to some value of a “personal vote” found in contact with a district’s voters. Parker (1989, p85) perhaps identified the most important value that service provides to ease incumbents’ uncertainty: “Thus by maintaining extensive contact with voters, incumbents are able to enhance their support among their constituents and thereby weaken the opposition they face at the next election.” I would note that the opposite also likely holds, that incumbent enterprises that



do not perform elite interaction, or perform it poorly, risk misidentifying or alienating elite constituencies.

Because it satisfies the needs of all three actors

Perhaps the best explanation of the value of elite interaction can be found in the fact that it satisfies the needs of all three actors. It is a boundary-spanning behavior where output by the incumbent and staff is indirectly exchanged for inputs that are beneficial to the incumbent enterprise. The elite satisfaction is most obvious, interaction (output) with incumbents and staff satisfies their material, purposive and social goals (to be detailed later).

Assuming that satisfied elites reciprocate by passing along reinforcing messages to their “followers” through a two-step communication, incumbent satisfaction is derived from higher levels of name recognition and job approval that ultimately will pay the incumbent back on election day. At a more minimal level, the incumbent enterprise is simply enhanced because it brings an important class of constituents into their fold. In this case the incumbent receives input in the form of votes, support and campaign contributions to assist them in their uncertain electoral environments. At an even more complex level, elite involvement in the extended incumbent enterprise allows the incumbent leeway to focus on other activities beyond the pale of district representation. The “leeway” will be detailed later in this chapter.

Staff satisfaction is the most complex of the three actors, but no less relevant. For the individual staff member, elite interaction is a cheap and effective way for them to advertise the services of the incumbent. But staff satisfaction can go beyond work goals to also include personal staff motivations. As was discussed in Chapter Three, some staff

members are motivated by the desire to be personally involved in district political issues or even entertain possible bids for future runs at elective office. Either way, interactions with elite constituents would be beneficial to individual staff goals.

#### Value by the numbers

Some staff actually placed a numeric value on the service that they performed. At the aggregate casework level, one of B's younger staff members suggested that with five field representatives each generating five new cases per day, each staffer ultimately assists about twelve hundred constituents per year. That translates into roughly six thousand constituents per year. Given that five per day is a high average and that a significant portion of those cases are likely to be repeats, six thousand is probably high. Yet, even half that total would mean that the incumbent enterprise is reaching out to six thousand constituents and their families every election cycle. If there is a "personal vote" to be had, this casework is surely significant in a low turnout congressional election. Focusing instead on elite interaction, one of E's field representatives suggested that interacting with one opinion leader had the impact of directly touching three people and that by the end of the week between fifteen and fifty other members of that community would have heard about the incumbent/staff assistance. I would suggest that the latter evaluation is probably more accurate, as well as more valuable to the incumbent enterprise. Service to the opinion leader seems much more likely to generate political support, whether it be allegiance, a vote or a contribution.

#### Value by perception

Again, the actual value of the interaction is hard to measure. What is more relevant is that incumbents and staff perceive such service to be of value to the enterprise. They

think that service has an electoral payoff. F's RDSM knew that casework and service were useful at election time but had a hard time assigning an actual value. Elite service was even "less tangibly measured" than was casework, yet she had allocated more than four staff to aggressive field interaction and only two to casework. Furthermore, staff members seemed to largely believe that if you touch a lot of elites, much of the enterprise's 'advertising' will be done automatically through word of mouth. From this perspective doing the math like E's field representative did suggests that the actual output or resolution of cases is much less important than simply interacting with the elite constituents. The simple effort is what is rewarded. This staffer went on to suggest that "if word gets out that elite x or y says that the incumbent was involved, it has a positive impact on other's evaluations" of the incumbent. The logic of this perception is also upheld in the cross-jurisdictional work performed by district staff, where there is usually little that federal staff can do to help resolve local or state issues. My observations and discussions with elite constituents seemed to affirm these perceptions. Elite constituents were largely appreciative of the simple efforts put forth by staff members in their drop-by visits, office hours, or forums held in their communities. This contact was largely rewarded with positive evaluations of the incumbent, and frequently supported by a desire to 'do something' for the incumbent at election time, whether it be a vote, a contribution or volunteering some time. More importantly, interaction with staff functionally made many elites a distant extension of the incumbent enterprise. Contact important because some incumbents do lose

Elite interaction also holds a value in a negative sense. These activities are notable in that they can play a role in the demise of an incumbent's career. On rare occasions

candidates who seem to emerge from nowhere shock veteran incumbents. In 1992 Bob Kastenmeier lost to local news anchor Scott Klug and in 1994 Neal Smith suffered defeat at the hands of surgeon Greg Ganske. While both Klug and Ganske went on to well-respected positions in the legislature, both would have been regarded as only semi-quality challengers. I speculate that Kastenmeier and Smith's district efforts should be the focal point of explanations of their losses. Perhaps it is the case that a veteran incumbent and their staff do a poor job with elite interaction and begin to establish a poor reputation. Or perhaps the aging incumbent and staff continue to serve the same circles of elite constituents, excluding important voices in their districts and never really knowing it until election night. Additionally, the immigration of new elites into a district can cause tension within an enterprise about when it should 'expand' and when it should 'protect'. Do they continue to serve the old reliable circles of support? Or do they turn to incorporate new faces into the district enterprise?<sup>6</sup> Witness the comments by B in Chapter Four about his lack of familiarity with his new constituents or the relatively high level of turnover in C's district enterprise over the previous several years. This was a trend that had not gone unnoticed by his constituents.

Perhaps these are the types of things that lead elites to note that an incumbent is 'losing touch' and so they slowly fade out of contact with the incumbent. At some point the enterprise has lost ties to its old core of supporters or hasn't reached out to the new circles of support in the district. Are B and C falling into this cycle of neglect? Perhaps C felt this type of defeat approaching in 1998 when he moved his press secretary back to

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<sup>6</sup> These are important allocative decisions for the district enterprise. Can a routine staff in an increasingly unfamiliar district staff be asked to be more proactive given that they do not expend a great deal of resources interacting with the community? And if they were out doing "more" what kinds of things would they be sacrificing in their normal routines?

the district after a hard fought election in 1996. This might be called the ‘slipping senior incumbent’ theory, a temporary decision to reallocate resources to their district enterprise to avoid defeat at the polls. The cases of Kastenmeier and Smith probably have elements of all these failings. In the end, infrequent travel home, inactive district staff, the development of a bad district reputation and the isolation of electoral support will probably result in the creation of decent electoral challenges (as seen in Ganske and Klug). While I am not maintaining that elite interaction is the be-all, end-all determinant of congressional election outcomes, it is an important increment in determining the final vote total. And in a low-turnout mid-term election with strong national tides, like say 1994, the lack of a solid district reputation and a supportive core of elite constituents can spell electoral defeat. In the election of 1994, the Republican majority was built on fifteen marginal seats that were cumulatively won with less than 20,000 total votes. And in that election 52 Democrats and 52 Republicans each received 55% or less of the vote. Electorally speaking, the parties would be wise to test the electoral strength of aging incumbents in changing districts, regardless of poll tests taken months before the election.

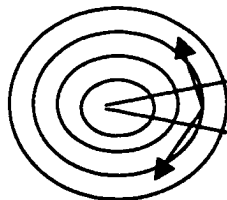
It is easily overlooked that many of these perceptions of incumbents and their connections to the district are built on activities that are largely performed by the district staff. This is the case especially for active enterprises but even for B as a ‘personal’ incumbent. While B might have a well-developed reputation, it is solid largely because of his staff’s longstanding contacts, service over time, and professionalism that clears the high number of cases that allow him to interact with individual constituents. In short, the district staff enterprise is the foundation of his reputation and an important “increment” in his election victories.

## The “slice” model

### Increments and margins

This chapter has argued that district staff enterprises interact with a select ‘slice’ of elite constituents for two basic reasons. First, the staff members are limited in their ability to interact with more than a small fraction of the district’s constituents over a two-year period. Second, those constituents that they interact with are commonly found to be individuals with the resources to impact the reelection prospects of the incumbent. The idea of a ‘slice’ is derived from Miller and Stokes (1963) suggestion that incumbents win by focusing on “increments and margins.” In today’s congressional elections, Miller and Stokes would argue that “increments and margins” are collectively provided in incumbent home styles, campaign finance and advertising, the role of the media, quality challengers, redistricting, etc. I argue that elite interaction provides incumbents with another “increment” to protect themselves at the polls. Furthermore, this interaction has a ‘spillover’ effect onto several of the other “increments” just mentioned. The select ‘slice’ of elite constituents that staff and incumbents interact with can perhaps best be depicted by slightly modifying Fenno’s (1978) analysis of the four circles of constituents in a congressional district. Figure 5.1 illustrates Fenno’s circles with the added ‘slice’ of elite interaction.

Figure 5.1 The “slice” of the constituency



### Four circles and a 'slice'

#### Personal

The personal constituency is the core of an incumbent's support. It is very small and is filled with the most loyal supporters. These individuals know the incumbent well and are willing to make personal sacrifices for the incumbent. One example here was an individual who stated that "he would quit his job" to help E in an anticipated statewide race. Often these individuals have the best access to the incumbent because they know him or her personally. They are counted as the incumbents' informal advisers about issues, personalities and politics. Or the incumbent counts on them as informal advisers and 'kitchen cabinet' members. As this tends to be a small and personal coalition, incumbents probably tend to keep the personal circle static in its membership with limited staff interaction.

#### Primary

The primary constituency is of greater electoral significance to the incumbent. This group is considerably larger than the personal constituency as it entails the incumbent's political support base beyond his or her personal friends and advisers. An example of a primary constituent was a business owner who I observed talking to one of E's staff about a project that he had just worked with "E and his (Washington) staff", as well as his long-standing political support of E. The primary supporters are the constituents who can be counted on to vote, volunteer and contribute to the incumbent's campaigns. They are what might best be defined as the incumbent's base. They may be loyal partisans who have never met the incumbent or they may be intimately involved with office or

campaign functions and know the incumbent quite well. There is a substantial range in access in the primary constituency. Some of these constituents will have higher levels of interaction with the incumbent, district and Washington staff than do most of the other primary constituents. Staff enterprises clearly have a role to play with the incumbent's base. If the staff do not maintain contact with the incumbent's personal and partisan base, it is likely to be less energetically involved in future campaigns. Especially given that elite constituents like to be contacted.

### Re-election

Perhaps an even more relevant constituency is the reelection constituency. This is the incumbent's broader baseline of political support; they control his or her electoral fortunes in the general election. Because most incumbents do not face primary challengers, it is this broader constituency that is usually tested. It is also from this group that the incumbent most fears electoral or issue opposition. Bullock and Brady (1983) found a distinction between the impact of reelection and geographic constituencies on the roll call votes of senators from the same states. Their conclusion was that senators' votes on policy issues were more influenced by the reelection constituency than the geographic. This would reflect the incumbent concern with being in tune with the constituency most responsible for keeping him or her in office. This is also the sensitive area where the incumbent enterprise must choose how aggressive it will be with elite constituents. It was plainly the case that focusing on a broader, newer group or reelection constituents would take away time and resources from a focus on the base/primary constituents. At least with elite interaction, the staff enterprise could somewhat minimize that tradeoff by interacting with elites from both constituencies. Nevertheless, the tradeoff remains.



Another dilemma confronts the incumbent whose popularity results in election victories of sixty or maybe even seventy percent. E provides an excellent example then of an incumbent who confronts a reelection constituency that is virtually the entire district. This is perhaps the only imaginable instance of where an incumbent who receives less than 55% of the vote has an advantage; they know who their base is and can more easily serve, interact and keep them happy. The popular incumbent must either struggle to gauge the depth of his or her support or take it for granted and risk the collapse that Kastenmeier and Smith suffered.

### Geographic

Finally, the “geographic” constituency is the broadest outside circle. It includes both non-voters and those opponents of the incumbent that will not likely offer support under any circumstances. One field representative revealed that staff from even the most popular incumbents realize they can’t get everybody; “some people love E, some people hate him, you just live with it.” Generally speaking, this outer circle is not actively pursued, except for two situations. First, the incumbent whose reelection constituency is less than fifty-five percent is likely to make aggressive allocations of personal and staff time to interact with a larger chunk of constituents and push their election total slightly higher. The second type of interaction in this constituency is the targeting of specific elites who are either independent or previously opposed to the incumbent. Staff members were observed interacting with these types of elites with the goal of incorporating them into the incumbent’s district enterprise. My observations generally suggested, however, that this final constituency was the most neglected.

## The 'slice'

As can be seen from the Figure 5.3, district staff hope to elicit a 'slice' of voters in support of the incumbent. This 'slicing' is performed on the assumption that it will bring valuable votes and resources to the incumbent. The 'slice' widens to contact a larger group of elites in the outer circles in order that the staff might communicate their services to elites not ordinarily in their circles. As will be shown below, the goal is to target a pool of elites to co-opt into the district enterprise. To reiterate, the 'slice' is a group of elite constituents in the reelection and general constituencies that the staff hope to draw into the incumbent's base; the primary constituency. By interacting with elites outside of the incumbent's base, district staff members possibly hope to elicit a spillover from the two outer constituencies for two purposes. The arrows on Figure 5.3 reflect this desired spillover into the outer constituencies that ordinarily aren't vital elements of the incumbent enterprise. First, they interact to assist with resources for their reelection campaigns. And second, they hope to buy 'leeway' for the incumbent so that they can focus on other personal goals. The ideal goal appeared to me to be that they establish a comfortable "slice" where they are in touch with as many elite circles as possible, as was noted above. They hope to be in touch with these different elite circles so that they 1) know everything that is going on in the district and 2) that they are comfortably supported by as many elite circles as necessary to maintain their election and deter any serious electoral threat. These behaviors and the purchase of "leeway" will be discussed later in this chapter.

In most offices, staff members were relatively open about the volume and purpose of their interactions with elite constituents. When asked to provide a job description, it was

usually apparent if, and to what extent, staff interacted with elite constituents as they walked me through a typical week of their employment. While widening the ‘slice’ may not be a deliberate electoral strategy (i.e. serve elites as another “increment” on the way to victory) for all district staff members, this behavior has definite political impact. The value of the ‘slice’ relies to some degree on a two-step flow of communication between the elites and the rest of the voters. Whether or not this link truly exists is less important than the fact that staff attitudes demonstrate that they perceive that elites have such an influence; “through the elites, you meet more people, it’s better than cold calling.” Another staff member felt that courting these elites definitely had a payback both with the immediate word of mouth recognition throughout the community and with more delayed gratification at election time. A third staff member remarked that if “word gets out that (elite X or Y) says the incumbent did a good job” that it has a “positive impact on the incumbent’s evaluation” by the rest of the citizens. Furthermore, constituents value the “presence” of staff and incumbents and appeared to repay their gratitude with support long after the interaction was rendered. The majority of my cases suggested that staff pursue the elites with the intention of multiplying or at least maintaining the incumbent’s vote totals. Yet, as Chapters Three and Four noted, there is substantial variation in the amount of aggressive elite interaction performed from office to office. A quick examination of the motives of each of the three actors in this equation would be helpful in attempting to gain an understanding of this behavior.

Why do offices vary in their elite interaction? Individual motivations

This dissertation has continually noted variation in the functions of district staff. This is particularly true with the quality and effectiveness of elite interaction. As with

many of their behaviors, the variation in elite interaction seems to be due in large part to the motivations of each of the interactors. Because incumbents represent roughly similar constituencies (in that they represent roughly five hundred thousand people, some of which are invariably elite constituents) and have the resources and potential to perform elite interaction, it is hypothesized that variation in this behavior is largely due to their motivations and philosophies about the proper role for district staff.

### Incumbent

#### The obvious – electoral pressure

Incumbent motivations are partly obvious in that they are electoral, but they also appeared to be highly impacted by the style discussed in Chapter Four. The most obvious explanation of incumbent behavior and the differences in their elite interaction might be attributed to the different levels of electoral pressure that they confront. References to my observations and the literature throughout this dissertation suggest that incumbents are often motivated by a perception of electoral uncertainty and vulnerability.

It appeared that the more electorally marginal incumbents had staff members who were more aggressive in their ‘slicing’ of elite constituents. Furthermore, they more commonly targeted members of the opposition party if their reelection percentage was marginal. The “aggressiveness” also appeared to roughly correspond to the incumbent’s length of tenure in office, with the staff enterprises of the junior incumbents doing more ‘slicing’ to build up their extended enterprises. My observations confirm Fenno’s (1978) finding that these junior members are more “expansionist” in their behaviors, while senior incumbents tend to discourage such proactive behavior by their staff in favor of maintaining their base. The differing means by which A and E’s staff engaged the elites

of their district was instructive on this difference. A's staff sought out new issues and personalities to interact with throughout their first two terms. The "expansive" nature of their behavior could be seen from the top to the bottom of the organization; from A's comments, to the COS's rationale for staff existence, to the routines by which the field staff guided their weekly behaviors, meeting "new faces" or new "opinion leaders" was the priority. One of A's staff spent her first eighteen months "introducing herself and being consistent" with people and groups. She had a "time formula" to deal with those groups that she knew from the community as well as introducing new groups each week or month so that she "didn't see the same old faces all the time." Basically she would speak to any group that "gave her the opportunity." At those meetings she talked largely about what things A's office could do for those groups but also to some extent what A was doing (used talking points) because she was "an extension of the congressman." E's staff, on the other hand, was almost exclusively focused on the maintenance of their base. While their guidebooks for different communities contained substantial lists of people that they had interacted with over the years, by the time that I observed them, the interactions were limited to a few comfortable faces in each city. In their minds, seniority allowed them to establish an efficient mechanism whereby they could quickly move through a community and gauge its disposition. It is likely that at some point, as with E's staff, A's books, routines and rationale will become too cumbersome and the enterprise will shift to a more "protectionist" stance, seeking to interact with only a few trusted faces in each community.

## The personality/philosophy

The other obvious explanation for the variation in time and “aggressiveness” devoted to elite interaction was attributable to the personality types identified in Chapter Four. The personal and policy incumbents had staff members who did substantially less elite interaction than did the electoral or partisan enterprises.

Staff from the former two types of incumbents tended to focus mainly on activities that were purely supportive of the incumbent. This was the case especially with the personal incumbent who does much of the elite interaction him/herself. Because B traveled home regularly and spent so much of his time in the field meeting with individual constituents, he generated a substantial amount of casework to occupy his staffs’ time. While B’s field staff did some outreach to constituents, by and large they waited to see what the incumbent would turn up himself, or the constituents brought to the office. The policy incumbent such as C may have staff act in aggressive fashions on certain issues (low income housing in the case of C). But as the previous chapter discussed, policy incumbents see service as an end in itself, not a means to improve their own electoral positions. When I asked C’s staff whether they perceived that service to constituents was valuable to the incumbent, their response was, in the words of one field representative: “we’re too busy to be juicing up for re-election.” For the most part, policy staff members are reactive or “preparatory” as are the personal staff members. As a common example, neither type of office paid much attention to cross-jurisdictional work. If a constituent approached the district enterprise with an issue that was more local or state in nature, these offices would quickly refer that case to the ‘appropriate’ source, rarely even following up to see if the constituent’s issue was resolved. Conversely, the

electoral and partisan enterprises more commonly took steps to assist, and even take credit for whatever help other governmental units could render. To borrow a metaphor from the previous chapter, the personal and policy enterprises tend to act more as the generalist physician, diagnosing the patient's illness and passing them along. The electoral and partisan enterprises are the specialists who aggressively advertise their curative powers and will pull in consults with other 'physicians' to ensure that the patient gets the best possible care.

The electoral and partisan staff seemed to be much more aggressive in their elite interaction. In fact, these types of incumbents seemed to defer much of their elite interaction to staff, although I would note two exceptions here. First, the electoral incumbent by definition is going to be the more engaged in community interests. Like the personal incumbent, the electoral incumbent spends a sizeable portion of their time doing community outreach, going to forums, town hall meetings, even dealing with individual constituents. The difference, however, is that the electoral enterprise also utilizes staff resources to court additional elites and more "aggressively" follow-up with the elite constituents that the incumbent interacts with. Or, as described in Chapter Four, the electoral office tends to be a better "door opener", surveilling the district and exposing its constituents to the wide-range of potential services that they have to offer, while the personal office is the "finisher", with the staff waiting for constituent requests to come into the office where they can use their resources to resolve the case.<sup>7</sup> This is a qualitatively and quantitatively more aggressive elite outreach than is performed by the personal incumbent.

The second difference between the electoral and the partisan enterprise is the target of their affections. While the partisan incumbents tend to come from more homogenous districts and focus their efforts on the base and ideological supporters, the electoral enterprises tend to interact with constituencies not clearly supportive of the incumbent. This also suggested a difference in the urgency of elite interaction. While the partisan office is much more likely to be sought out by its base, or to “bump into” them at extracurricular functions, the electoral constituency will have to look a little bit harder. This could clearly be seen with D’s staff aggressive interaction with groups throughout her district and in A’s courting of individual “opinion leaders.” With both types of offices, however, there was more elite interaction observed relative to the personal and policy offices.

#### The nature of the district

One other factor that contributes to aggressive elite interaction is the nature of the district. It was an ironic finding that a homogenous district provided an easier setting for an aggressive outreach because of the familiarity with most of the relevant groups of the district. The electoral imperative would seem to suggest that the marginal incumbent from the larger or more heterogenous district would expect to be interactive with elite constituents. My observations suggested this was usually not the case. It was perhaps safer for the incumbent from the mixed district to confront its interests bit by bit. Here, A was an instructive example, initially dividing his staff by issue area, letting them slowly interact with the relevant interests of the district. Criticisms of elites who felt that the

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<sup>7</sup> I am not completely comfortable with this metaphor here, however, because as Chapter Four also pointed out the “door opener” characterization suggests an office that is more slipshod in its follow-up. I am not



enterprise was slow to reach out to them were confirmed by the revelation from A's staff when they were forced to switch from issue to geographic representation as the end of the first term approached. This switch in style allowed the staff to better serve A by providing him more surveillance about their immediate areas and groups that had not been previously engaged by the enterprise. While there are clearly other incumbent motivations at work, these three seemed to be variables most commonly shared by all cases.

### Elite motivations

Some have higher demands for access

Understanding that the elites are also rational political actors will help us to further understand the variation in district staff functions. Elites interact with incumbents in widely different amounts and for widely divergent reasons. Fenno's (1978, p916) question, "what do various constituencies get in return for their support?" was simply too broad. Elites in different circles have different demands. Some enterprises are forced to conduct more aggressive levels of interaction because they are confronted with elite constituents who demand service and/or attention. One particular constituency within C's district, a large state university, demanded and received substantial personal attention from the incumbent. C's elite contact at the school was in almost daily contact with either C, a district staffer or a legislative assistant in Washington. Elites who represent interests as large as this particular example seemed to have no trouble interacting with their own district enterprise, or those even from nearby districts for that matter. Another example of this was found in the community surrounding a military base in A's district. This very homogenous constituency was politically active as a whole, seeking interaction

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sure that that is a fully accurate depiction of the "door opener" style.

with government officials at all levels. This was notably one of the groups that caused A to shift his operation to a more geographic nature, allowing his staff to aggressively interact with their local communities. Alternatively, individuals with very specific issue concerns can sometimes demand attention from a district enterprise from different states. If an incumbent is identified as a leader on a particular issue such as veteran's affairs, or a particular agricultural issue, their staff might field calls from constituents across the country. These cases show that one must consider the motivations and behavior of the constituents if one is to understand staff and incumbent behavior. And it is the elite constituents who represent universities, or military bases, or a particular agricultural issue that are most likely demanding attention from the district enterprise. We might also understand the variation in elite demands by looking at three possible motivations for their behavior; purposive, material, and solidary.

#### Purposive

Because of a specific issue. The most basic motivation for elite interaction with incumbents stems from issues. Elites, like other constituents, have issues that they want to pursue, from specific pieces of legislation that affect their livelihoods, to issues of local concern and major policy issues of the day such as gun control or abortion. Some elites became contributing elements of the extended incumbent enterprise because of a policy issue that initially brought them into contact with the office. For example, the individual who head's A's informal advisory group on military issues was a veteran who had no previous exposure to political officeholders. He simply decided late in life that it was appropriate for him to become involved and because he wanted to impact the incumbent's viewpoint on military affairs. This constituent was a Democrat and a

supporter of one of A's potential opponents in his first election bid. Consequently, his interaction with A was built on a give-and-take relationship built over time after the election. By A's second term, this constituent's purposive motivation had led him to become a staunch supporter of the incumbent. While not wealthy, this constituent could be considered elite because of his leadership role in one of A's more sizeable communities of interest.

They share a common interest with incumbent. Many elite constituents find themselves interacting with the incumbent enterprise because they share a common partisan or philosophical interest. This motivation explains the easy supporters: the hard-core partisans, and the interest groups that comprise the base of the parties today. For example, trial lawyers are as reliably Democratic supporters as Chamber of Commerce officers are Republican. Individuals from base groups such as these can be expected to interact with, and support the incumbent enterprise to advance their general policy or partisan interests. Sometimes, these constituents might even come from the same occupation or social background and hence share a common outlook on a wide range of social and political issues, as did one of B's "personal constituency" members. He had not met this constituent before being elected to Congress, but soon after they began a relationship that has lasted throughout his tenure in office and is largely based on their shared occupation. As opposed to this banker or the veteran in the previous example, these constituents are likely to have broader policy interests and require less maintenance in the development of their relationships. I also observed that incumbents who developed specializations or chaired committees for key groups (bankers, military, education, etc.)

also drew requests for interaction from outside of their districts.<sup>8</sup> The same thing could happen with individual staff members who developed specializations with certain issues or governmental bureaucracies. These staff could become valuable assets to the elite community. It is not always to be assumed that these types of base groups will always oppose an incumbent hostile to their interests. I frequently observed teachers and trial lawyers who supported entrenched Republicans and corporate attorneys and Chamber officers who were the biggest supporters to Democrats. So clearly there are motivations beyond simple philosophical or partisan agreement.

Some elites are driven by national interests. A sub-category of elite constituent who interact with incumbent enterprises are those who seemed to be motivated more by their affiliation with national organizations. This group of elites captures a wide swath of people who might be considered economic or community elites but have very little interest in politics. In fact, my observations suggest that this characterizes a substantial portion of individuals who might otherwise be considered elite constituents. It is only through the pressure from national organizations that these elites are motivated into political activity. Journalists have tabbed this new style of lobbying “Astroturf”, as opposed to the traditional grass-roots mobilization. With “Astroturf” lobbying, national associations and interest groups seek to mobilize a relatively few decision-leaders in a community to pressure an individual incumbent. An example of this type of constituent was found in a Chamber official in B’s district, where he mentioned his lobbying effort in favor of NAFTA. The national association provided all the relevant material, contact

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<sup>8</sup> These offices seemed to accept or decline these desires to interact largely on the basis of the incumbent’s district “personality”. Those offices that were less aggressive with their own constituents were likely to be as distant to individuals seeking interaction even on the incumbent’s main legislative issues. While offices that were more aggressive had fewer geographical qualms about who was, and who was not a constituent.

information and 'talking points' with the hope that notable elite constituents would pressure the incumbent to support the association's viewpoint. Then there was a banker from C's district who made frequent trips to Washington and calls to C's legislative staff. All of his political activity was "done through the association." This increasingly common lobbying technique appears to be built on what I observed to be a surprisingly similar level of political apathy amongst elites as exists among average constituents. The elite constituent merely joins an organization ranging from the NRA to NARAL to the Chamber of Commerce and waits for his or her email account or fax machine to send them the appropriate material and they will log the appropriate phone call.

Other district elites suggested that they interact with incumbents based on whether they were "inside" or "outside" on issues of importance to them. Incumbents who were "inside" implied that they were on the right committee and can do something for their interests. If the home incumbent had an "inside" position on issues of concern to national associations then that constituent would be prompted to be highly involved with the incumbent enterprise. If the home incumbent was merely an "outside" member on that particular issue, the lobbying was applied minimally to perhaps gain an additional vote cushion so the association could get things passed in committee or on the floor, or to put pressure on the party leadership to move a bill along. One example was a company president from B's district did not think that it was very productive to work on outside members and their staff and so he rarely interacted with them. Amongst these more 'national' elite constituents, there was a greater sense of apathy about their general relationship with the incumbent and staff.

While it initially appeared to me that this style of elite interaction was antithetical to the enterprise coming to understand the nature of constituent interests, I realized that this was not always the case. In return for dancing with these minimal, direct and simplified expressions of constituent preference, thereby pleasing large national associations, some incumbent enterprises could reap the substantial campaign resources that these organizations would direct to incumbents who supported the ‘pleas’ of the ‘nationalized’ constituents. These resources can be directed through national PAC contributions, soft money contributions to the home state political parties on behalf of the incumbents, or even bundled conduit checks that the national association will pressure the ‘nationalized’ constituents to give to their home incumbent. In short, “Astroturf” lobbying saves them the trouble of interacting with portions of their constituencies. Not all elites, however, are reliant upon national associations to tell them when to be active and defend their interests. More savvy elites understand that building a relationship with the incumbent enterprise will result in better access to the incumbent (through the staff) and perhaps even an impact on the incumbent’s decision-making process. A prominent attorney from C’s district suggested that he had both personal and “national” political interests and that his information and motivation for each came from different sources. It was evident that his local contacts facilitated his national interests. Staff members figure in to this equation because they can develop those relationships and help constituents gain access to the member’s schedule and inner sanctum.

#### Material

A personal material incentive. A second group of elites appeared to be active because of personal material incentives. The most extreme of these examples was a rare case where

a constituent expanded his relationship with the incumbent to the most personal level where they were cooperating on an investment opportunity that would reward them both. The constituent had hoped to use his capital and the incumbent's knowledge of government assistance programs to procure funds from a quasi-public government-assisted housing project. Ultimately the project did not materialize, but the constituent had clearly become an integral part of the enterprise as a result of his personal interactions with A. This type of situation, where a constituent seeks to capitalize on the knowledge and position of the incumbent enterprise, is most likely exceedingly rare. I saw no other examples approaching this level of personal interaction. While certainly elites entertain notions of profiting from incumbents' positions, ethics restrictions place conflict-of-interest boundaries firmly around many such joint ventures. This is not to say, however, that constituents do not seek to profit from their relationships with incumbents.

A more likely example was a constituent of B who became engaged in his enterprise because of B's support of the constituent's efforts to make the flower he grew the "national" flower. A combination of efforts by the local association and guidance by B and his local staff culminated in a national push and success on the part of this constituent, who had previously been politically inactive. Clearly he gained materially as a result of efforts by B and his staff. Consequently, this constituent became a key element of the enterprise. Another example was a constituent who was an active supporter of E because of his involvement in oil and trust issues. While he disagreed with many of E's political stances, his larger motivation was simple; "why would I want to replace him? He's been so good to me." This constituent continued his pragmatic

(and integral) relationship with A. Elite contact with the incumbent's enterprise also cycled around the ebb and flow of their legislative interests. G's office noted that elites in their district stepped up their interaction with both incumbent and staff months in advance of a telecommunications bill that would have a tremendous impact on their livelihoods.

Materially guided constituents such as these are only marginally more common than the constituent who sought to use the personal position of the incumbent for gain. The ethics limitations provide part of the explanation, but I also believe that incumbents and staff do not generally want to have too many "integral" relationships with elite constituents. One might imagine an incumbent enterprise that includes the incumbent, a few key federal staff and campaign employees and then twenty or more "integral" constituents who demand access to the incumbent. This type of enterprise could become unwieldy. Fortunately for incumbents, not many elites seek out relationships of this depth, probably because there is simply not much that a single member of the US House of Representatives can do for them as compared to the impact that a number of state legislators can have on their community or business interests, especially when one considers the more "bang for the buck" that contributions can have in substantially cheaper state legislative races.

Or community material incentives- the 'locals'. A different type of material incentive was found in elites who supported the incumbent not so much for "self-preservation" or their own company's bottom line but more for the development of the larger community. The 'local' elites are the community builders that incumbents often willingly partner with, some out of an electoral motive, others for the good of the community. Elites will



interact as 'locals' for varying sets of rationales, but usually because of a desire to improve the local area. They comprise the membership of community boards, charitable organizations, and private-public cooperative ventures. I observed considerable variation in the degree to which community economic elites worked together to improve the area's fortunes.

What the community elites tended to share with the more 'national' elites was a desire to keep the incumbent in office, so that increased tenure could bring the protection, perquisites and budgetary power of a senior legislator. What set the 'local' and the 'national' elites apart was that the more 'local' elites seemed to place a higher value on interactions with incumbents and their staff. Consequently, elites of this type seemed to express a concern for competent district staff that hears and understands their concerns. One of A's constituents suggested most of his interaction with staff and incumbent is to "lobby" for local community. As a travel agent, what benefits the community is indirectly good for him. Similarly motivated constituencies were found in the several military communities found within A's district or in inner city districts, like F's, that were similarly reliant on federal program dollars. There was sentiment within A's military community that it was important to keep the incumbent in their "hip pocket." Furthermore, I found that in communities that were represented by more routine enterprises with limited interest in pursuing cross-jurisdictional issues, the 'local' constituents tended to emphasize their relationships with state and local officials who could frankly do more for their communities. More aggressive district enterprises, on the other hand, were often the crucibles of community activism and development, even though there was a limit to what these federal staff could actually provide. The 'local'

elite constituents seemed to feel that the district staff enterprise was an equal and essential part of the community. For example, a company president from B's district compared his 'loan' of an engineer to the city for a year for a community project to the potential 'loans' that incumbents regularly make with their staff resources.

'Local' elites welcomed the involvement of incumbents and staff in their community organizations. Here C's large state university made sure that C was an integral part of the community's social and athletic functions, not just those events that had to do with federal funding. With many elites the involvement of staff in community organizations was "reassuring" and if the staff member was felt to be an empowered surrogate of the incumbent then their participation was "as good as talking to (the incumbent)." The involvement of the incumbent enterprise has a two-fold benefit. Perhaps more cynically it gives the community a toehold into the world of federal funding and regulatory assistance, especially on the assumption that incumbents hope to procure assistance for their constituents to make them happy. Here is where staff efforts can figure largely into elite service. District enterprises plainly valued such opportunities to assist their constituents. "Business Forums", "District Economic Taskforces", even "Job Fairs" were commonly found housed in congressional offices where field representatives worked with local government and capital to lure jobs, sometimes public, sometimes private, into the community.

The secondary benefit is that involvement of such a high profile figure brings credibility and visibility. While some constituents dismissed this as largely symbolic, the majority sentiment was that it was greatly appreciated and of real value. Elites regularly

suggested that incumbents and their staff could help with recruitment of “new interested companies” to the district and that it was “good for the community.”

Just as the incumbent who received policy support or personal financial gain from the incumbent’s efforts, the ‘local’ elites also were drawn into the incumbent enterprise because of services rendered. A typical example was one of B’s constituent who worked with B during his first years in office to get federal funding for a dilapidated college in the district. B and this constituent worked closely together on an ad hoc board and helped to identify sources of private and public funds to keep the institution on its feet. The relationship continues, many years later, with the constituent now an element of the district enterprise.

The risk of not supporting incumbents. “We like to know and keep our member of Congress.” “We try to be apolitical, but we will support the current incumbent.” The opposite side of the equation is a district that gathers around an incumbent and treats him or her as a valuable community resource. In this scenario, supporting a challenger is a risky proposition. For starters, incumbents rarely lose, so challenging incumbents risks alienating a political force that can be an asset to a community. This chapter earlier established that the district enterprise is a useful tool to elite constituents, providing it with information, access and a ‘political library’ of knowledge in the staff themselves. More importantly, the status as an asset grows over time. Elite constituents frequently expressed their desire to support seniority. For some, the actual person occupying the seat was distinctly secondary in importance to the seniority that they were acquiring. This is especially the case with districts that are heavily reliant upon federal funding. Communities such as A’s military interests go to great lengths in the home states and in

Washington to protect their interests by all means possible. For those elites with a partisan or philosophical attachment to the incumbent, there is also a risk in not supporting the incumbent. An incumbent House member can become an important figure for an area's political environment; shaping and recruiting state legislators and other local candidates, providing a leadership figure. Their demise would have an impact on the 'local' shade of politics.

Limits to how far elites will go. Despite the advantages that can accrue to a community or individual constituent from supporting an incumbent, many elites suggested that federal officeholders have a truly limited 'local' impact. Consequently, many elite constituents, especially those motivated mostly by material issues are likely to be more active in state politics. The first reason for a more 'local' political attention derives from the fact that funds for transportation, education and community development projects are much more commonly found at the state level than the federal. And in terms of private businesses, unless the constituent represents the interest of a major corporation, state regulations and grant programs are also going to be paramount. The second reason that many elite constituents are more active locally is that campaign finance laws favor their presence there. With much higher contribution limits and smaller spending on individual legislative races, an individual constituent or company can have a substantial impact on a single candidate. Given the cost of congressional campaigns and the direct limitations imposed by campaign finance laws, it is difficult to generate a comparable level of leverage. As I just stated, playing at the state level gives an elite constituent more "bang for their buck." And yet individual constituents do continue to incorporate themselves with incumbent enterprises, not so much because of either purposive or material reasons.

For some, involvement in federal politics provides a more socially desirable form of participation.

### Solidary

Some elites feel a social compulsion to become active components of the incumbent enterprise. It appeared to me that there were two different groups of constituents who felt this solidary pressure to interact with politicians. The first group was the more obvious partisan-types. This is a group not wholly unlike those elites mentioned above who were driven to interact with incumbent and staff because of policy agreement. The solidary elites' involvement stems more from a sense of belonging; belonging to the local party or to the incumbent's campaign enterprise, or being the local "opinion leader". Elites with these motivations present themselves as natural targets for staff and incumbents who come to the town or neighborhood. The fact that certain elites present themselves to the staff to act as their connection to the community should probably give staff some pause, as it may be hard to reliably determine whether this constituent is actually someone who can serve as a conduit to the people or is simply the local political 'hack' that leads the "opinions" of no one. It should also not be forgotten that incumbents are human beings too; they have personal friends just like anyone else. And these personal friends also feel a social motivation to be part of the incumbent's enterprise. One elite constituent attributed his participation in B's enterprise to a friendship that came partly from politics and partly from his personality. The partisan activist, local "opinion leader" and personal friend comprise the most loyal core of a politician's base.

A second, and more unique set of solidary elites, are a group that might be referred to as political players. Some of the elites that I observed had a desire for access and

attention that seemed to derive much more substantially from personal ego needs than for any purpose or material satisfaction. This class of elites was driven, as one put it, by a desire to be “part of the team” or the “inner circle” as another elite put it. The fact that this group are largely much more advanced in terms of socio-economic status perhaps frees them from the constraints of having to worry so much about material and purposive issues; they are safe in their position and can move on to other interests.<sup>9</sup> One of these political players suggested to me that “if somebody gives you a dollar, you’ve got their vote, if they give a thousand dollars, you’re not so sure.” This latter half of solidary elites is quite different from the former in that purposive and material differences with the incumbent are less likely to cause dissonance. In particular, I observed trial lawyers and bankers who were long-time financial patrons of Democratic causes interact with A. Confronted with the prospect of an entrenched incumbent from the opposite party, the political player has to search for other avenues to alleviate their social needs. Alternatively, this behavior raises some serious questions about political participation if some elites are willing to subordinate the other motivations to their need to be part of the game. I will return to this question in Chapter Six.

Like the incumbents and staff themselves, elites varied in the extent that they utilized interactive relationships. As was discussed in Chapter Three, elites, like staff, will be active for personal, solidary or community reasons and some will be more aggressive and frequent in their interactions than others (in office visits, calls to Washington, emails to

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<sup>9</sup> I should also not dismiss the probability that ‘players’ like this seek access that will be utilized at later dates and on very specific issues that will suit their material or purposive interests substantially. In the short term, they may mask those desires to develop the relationship and guarantee access for the time that they will most need assistance.

the incumbent). One common factor, however, seemed to be that elites shared a greater level of comfort about contacting the enterprise than did average constituents.

### Staff motivations

Offices are the same to the extent that they all must serve

The basic purpose of the district staff enterprise is to serve the needs of the constituency. To the extent that elite interaction takes place in most congressional district offices, it is utilized as an efficient means to interact with constituents on a variety of issues. One should also not forget that district staff members interact with constituents, elite or otherwise, to a much greater degree than do incumbents. Some of these issues that staff work on include transportation, health and military issues, not to mention other political matters. As one of E's staff suggested, his basic role is to act as a "trouble-shooting mediator" and help constituents resolve these issues. Observations suggest that district staff do more than this simple depiction. While district staff have similar jobs by definition, they pursue them in different ways and for different motives.

But staff motives vary

Incumbents have different demands. The most basic impulse driving elite interaction seemed to be whether the incumbent desired that the activity was performed. Chapter Three revealed that some incumbents have more aggressive or proactive enterprises. While virtually all of the ranking district staff members (RDSM) conducted some elite interaction, they clearly were not equal in the amount that they were aggressive or out in the field. The disparity was even more notable amongst district directors (DD) and field representatives, not to mention the friends and volunteers who serve as surrogates for the incumbent. Some incumbents have greater demands for elite interaction. Where

incumbents expressed this desire, staff appeared happy to comply. Although I did observe some frustrated staff in the more routine offices who truly wanted to be more proactive with the constituency groups in their area, for the most part even they complied with their employers' demands and limited their interactions to minimal levels in order to concentrate on the routine activities. Staff motivations for elite interaction are driven in large part to comply with the demands of their employers. There are, however, other motivations at play.

Extracurricular activity. Some district enterprises had greater level of elite interaction because the staff members put themselves in situations where they “bump into” elite constituents. Like the incumbents, staff members are involved on community boards, public-private partnerships, and they run the “cocktail circuit” as well. In short, staff members can live in the same social world as the incumbent.<sup>10</sup> Some district staff members had greater levels of extracurricular activity in their communities. Yet, there were different motivations driving this activism. For some, membership in organizations was a result of stronger communitarian impulses, they want to be involved for the sake of civic good. For others, attending civic or social functions was a way to represent the incumbent or put themselves in situations where they could interact with elite constituents. Some of these staff suggested that the incumbent wanted them to “find out what was going on” with particular groups or communities. Still others were active in the community for their own personal reasons. What is certain is that the motivations of the

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<sup>10</sup> While I would note that the similarity is usually confined to those staff members at the top of the office hierarchy, there were clearly exceptions to this rule. It is not only the RDSMs who “bump into” elite constituents in the social settings. I observed field representatives and caseworkers interacting with these constituents in settings ranging from meals in restaurants, to a basketball game, to business social functions.



individual staff members' themselves, had an impact on how "aggressively" they interacted with elite constituents.

Because staff are 'rational' actors. To understand the roles and functions of the district staff, one must not simply assume that the entirety of staff behavior is driven by 'rational' incumbents solely out of a desire to be re-elected. They too are 'rational' political actors with their own goals and motivations. Some staff appeared to be interacting with elite constituents out of a dual purpose; for their employers and for themselves. Malbin (1980) showed that staff members develop close relationships with interest groups in Washington in order to facilitate their own careers by improving their incumbent's legislative success. This same principle applies to the district staff and their courting of the elite constituents. By interacting with elite constituents, they perceive that their behavior is communicating a helpful image for the incumbent and boosting his or her approval throughout the district. This interaction not only allows them to maintain their employment but it also satisfies personal desires to exercise power by developing ongoing relationships with elected officials, business leaders and directors of community organizations. In some cases the motivation could be even be driven by a desire for future political office. This is the case especially for those staff at the top of the office hierarchy, the position and access allow the individual to become something of a "semi-incumbent." This access provides them with a "launching pad" (Macartney, 1975) for future political careers of their own. For instance, one of E's field representatives remarked that the RDSM of that office performed tasks "as much for himself as for the incumbent." His interaction with elite constituents allowed him to form his own personal coalitions and leave him well placed should the incumbent step aside. Elites in the district

confirmed that they would not have been surprised if the staff member assumed E's place in Congress at some point in the future. In congress today, there are a significant number of members who came to the House directly from staff positions. I would argue that these aggressive district staff are well-suited to replace the incumbent because they: 1) have spent considerable time relating to the issues that the previous incumbent had successfully spoken to, 2) interacted extensively with the relevant individuals in the district who know and care about those issues, and 3) they have connections to people who are important at the local levels, like elected officials, interest group leaders and campaign contributors.

This is not to suggest that all district staff have political ambitions. Others may have simple progressive ambition within the office. Or, they may have desires to go to Washington in the future. One staff member mentioned a case of "Potomac fever" which meant a journey to Washington if the "offer was right and other family concerns could be worked out." It is also possible that this ambition can be altruistic. One staff member related that if the incumbent moved up to a statewide office that she would "like the opportunity to work for the whole state." There are a variety of ambitions present in district staffers. One should expect to find this when considering that district staff members work for a class of people who are, in large numbers, driven by "progressive ambition" themselves. It would be surprising if some of this did not rub off on their staffs.

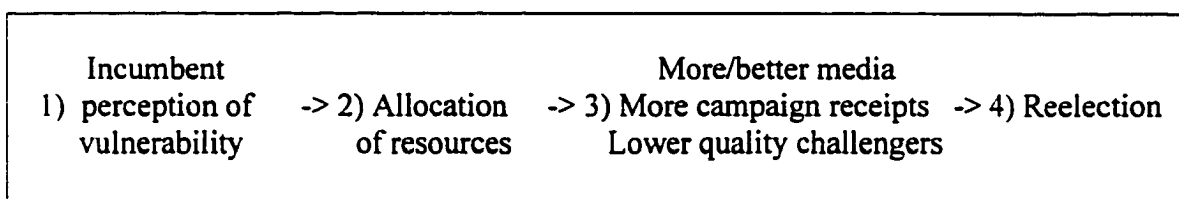
The previous pages have demonstrated that the variation in elite interaction that takes place between offices is largely rooted in the motivations of incumbents, staff and elite constituents themselves. It would now be instructive to sketch out a potential model of

incumbent/staff/elite constituent interaction. Once that model has been described, I will discuss the specifics of elite interaction.

#### A model of incumbent/staff/elite constituent interaction

As was noted in Chapter One, there is a substantial body of literature that deals with incumbency advantage. I would suggest, however, that the most two common themes of this work focus on the perceptions and behavior of the incumbent as a lone political figure or the aggregate impact of campaign contributions and advertising. Literature that details factors such as the non-campaign resources of the incumbent and the factors promoting or deterring quality challengers are practically “hidden” from view. I would argue that an overwhelming portion of the literature on congressional elections is comfortably presented within the confines of Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 The traditional interpretation



(1) Incumbents behavior is largely driven by a perception of electoral vulnerability. Some of the literature even suggests that this can be the sole motivation. (2) Based on the uncertainty, incumbents allocate resources to secure their electoral positions. Resources such as travel home, office budgets, the amount of legislation passed, and the amount of casework performed, all qualify as “allocation of resources.” Because of their uncertainty and a desire to increase name recognition, incumbents have allocated increasing levels of resources over the past three decades. Yet, these allocations are

much less central to most explanations of incumbency advantage than are the factors of step three. (3) Because of their increased name recognition and active campaign behavior, incumbents receive favorable media, raise more funds, and face lower quality challengers. Some studies assert that one, or a combination of these factors, are the overwhelming causative factor of step four. (4) Ultimately, the perception that drives incumbent behavior tends to result overwhelmingly in their victories at the ballot box.

While I don't fundamentally disagree with Figure 5.2, this dissertation suggests that more specific analysis of the resources that incumbents allocate, and their independent impact on the outcomes is necessary. I would suggest that it is not one of the above factors, or even a combination of the above factors, so much as it is all of the factors working in unison. Many of the assumptions from 5.2 focus on the period of time just before the election. The initial eighteen months of a congressional term are taken for granted, serving only to take some initial positions and begin to raise campaign contributions. This dissertation holds that important determinants of the election outcomes are determined during this early period, and they are heavily influenced by the interaction of incumbents and staff with elite constituents. Susan Webb Hammond (1984, p.281) speculated that legislative staff are an "intervening variable" and that we need to see their effect in helping incumbents win elections. Here is just such a model.

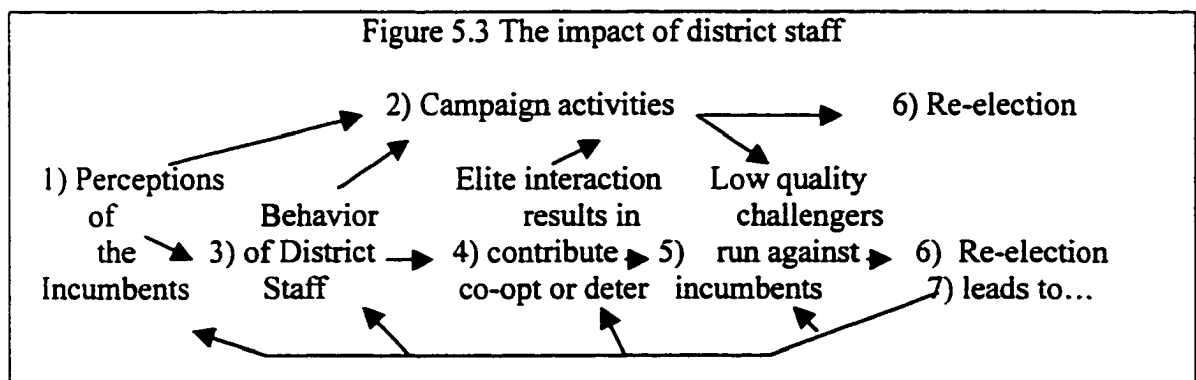


Figure 5.3 demonstrates how an active incumbent and staff can have an impact on the final outcome at a much lower cost than the traditional model. When I say cost, I am comparing the relative impact of tens of thousands of dollars in federal staff salaries as opposed to hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign advertisements. Figure 5.3 shows that elite service, high name recognition and lesser quality challengers are all interrelated and impact reelection. Most importantly, they are all affected by the elite interaction of staff. (1) This model starts with the same assumption as Figure 5.2. (2) And it certainly agrees that one cannot ignore the campaign activities, the ads, finances and other campaign efforts. However, these factors are largely confined to six months of a two-year term and there are other significant activities that take place during that first eighteen months that will impact step two. (3) The fundamental distinction of that eighteen- month period is whether the district staff enterprise takes an aggressive or routine stance in regard to their district functions, especially the nature in which they engage elites. Engaging the 'right' people in the enterprise early in the term helps to ensure that these individuals will be around to assist with the campaign activities. Alternatively, not interacting with these individuals might make them more likely to be involved in an opponent's campaign. One should also not forget the role of district staff in the campaigns (nor their potential desires to run for office). Interacting with local elected officials, journalists, and party figures helps to set the stage for later campaign efforts. (4) aggressive elite interaction by staff contributes to the likelihood that elite constituents will either be co-opted into the incumbent's enterprise, or be deterred from

running against the incumbent or supporting a potential opponent. (5) The real consequence is that these behaviors help to lower the quality of challengers. In addition to the fact that incumbents are able to raise far more resources for their campaigns and are able to get far more favorable “free media” attention for the activities, incumbents have the staff resources to effectively begin their campaign to elite constituents nearly two years before the election takes place. Because of these benefits, many would-be quality challengers simply opt not to run or cannot generate any financial or media interest in their candidacies and then they withdraw. In sum, more staff and more aggressive staff result in lower quality challengers. This serves to reinforce the financial disparity of the traditional campaign variables in Step Two. (6) The end result is as the literature already identifies; incumbents get reelected frequently and by wide margins. (7) Finally, their re-election margins have subsequent feedback effects. They have an impact on the incumbent’s perception heading into the next term. They have an impact on how staff members are utilized and the attitudes that they have about their jobs. They have an impact on the desire of elites to be part of subsequent election campaigns. And finally, they have an impact on the decisions of potential challengers and their patrons at the local and national level.

While I am not arguing that district staff are the main causative factor in this model, my observations suggest that their interaction with elite constituents are an integral element in the re-election of incumbents. This interaction is an integral element of the incumbent enterprise because it brings four key benefits: 1) surveillance of the district, 2) support of constituents that “matter”, 3) vital campaign resources and 4) the on-going support in future terms that allows incumbents to focus on other activities. Chapters

Three and Four demonstrated that some incumbents and staff members perceive a greater political value in these activities. Consequently they perform them more often and more effectively. I now turn to those four benefits.

#### What it brings 1: Surveillance of the district

The function of elite interaction is an overtly political activity for some field staff, especially when they are conducting surveillance for opposition and issues while on “Main Street.” The first benefit of district staff is that they provide surveillance of the district for the incumbent. Two of the fourteen district staff functions identified by Macartney (1982) were to “organize and surveil” the district. Yet Macartney’s work failed to fully grasp the significance of this function, and he limited his discussion of these important tasks to only one page of his dissertation. As opposed to simply collecting the specifics of issues and concerns of their constituents, I suggest that the surveillance function is the most basic of district staff. For the aggressive staff, surveillance is a function that tends to occupy a greater percentage of their time. They are out of the office more frequently, attending more meetings, dropping by on constituents more often. And for aggressive staff, the surveillance function actually tends to be more of a proactive activity with staff communicating to constituents as much as they are listening. In either case, because the average incumbent spends thirty to forty weeks per year in Washington, he or she is reliant upon staff for information about the district.

Incumbents rarely at home, so reliant upon staff for information

Staff are the “pipes to the faucet”

“We have to be the eyes and ears throughout the entire district, because C is not here frequently.” During a tour of a faucet plant in A’s district, his field representative remarked to me that he felt as though he was the “pipe to A’s faucet.” The tour provided an inspired analogy, suggesting that he takes tours, phone calls, and visits with individual constituents as a way of providing A with a view of the ‘plumbing’ of the district. A then is able to determine when and where he will direct his staff and legislative efforts to assist his constituents; to “turn on the faucet” if you will. Staff members have to listen to the issues and talk to the decision-makers in their district’s communities. Incumbents often want to know the impact of federal legislation on their constituents, and the district staff members are the quickest way to accomplish this task, although Chapter Three suggests that some incumbents value this information more than others and use their offices more “aggressively” to interact with constituents. For the aggressive offices, acquiring information about the state of the district was a relatively straightforward proposition. Yet, every district enterprise had at least some intelligence-gathering function to assist the incumbent. As was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, elites provide district staff with a ‘cheaper’ way of interacting with their district’s communities. While the staff are expected to be the “eyes and ears” for the rarely home incumbent, the elite constituents should also be considered part of this surveillance function. With a less aggressive enterprise such as B’s or C’s, where staff members are rarely out on “Main Street”, it is vital that local elites communicate with incumbent and/or staff. One of B’s



constituents noted that his district operation was very reliant upon this type of information because his staff members were so infrequently out in the community.<sup>11</sup> A field representative from C's office confirmed their dependency on district elites with her discussion of a university official and a local reporter who acted as "receivers to convey information to C" about important activities in their areas.

### They watch for issues

At the most basic level, the purpose of elite interaction is to surveil for significant issues. These may be issues that are coming up for votes in Congress. When staff and incumbents interacted with incumbents, the discussion would quite frequently center on discussions of current hot political issues and how they would affect their communities. For example, one business owner echoed a common question in asking: "I'm worried about health care, what's going to happen?" The staff member involved here suggested that his travels into the district helped him listen to constituents and identify issues where he and E should be focusing their attention. Assuming that this interaction was more than passing conversation, staff would usually follow-up with constituents with either a quick letter or maybe a phone call from the incumbent. In more organized offices, that incumbent's name would be flagged as an individual who was concerned about an important issue in case the office wanted to mobilize concerned citizens or seek their input.

District staff members interact with elite constituents for the purpose of uncovering issues that could potentially lead to new legislation. In the case of one of A's constituents, district staff worked to understand how he was affected by the RTC, and

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<sup>11</sup> B suggested that his staff keep him in touch with district issues with a regular unsophisticated "poll" that he has them take through random calls to constituents. While this is a cute form of community interaction,

whether there was any way that they could change the system for individuals with similar problems in the future. Finally, district staff members were even seen inquiring about issues where there was very little federal jurisdiction. As noted in Chapter Three, some staff members assist with cross-jurisdictional issues and even purely local issues. In these cases, they may perhaps be a federal grant or regulation that was overlooked. This is a supplemental element of the 'eyes and ears' function; elite surveillance helps to bring the community together. As noted above, elites like to build their communities. They may even realize that the incumbent may not be the appropriate individual decision-maker to help resolve an issue but they can act like the crucible to bring everyone together, especially in a district with homogenous communities of interest. More likely, however, district staff members are interacting with elite constituents here so that they can keep the incumbent apprised of the local environment.

They even look for tidbits of information

Surveillance is not necessarily focused entirely on major substantive issues in the district. In one instance, one of E's field representatives had a conversation with a local newspaper publisher about the high school team winning the state basketball championship. He mentioned that he would have someone tell the incumbent and a congratulatory note would be sent to print in the paper. These little tidbits of information are used by the incumbent enterprise to 'congratulate' their constituents and they are also passed along to the incumbent so that he or she can utilize them when next in that community.

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it is certainly less aggressive and useful than walking "Main Street."

But mainly they are looking for people, especially elites

While some district members staff suggest that elite surveillance is nothing more than “maintaining contact with the voters” of the district, the more aggressive staff will utilize elite interaction to identify key individuals in relevant communities and build relationships with them. The difference between these two perspectives is attributable to their motives. While the former seeks to merely represent points-of-view within the district, the latter staff member is seeking to both identify issues in the community as well as expand the incumbent’s enterprise by ‘slicing’ elites from new constituency groups or communities where the incumbent previously had no contact. The aggressive enterprise will seek out local government officials, journalists, business leaders and community activists who will help them fulfill the need for contact and information. These types of individuals can provide intelligence to the staff and incumbent about the social and economic status of their community, as well as other valuable political information. One of A’s constituents regularly met with staff, as he did previously with E. They have lunch a couple of times per month and he “requests or suggests information...without even knowing it.” He acts in some ways as a “hearing post” for the staff member and tells her the impact of things and what people are feeling.

The aggressive offices were more likely to be concerned about the types of people with which the incumbent and staff were interacting. While a more routine office such as E or B relied on one long-standing contact in a community, the aggressive enterprise was more likely to have multiple contacts and was continually working to identify new groups and issues within communities. A more aggressive office, such as H’s, were more active in their surveillance with their “key people” so that they could identify problems and

assist as much as possible. I would suggest that the incumbent and staff must think about whom they are spending time with. It is not profitable to meet only with people who tell you that you are doing a good job or going to meetings where your partisan opponents scream at you. Consequently, it puts the onus on staff to identify and interact with real people or elites who can be honest. Staff members are also under pressure to find and interact with the “right” person, a constituent who is both well placed and well respected within an institution and can be a useful element of the district enterprise. This realization was seen most clearly in A’s transformation away from an operation based around highly publicized Town Hall meetings toward smaller, private interactions by “Walking Main Street”. His COS offered that this transformation took place because they were “interacting with people who were their fans” and that they “weren’t meeting new people...but were getting screamed at by left-wingers.”

Ultimately though, the hope is that the elite constituents will become contributing elements of the incumbent enterprise, providing surveillance, campaign resources and ‘leeway’ for the incumbent. These contributions will be further described below.

They’re “conduits” back to voters...

Interacting with elite constituents is a form of two-way communication. Not only does this function assist the enterprise in gathering surveillance about the district and bringing elites into the enterprise, district staff members also use their interactions with elite constituents to pass the surveillance in the other direction. The more aggressive staff will think of elite constituents as “conduits” that allow them to reach out to a wider group of constituents. One of A’s staff members provided an anecdote about an activist who worked in a large nursing home in her area. This constituent would drop by the

office every few weeks where he would share his stories about what was going on there, what kinds of issues the seniors were talking about and how legislation was affecting them. In return, she would relay information about A's efforts for the constituent to take back to the residents. Hence, this constituent becomes part of the enterprise, acting as a conduit by relaying information about A back to a wider community. Elite constituents are not just information sources, they are also amplifiers that staff can use to promote the incumbent.

But there are limits – not all offices do this

As noted in Chapters Three and Four, B, C and to some extent E, had very routine district operations that conducted very little elite interaction. With B and C, even cases where elite constituents contacted the district staff with issues from the district, were invariably “headed off” and sent to the appropriate government office. Staff in these offices did not treat these constituents as sources of information, and especially did not utilize them as conduits back to a wider pool of voters. The more aggressive offices, however, were much more likely to take advantage of these types of interaction because of their potential value to the incumbent enterprise.

Laying the groundwork

The value of elite interaction lies mainly in the fact that it helps to “lay the groundwork” in the words of one staff member. The aggressive staff makes contact early in the term with the ‘right’ constituents. This contact spins off three useful functions that allow staff to do their jobs more effectively. It gives them: things to do in the name of the incumbent, things to do when the incumbent is home and things to “lay the groundwork” for the next campaign.

The initial function is the work that is provided through elite interaction. One of E's staff members "put his face in" by dropping by on elite constituents throughout the district. He suggested that these visits sometimes headed off constituent requests that were headed his way, but for the most part these visits usually created work. From thank you letters, to inquiries and legislative requests, to having the incumbent place a phone call, district staff members demonstrate to the constituents that representation is taking place. This service function is more than simply ribbon cutting and casework. It is also an important political interaction with elites about substantive and major issues that can potentially earn their gratitude.

The second spin-off is material generated for the incumbent's visit home. The routine office is reliant upon formal invitations and the personal activities of the incumbent to interact with constituents. Undoubtedly these two sources will not provide an adequate representation of district interests, especially as the incumbent's tenure in office lengthens and the face of the district begins to change. The more aggressive enterprise, by the nature of their elite interaction, will uncover more things for the incumbent to do, ranging from plant tours, to meetings with community groups to attending social events. Clearly incumbents receive these kinds of invitations, but the aggressive staff will solicit more of them, providing the incumbent with a more complete picture of the district and a more thorough range of options for how they wish to spend their district time. Aggressive staff will also work hard when to "set up" an incumbent when they are in public settings by screening individual constituents to find out their name, issue and an ice-breaking connection between the constituent and the incumbent. Additionally, elite interaction by the staff provides the incumbent with more details about

who the event is for, why it is important, whether their participation would be appreciated, etc. Without district staff, incumbents would have a hard time figuring out where to go, who to see, and what to say when they visit home.

More politically, spin-off helps the incumbent enterprise prepare for the next election campaign. In one sense, the interaction lays the groundwork by building the incumbent's reputation as discussed in Chapter Three. The work by C's staff on housing issues, D's embrace of district groups and A's one-to-one interaction all established with constituents impressions that the incumbents were working hard to represent district interests. Staff felt that these activities "laid the groundwork" because they got the staff efforts "known by the right people." The "right people" are then both useful and willing to help when election time rolls around. Regularly talking to elite constituents helps the incumbent enterprise to evaluate the issues that are resonating in the district. While virtually all incumbent campaigns today will formally begin their campaigns with expensive baseline polls that comprehensively measure district attitudes, elite interaction over the first eighteen months of the term is an effective supplement to that polling. It also can be used to identify highly different community interests within the constituency. Furthermore, elite interaction helps the enterprise to gauge feelings of support or opposition based on their record. Staff members frequently had discussions with constituents about these political concerns: "what have you heard?"; "I've been hear a few years and heard nothing"; and "no worries here." They will also simply ask whether the "incumbent is doing anything wrong?" The surveillance ultimately helps them to look for specific challengers. One staff member said that "these (elites) will be the first to hear about a challenge...and say, hey look there's noise in town" whether they are ardent backers or

not. In some cases, elite interaction might be used to identify potential contributors, votes, and volunteer supporters.

Staff members were unwilling to divulge the degree to which they utilized their constituent files for campaign activities, but second-hand reports confirm that some offices more “aggressively” utilize these materials. For example, a district staff member might help the campaign to assemble a group of “farmers for congressman X” or find a group of teachers who have had problems with legislation sponsored by the opposing party, or senior citizens who have had difficulty with their HMO’s. There are many other obvious examples, but what they all share is that the incumbent enterprise can plug people into the campaign based on their interaction with staff prior to the campaign. Having built the “groundwork” for campaign over the first eighteen months, district staff can spend their campaign time rounding up the money, resources, endorsements and finally the votes of constituents with whom they have interacted. The old campaign slogan “find ‘em and vote ‘em” takes on new significance when one considers the potential lists of constituents that staff can accumulate over a two-year term.

The breakdown in communication between communities and their incumbent perhaps helps to explain the defeats of incumbents such as Kastenmeier and Smith; their staff and surrogates become isolated and the incumbents are no longer touching good arteries of information, all the while confronting a rapid influx of new population and issues. It also can be seen in the attitudes of supporting constituents who become overconfident in the incumbent’s position in the district. As an example, one of C’s constituents suggested that he would be active as the “eyes and ears”, but he hadn’t been in years because C didn’t need it in his area. His office on the whole functioned with less



surveillance than any other office observed. From this perspective, it is perhaps not surprising that a long-serving incumbent, who was held in high regard by virtually every constituent I interviewed and observed, continually gets re-elected with unimpressive electoral margins.

Elected officials agreed that it was important that they be informed about and active in district issues. There were exceptions, however. One final benefit that surveillance brings to the incumbent enterprise is that it puts a buffer around the incumbent. Staff members and surrogates of the incumbent are exposed first to the dirty laundry and dispute resolution in a district so that the incumbents are not prematurely drawn into conflicts or constituent's expectations are raised unreasonably high. In one example, a D staff member attended several meetings about a very divisive local power issue. Unfortunately, it was a local issue where D clearly could do little to help. In that instance that staff member suggested that it was simply her responsibility to let the constituents know that D "is aware and concerned." After evaluating whether assistance or resolution can be procured, the staff member makes a cost/benefit calculation to determine whether the enterprise should be involved, and then either slips out of issue or pushes for resolution. If the latter approach is taken, the incumbent usually becomes involved at the end of the process to accept credit for the enterprise's effort. Most of the staff efforts do not fully mature into a final stage where credit can be accepted. Moreover, I do not mean to imply that in each aggressive office there are five or six staff members doing nothing more than evaluating when and where the incumbent can claim credit for some dispute resolution in the district. But when they do succeed, they are seen as important events and significant opportunities to build name recognition in the district. Realistically, staff

surveillance here is more protective. It keeps incumbents out of issues where there is nothing that they can do to help and their involvement would only serve to disappoint constituent expectations. This is perhaps the one danger of interacting with local elites. District staff members are tasked to watch local elites and their swirling alliances and issues so that the incumbent does not get caught on the wrong side of issues. In one case, B's district staff had to delicately deal with an African-American County Commissioner whose alliance with local Republicans was problematic for others in the community. Ultimately, the staff did what they could to keep B distant from anything involving this particular official. While protecting the incumbent from these types of situations and individuals is largely a positive, an overprotective staff can also be doing a disservice if they do not completely investigate the details and implications and pass them along to the incumbent. Getting caught on no side of an issue is potentially as embarrassing as being on the wrong side, especially with elite constituents who are active in community issues.

#### What it brings 2: Elite Cooptation

The aggressive enterprise not only wants to avoid alienating these key constituents, they want to make them part of the incumbent's team. Going beyond the collection of information, the second benefit or goal of elite interaction is that it co-opts certain constituents who can be of value to the incumbent enterprise. The aggressive staff members are tasked with the responsibility of expanding the incumbent enterprise to include reliable constituent supporters. Clearly not all district enterprises engage in this activity.

Who are the targets?

Some staff visualize their constituencies using the same concepts as the campaigner. Looking out at the district, the incumbent confronts a 'base' of constituents who are firmly supportive, as well as a group who are firmly in the opposing party's base. The latter are constituents that they "are just not going to get." In most districts, there is also a broad middle constituency to which each party appeals. The goal of the incumbent enterprise is to enlarge and firm up the base, make appeals to those in the middle and mellow the opposition. These perceptions also shape the types of behaviors that staff members perform. While this terminology largely refers to the campaign behaviors of incumbents, the more aggressive enterprises used their district staff to fulfill these goals in the early part of their term in office. I echo Serra and Cover's (1992) assessment that service is perhaps best done for those initially not disposed to support the incumbent. They found that amongst casework recipients, 56% would vote for their public servant even if from the opposite party. 96% of recipients affirmed their support for the incumbent if from the same party. My observations of elite interaction confirmed that gratitude was not limited to casework recipients and that it did, in fact, target constituents from outside of their 'base'.

#### The real 'permanent campaign'

The real 'permanent campaign' of the incumbent enterprise is not the fundraising and image management that journalists and much of the discipline generally presume. The real 'permanent campaign' are the efforts of the incumbent enterprise to identify and reach out to constituents through the activities of their federal district staff. The overwhelming rationale behind Figure 5.2 lies in the fact that the literature tends to focus on congressional campaigns as a six month exercise broken up by eighteen months of

down time, with little more than fund-raising going on that has an impact on the next reelection. Fenno (1990, p107) noted the impatience of several campaign aides with an incumbent whom they felt to be a “lousy campaigner.” This difference stemmed from the fact that they preferred the large crowds at the “Safeway over the few on Main Street.” This impatience is the same one that is reflected amongst journalists and much of the discipline. The problem here is a campaign focus. The staff members (and some incumbents) were working ‘Main Street’ for the previous eighteen months. They were not doing these relatively late efforts to put their face in front of large numbers of constituents at the “Safeway” or in town hall meetings or even in television ads. Rather, federal district staff members are continually interacting with elite constituents co-opting them into the incumbent’s enterprise. These are the real “permanent” campaigns.

The literature often reduces the notion of the ‘permanent campaign’ to campaign finance and the resultant campaign advertising. The staff enterprise are discussed only to the extent that they are part of that ‘permanent campaign.’ Macartney (1975, 1982), for instance, talks about the public staff of the incumbents as being the “nucleus” of political campaigns. I would agree that the campaign is permanent and that the public/federal staff members are actively involved in these campaigns. My experience with state legislative races suggests that his observation still applies at that level, where publicly financed staff members spend considerable amounts of time engaged in direct campaign activities, often serving as the only staff on the campaign. At the federal level, however, I would maintain that because campaigns today are so large and specialized, and much more complex and expensive than they were in 1982, that they are usually separate entire arms of the district enterprise. Additionally, the passage of ethics and campaign finance

reforms since 1975 has heightened the distinctions between the two sets of staff. I would accept that in some instances a key staff member, such as C's RDSM or A's DD, switches over to the campaign operation prior to the election. And it is quite common for press secretaries and schedulers to freely make the switch back and forth over time. However, the bulk of campaign and federal staff remain in separate arms of the district enterprise. This dissertation seeks to highlight the efforts of those staff that are more commonly rooted on the federal district staff. But it also looks at those "designees" who live in the 'gray' area described in Chapter Three. In each office, two staff members are permitted to participate in both the campaign and the federal sides of the enterprise. Not coincidentally, these staff members are also the ones most involved in elite interaction.

My argument is that the impact of staff is more sophisticated than Macartney describes. More commonly, the key staff members can do more good working in their jobs in other political ways over the 18 months before the campaign season commences. In fact, some federal staff that might appear to be 'lazy' and uninvolved with the campaign are actually working fifty to sixty hours per week in the months leading up to the election. They are putting in these long hours by attending meetings with constituent groups after work or on the weekends. In short, the aggressive staff member is putting in campaign hours long before the campaign begins. I speculate that staff members today are busier than those thirty years ago because there is more government and more for them to do for constituents, not to mention that there are more extracurricular needs in the community that need to be addressed. If the aggressive staff members have performed these activities, they have fulfilled their campaign roles. Some will then simply fit into in minor voluntary or advisory capacities.

The ‘real permanent campaign’ is especially important because these staff members are resources that challengers largely do not have. Challengers do not have caseworkers, field representatives and press secretaries who will spend two years providing service to constituents, doing casework, cutting ribbons, making appearances at awards dinners, and then advertising that service in the media. Challengers do not have staff that will spend two years interacting with elite constituents, surveying their needs, identifying issues that are important to them, and possibly even co-opting them into the incumbent’s enterprise. Finally, challengers also do not have the designees who are able to freely make the transition from the district staff world to the political campaign.

I should also quickly note that the campaign employees serve as extensions of the enterprise. For the purposes of elite interaction, they tend to be “very reactive” like E’s chief fundraiser. They often work in offices close to the federal staff and associate with them socially, but for the most part, the “networking” that they do is done separately from the district staff. There are strict rules that govern the boundaries. Though there is a formal barrier between the staff and the campaigner, there seems to be a strong relationship between the two elements. The reason that the campaigner is noted here is that in some cases this individual may conduct interaction with elite constituents for much the same purpose as the field representative; to win votes for the incumbent. Albeit, for the campaign people, the primary focus is on raising funds, not serving constituents in the manner of the other staff. The observations also suggested that incumbents have different interpretations of the ‘gray’ area. For example, when C’s RDSM ventured to and from the campaign setting, he saw a completely “other side” of the constituency, with entirely new groups of people and issues. This was a very ethical

approach. For other offices, it was more common for the campaign and federal staff to be the same people, just using different phones in different offices. For the offices that have been more aggressive in their elite interaction over the previous two years, the “other side” is usually much more familiar to them. The political activities of D and A’s RDSMs prepared them for this transition. And once C’s staff member had been to the “other side” he saw many constituents in a “different light.” It came to affect his relationship with them in subsequent business as things were more “openly about politics.”

#### How they do co-opt elites?

Once the elites and issues have been identified, the aggressive staff will work over the duration of the term to recruit elite constituents into the fabric of the district enterprise. I observed staff enterprises to use a variety of techniques to reach out to key constituents, from service, to political discussions, to the actual use of a constituent as a resource. Depending on the sense of urgency and the demands of the incumbents, some staff enterprises will more “aggressively” seek to co-opt elites than other offices. Furthermore, in most offices there was a clear distinction in the types of attention accorded to elite and average constituents.

#### Service

Service to constituents is usually defined as “casework.” It is held to be a routine function that is largely generated by constituents who write or call the office. Yet, service takes place at all levels of the enterprise. In fact, direct service to elite constituents is probably the most aggressive of staff behaviors. Studies that merely aggregate allocation of staff time or function blur the variation amongst individuals and

offices. Many of the district staff, especially those individuals carrying out the aggressive activities, may not account for large quantities of total staff time or personnel, as compared to those who do basic casework. Chapter One identified these types of staff as the “interactors.” Consequently, aggregate coding will under-represent their true importance. My observations suggest that the tasks performed by these small numbers of district staffers are as electorally valuable as the typical “service” activities performed by more numerous caseworkers. These individuals are responsible for identifying community interests and assisting in their development in the name of the member. Their service ranges from regular phone conversations with important constituents to formal or informal meetings and trips into the constituency, to assistance or cooperation with constituents on significant grants or programs. My contention is that we best not judge the effectiveness of service on volume of activity by an office. Rather, we should emphasize the value of a few “interactors” and the service that they conduct on behalf of the incumbent.

While not an exhaustive list, I observed staff in three different service settings with elite constituents. First, staff served elites by taking political requests about a bill or budget item and finding something out for constituents. This service is largely informational in nature. It provides the elite constituents with information about when the bill will pass, what it will look like, how much it will cost, what it will do to their small business, etc. While all constituents are able to receive this kind of information from the incumbents, a request from an elite constituent usually prompted the staff to go a little farther in obtaining suitable information. For example, they called the



Congressional Research Service, relevant committee staff or even asked the incumbent for information to assist elite constituents.

The second elite service was an intervention with a federal bureaucracy on behalf of a requesting constituent. Typically, district offices were observed representing the interests of small businesses within their districts to the Department of Transportation, IRS, Small Business Administration (SBA), or Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC). By definition, average constituents also receive this kind of assistance from the staff. I did not observe any staff that seemed to purposefully delay, ignore or mishandle requests from constituents. But again, the difference is a question of degree. Elite constituents with federal problems seemed to be a higher priority amongst aggressive district staff, they were willing to make more calls and be more persistent with federal regulators. I also observed aggressive staff working with the incumbent's Washington staff to further push constituent requests. While I would speculate that district-Washington contact is a normal interaction made on behalf of many constituent requests, my observations suggested that some constituents merited more calls and attention from more senior Washington staff. Aggressive staff members were more likely to go to elite constituents and advertise their services. Here one can see a clean distinction between C's office not having the time to "create work" versus A's staff visiting with local school superintendents and suggesting sources of impact aid that they would be willing to help procure, or the G staff member whose "specialty" was finding funds to build new post offices for some local 'friends'.<sup>12</sup> And most importantly, aggressive staff members were

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<sup>12</sup> Incidentally, this staffer was able to procure federal funds for five post offices during G's four terms in office.

more likely to invoke the time of the incumbent to make a call in the case of an important constituent.

Finally, district staff on occasion intervened with a state or local bureaucracy that received federal funding. In this case the federal staff were usually pretty limited in what they could accomplish, other than flexing their muscles and hoping to move officials through coercion or inspiration. The routine office does very little to assist in these types of cases, and when they do their activities appeared to be quite limited. For example, one of B's staff members was helping a constituent who was being adversely impacted by a state highway law that required the constituent to take down a substantial numbers of his advertising billboards, costing him business. B's staff member suggested that there was little more that he could do than make a few phone calls. In another example, a rapidly growing town in C's district, less than twenty miles from his main district office, was experiencing significant housing needs to accommodate the new growth. Yet, C's staff had made no contact and the local mayor and chamber director were unaware of C's special interest in housing issues. Another elite constituent suggested that C's staff, as compared to the other incumbents in the area, approached the complex state, county and municipal jurisdictional overlaps as more of a "quagmire" than an opportunity for successful representation. At the other end of the spectrum, E's "Economic Task Force" attempted creative federal innovations to assist in the expansion or relocation of industry to the district. As with the previous two types of service, the difference here again is one of degree. Elite constituents merit more staff time, calls, and the possible involvement of the incumbent. While I did not observe staff undertaking this kind of service for average constituents, some assured me that they did occasionally when they encountered a

constituent that they legitimately thought they could assist with minimal cost in time and resources.

Each of these three types of service to constituents created gratitude. Perhaps the best example of the value of service was seen in the parent of autistic child. This individual was an active labor member (and Democrat) and led an organization of parents of autistic children. Even though this was a local problem in nature, A's staff member made some jurisdictional inquiries and "helped out a taxpayer." When I later pressed her on the interaction she admitted that there was a mixture of motives driving this interaction; she was able to legitimately help a constituent in need at the same time as assisting the incumbent. The parent was now a loyal supporter of A's enterprise.

The staff member that ran E's "Economic Task Force" also realized the utility of her service. In her role as "grant supporter," she felt that her job was vital to the incumbent primarily because she helped to "build the community - - to bring better businesses into the community" and to "show that E has an interest in the district." She was frank in her admission that the constituents she was serving were likely to be wealthier, as well as "opinion leaders" and voters. Again, we see dual motivations at work. While she recognized the good for the community that her work generated, she also welcomed the political support that such activism generated.

Service does not always produce successful outcomes for elite constituents. Based on my observations, the gratitude seems to be generated more from the effort than from the successful resolution of service.<sup>13</sup> So the importance of staff in this instance is that

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<sup>13</sup> There were several examples, however, where staff activities on behalf of some constituents created problems for other constituents. Some districts have heterogeneous and competing interests. B's staff suggested that they walked a "tightrope" between oil and dairy, urban and rural, and even race issues in their district. I observed A's district director maneuver his way through two delicate situations where he

they provide visibility and the means for elites to contact a local or federal bureaucrat and give them the impression that they have more direct access. This is still an important finding in that staff members are an unrecognized entity but that they are out their communities digging up stuff for their bosses to do and representing them throughout the district.

### One-on-One interaction

Interaction with constituents need not be based entirely on requests for service. As was the case with A's staff, and to a much smaller extent with E, attempts to co-opt elite constituents were based heavily on aggressive one-on-one interaction. The incumbent and staff had notable faces that they wanted to drop in on in communities they visited. Examples from one community visit included a doctor, a used car dealer and a property developer. They wanted to assess the political, economic, and social condition of these communities, frequently asking the elite constituents "what do you need from us?" A's district staff had an extremely flexible definition of "office hours" relative to other district enterprises. These staff interpreted the concept of an "office hour" as a chance to get out and mingle with the community. Other staff, notably B and D's, were much more constrained in their visits, often sitting in an empty room or passing small chit-chat with senior citizens for up to two hours. While I noted in Chapter Three that B pursued this function personally, his staff did not. Because A's staff made this penetration of the district an important goal for five of its seven staff members, they were able to obtain a

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was promoting the development of a new prison and a new company to competing towns, both within A's congressional district. Finally there was a case where C's staff requested a Department of Transportation on behalf of a group of concerned citizens. While the requesting constituents were content with C's request, local government and development officials were not. Perhaps the biggest problem created by staff activism is heightened expectations. One of C's constituents detailed the failed efforts of an incumbent who formerly represented the town. While C did not deliver roads or government jobs, he did not promise them. The other incumbent and staff promised several projects and failed to deliver.

much greater visibility throughout the district as compared to that of a sole incumbent such as B or C. The one-on-one interaction is premised on the fact that it is the contact that matters. Sometimes these visits will generate work, sometimes the staff can use the interaction to pass on information from the incumbent, but usually the interaction is performed simply to maintain the relationship. In the case of B or C, the one-on-one interaction was much more personal in nature, conducting visits largely for their own informational purposes, as opposed to any promotional purpose. A's staff believed that elite constituents "were on the team even if they don't know it."

#### Group interaction

D's staff were no less aggressive than A's staff. Instead of focusing on interactions with individual constituents, D's enterprise sought to co-opt elites through their group membership. In the case of D's enterprise, four staff members interacted with various constituent groups as a means of touching the different communities and their leaders throughout the district. Through membership in the health care, aging, agriculture and military communities, the staff hoped to relay to elites in the community that D was effectively doing her job. Each of these four staff were further driven to persuade elite constituents to: 1) include them in the important groups for the issue area that each staff member represented, 2) provide them in-depth information about their issues and groups, 3) get them to work with the incumbent on legislative issues that would benefit both the group and D, and 4) to hopefully procure their endorsements and assistance for the next election.

## Politick

District staff also conducted one-on-one interaction with the elected officials in their areas. I refer to this behavior as “politicking” and is different from the activity just mentioned because of the class of people it serves. Staff members commonly referred to this kind of behavior as “courting the courthouse.” In its most simple fashion, it is dropping by to visit local officials or regularly calling them to discuss their issues and concerns. More sophisticated and aggressive staff will do cross-jurisdictional work to help them get funding or regulatory relief for local projects. The creative aggressive staff members even allowed local officials to share credit for this work. In one case, a staff member pulled together federal funding to establish a veteran’s council but let a state representative take the credit for the initiative. Such behavior solidifies the incumbent’s base and encourages on-going gratitude.

“Politicking” is another of the two-way relationships in which incumbents and staff members engage. In this case, each incumbent (the federal and the local/state) has his or her own personal coalitions. So, underneath each member of the House exist numerous personal coalitions at the state, county and local levels. Interacting with these elected officials gives the staff the opportunity to collect additional surveillance about the district and to pass along information about the incumbent. In a pinch, effective “politicking” with local officials will have laid the groundwork to borrow or utilize their electoral coalitions. If they are ignored, then the phone banks and lit drops in the last few weeks of a campaign might come up short of volunteers. Incumbents “politick” with elected officials for five reasons: 1) It helps acquire information by putting these lower limbs to work gathering information for the enterprise. A local judge in B’s district was an old

rival but because of B and staff attention to him, he became a good “source of information” to B as he has “his ear to the ground all the time.” Many constituents perceived the lower level officials as being more accessible and understanding of their issues. A business owner from C’s district believed that the “higher you go, the bigger the issues, the less contact they have.” Working with local officials allows the district enterprise to reach or understand the kind of constituent who wouldn’t ordinarily contact a federal legislator. A state senator from C’s district who was a personal friend and political supporter of C also suggested that on occasion it was her job to act as a “lobbyist” for their shared constituency. As the business owner noted, the federal staff simply have too much ground to cover, and in a routine office such as C’s they aren’t really even looking to interact with elite constituents. In these cases, it helps greatly to have local officials like the state senator who will represent the incumbent’s interests to local elites and let the incumbent enterprise know when steps need to be taken. 2) To ensure that potential primary challengers below them are happy and unlikely to run against them. The incumbent who doesn’t pay attention to officials below them runs the risk of a primary challenge or an unexcited base. 3) Interacting with other elected officials and their supporters gives the incumbent a mechanism to broadcast a message to his or her base more quickly. For example, one staff member frequently discussed with elected officials the fact that his employer was not like “other” incumbents. This staff member talked about how the role of money, political parties, and interest groups (labor and Christian) are used to demonize opponents but that talking to the locals allowed him a way of saying that “our incumbent just ain’t like that.” 4) Interacting with local elected officials builds a farm team of potential replacements when it is time to move on. 5)

Finally, in a district where there is less of a friendly infrastructure below the incumbent, interacting with elected officials of the opposite party can minimize the damage or threat. A mayor of one of C's larger towns gave distinct "non-endorsements" to candidates running against C because of her respect for his positions and personal contact with her. A's office followed the same strategy with a much more aggressive tact. One of A's staff suggested that he sought out state legislators either at home or dropped by their capitol offices so that at least "it makes it harder for them to badmouth you." It is also likely that local and state officials might come to have pragmatic relationships with incumbents from the opposite party who are unlikely to be defeated or leave office anytime soon. This appeared to be the case by the end of A's second term. The many Democrats of his district had seemed to be moving towards a state of peaceful coexistence rather than risk having A seek out potential challengers for them.

#### Incorporate the elites

One of the most direct ways to co-opt elite constituents into the incumbent enterprise was to give them a participatory role. A common vehicle to directly incorporate elite constituents was found in what some offices referred to as "advisories forums" or "advisory boards." As discussed in Chapter Three, these groups ranged in their size, public openness and utility to the incumbent. The co-optation of elites seemed to take place earlier in the incumbent's career, when they were both searching for advice on new subjects as well as seeking to cement their electoral positions. The example of H is instructive here. Early in his tenure, H recruited elite constituents on a number of issues including health care and transportation. These early advisories were informational events for his benefit. He would spend a morning or an afternoon visiting with a small



group of elite constituents on these issues and solicit their opinions and the attitudes of the district. The impact of these early forums was twofold, while he was clearly using their information to form his own positions he was also inviting these important constituents to become part of his enterprise. Once these elite constituents were given this status, logic would suggest that most would value their continued participation and access to a federal lawmaker. Consequently, they most likely became active supporters of the incumbent. The number of elites involved in the forums grew gradually over the years until their purpose began to change. By the time that H had consolidated his position in his district, the advisory forums were structured more to highlight the participation of the ‘friends’ of his campaigns. They had become large public events where these same elites from his early forums provided informational reviews to groups of constituents. They were more promoting issues consistent with the incumbent’s positions than in seeking to influence him, which is logical given that they had become incorporated in the incumbent enterprise.

#### Observe and anticipate the community needs

District staff also facilitated the co-optation of elite constituents by observing and anticipating community needs. As opposed to waiting to hear from constituents about their potential needs, some aggressive staff set up visits with community political and economic leaders to discuss their needs and push them proactively towards projects that would assist their district. Bankers in A’s district discussed how one of his staff members had “interfaced” with them about A’s positions on their issues and the services that he could offer to their communities. E’s “grants-person” had on-going relationships with numerous cities in the district. She would regularly call together the mayors and any

economic development staff with the leading economic elites of the cities to discuss what projects they were working on and what assistance DM's office could offer. These relationships were institutionalized through "Business Opportunity Fairs" and a "District Economic Task Force" that sought to procure government contracts and private sectors jobs for the district. While E's was generally a routine office, this staff member "aggressively" observed the needs of the district's communities and they appreciated her leadership and follow-up with the community leaders. Other staff used their extracurricular involvement in the community to anticipate potential problems and then take leadership roles in resolving the problems. District staff commonly served in Chambers of Commerce where they could see what types of businesses the communities were trying to recruit. E's RDSM was even the head of the Chamber in the district's biggest city. Elites spoke highly of his innovative programs and the assets that he was able to bring through his position in the federal government. In these cases they locate federal grant programs that would assist them in luring new jobs and grant money to the district. Another staff member was active in the United Way where she too could anticipate projects that local activists were undertaking and bring the incumbent's resources to help on occasion. There were numerous other types of groups that staff members were involved in, some social, some economic. The common factor was that staff members could anticipate the needs of the community and then, through their positions as part of the incumbent enterprise, attempt to marshal resources to help resolve the group's goals. In a number of examples elites who were members of these organizations spoke appreciatively of staff participation. Furthermore, the appreciation

usually recognized the individual staff member as part of the incumbent enterprise as opposed to being a private citizen like the rest of the activist in the group.

The “missing” aggressive staff hurts

The absence of aggressive staff members who pursue elite constituents created clear voids in the incumbent enterprise. I observed missed opportunities and the “fallout” that accompanied them. In one instance, C’s acting RDSM suggested that because they had not filled the RDSM position with a permanent hire, “some voids were not filled because there was no one responsible” for interacting with elite constituents and that there was “fallout” from not having a strong district person. The “fallout” was an increase in requests and projects that went unanswered or were delayed. C, the COS and the RDSM had intended on following up the passage of an agricultural spending bill with a forum on its impact on farmers in the district. In the end, they did not have the time to interact with farmers about the bill. Nor did they assign any other staff members the responsibility of interacting with farmers to at least get their feedback. Even though C had a routine staff to begin, the departure of his RDSM created an even greater void and decreased the already limited amount of attention paid to district elites. Consequently, they received a substantial amount of negative feedback over the next year and his margin of victory shrank noticeably in the rural counties of his district. Several elites in other districts also noted the falloff in service from incumbent enterprises when long-serving staff departed. It is not unreasonable to assert that failing to replace aggressive staff members or turning prematurely away from elite interaction can contribute to defeat at the polls. At a minimum, when elite constituents are not tapped by the incumbent enterprise they are less likely to become active parts of the incumbent’s campaign efforts.

### What it brings 3: Campaign impact

Once the elite constituents have been identified and are co-opted as elements of the incumbent enterprise, they are more likely to contribute vital resources to the campaign. This is not to suggest that only co-opted elites contribute to campaigns. Those elites who derive partisan, policy or material satisfaction from the incumbent's position will likely be disposed to help the incumbent regardless of contact with staff. The argument here is that activities by the staff to identify and work with elite constituents enlarge the class of elite constituents who are committed to the incumbent. The relationship can also flow in the opposite direction. Elite constituents and groups understand incumbents' needs for electoral support, ranging from contributions to endorsements, volunteers and votes. Consequently their efforts to raise these resources and squelch potential issues and candidates of concern help to ingratiate them in the incumbent enterprise. Remember that elite constituents and groups also have motivations and policy needs that benefit from the reelection of incumbents.

For some elites the resources focus on campaign contributions, while for others it might be the ability to give an endorsement, procure volunteers, or work to deter quality opponents from running against the incumbent. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, incumbents strive to get more contributions, endorsements, volunteers and votes from their base, get some of these elements from more independent constituents and hope to diminish the threat emanating from their opponent's base. Efforts to co-opt elite constituents from all three groups were perceived to be effective allocations of staff time and resources that likely paid off at election time.

They contribute resources

### People who control resources

Not coincidentally, many of the elite constituents that staff members interact with come from higher socio-economic status or belong to groups that are politically active and have resources. They are the people who “control campaign resources” (Jacobson, 1997, p34). They are more likely to be able to make significant campaign contributions. Alternatively, they are more likely to be leaders in organizations such as labor unions, volunteer groups or professional associations. As such, they are more likely to be able to mobilize volunteers and organize events for the incumbent. Elites are also more likely to have an impact on how the community communicates. They are the journalists, editors and owners of the district’s media sources. If so, they can provide the incumbent greater amounts of favorable coverage.

Some incumbents conglomerated these individuals into “networks” that extend their district enterprises. While some networks are formal advisory bodies that meet regularly, others are simply fund-raising arms that have no institutional structure. In any shape, these groups reflect a body of district constituents with resources that are interested in committed to the incumbent enterprise. Some incumbents rely upon the leaders of their “networks” to perform many political tasks that they do not want or trust their staff to do. In the case of H, his “network” head was a former head of a substantial Chamber of Commerce who at the beginning took H around to meet the economic leaders of his district, and later represented H’s interests in front of these same elites. As his career and these relationships progressed, H began to involve his staff in these interactions to the point where he now only rarely interacts with people in his “network” for anything other

than fund-raising requests. The district staff now largely handles requests that emanate from CEOs and other elite constituents.

#### Elites contribute for a variety of reasons

##### Favor seeking

Some of the elites who are co-opted into the incumbent enterprise undoubtedly use their access for personal or community gain. Numerous elites expressed pragmatic attitudes about assisting incumbents who did not share their political beliefs or backgrounds. Whether it was an economic or social favor, these elites were largely appreciative of the access they had to the incumbent enterprise and admitted that interaction had an impact on their support. In fact, a business owner in B's district suggested that an active staff and incumbent can "reach the voters" and change their minds with service. In her view, the incumbent and staff serve the district interests, with a focus on "those at the top" and that ultimately word of this service "trickles down" to the average voters. This constituent suggested cynically that service was done with a "bottom line (that was) for campaign cash." I did observe prominent supporters of the opposition party interacting with incumbents and staff. In particular, A and his staff were proactive in their efforts to recruit supporters of the previous incumbent into their enterprise. As noted earlier in this chapter, meetings with Democratic bankers and trial lawyers may have been driven by the elites desire to 'play' in the political arena, with A and his staff providing the best access for them. While it is not likely that many staff or incumbents set out to interact with constituents with the primary goal of increasing their campaign coffers, this constituent's remarks imply that some elites perceive the system in that fashion and that may drive the reality of their contributions.

Some groups are more proactive in their desire to contribute to the incumbent enterprise. In particular one of the military communities in A's district provided a number of examples of their electoral pragmatism. Whether it was abandoning E in his final losing days of a bid for higher office or coming quickly together behind A, elites in this community banded together for effect; to raise campaign contributions and to send a message to potential challengers. I would speculate that groups such as this community, that are heavily reliant on federal government programs, are likely to swing behind the individuals whom they perceive are going to win elections. And almost universally those are the incumbents. By interacting with these groups throughout the two-year cycle, the incumbent enterprise reassures the community that their interests are represented and reminds them of the need to keep an incumbent with seniority continuing in office.

In this sense corporations and their PACs are the ultimate defenders of the incumbency and the status quo. Generally, these were the constituents most aware of the incumbent's seniority and ability to procure funding and regulatory assistance for the constituency. A corporate PAC director from B's district maintained that they supported candidates who are "forward looking" with regard to their product area. With further probing, he admitted that virtually all of their support goes to incumbents. When asked if they would ever support a challenger to B, he "couldn't imagine that scenario" because B qualified his four-part test: 1) He was an incumbent. 2) Furthermore he was the incumbent from their district. 3) He was at least interested in visiting their facility and hearing their position. 4) And they tend to be in agreement on all issues concerning their industry. Because B was affirmative on all four questions, a potential opponent would have to be "pretty impressive." Since incumbents will automatically qualify on three of

the four answers, and they generally support the interests of their constituency, corporate and PAC support is largely a given. Nevertheless, staff interaction with corporate citizens keeps them involved in the enterprise as well.

#### Affirm support

Staff interaction also raises support from new faces in the community. Not every constituent who contributes or interacts with the incumbent enterprise does so out of a sense of material or policy gain. Some constituents who became contributors did so out of a sense of gratitude for the personal attention paid to them by the incumbent enterprise. The parent of the autistic child from A's district and a small business owner from B's district who was given advice and support on a legislative issues ultimately became campaign contributors because of their interactions with the incumbent's staff. In the case of the parent, he actually switched his activism from one party to the other. A more typical recruit, the small business owner was turned from a passive independent into a loyal supporter of B.

The old faces are also part of the incumbent enterprise. People who are social or political friends of the incumbent, or constituents who became part of the enterprise long ago are often the core of the incumbent's fundraising base. For the most part these people need little prompting (or service) to continue their support. Yet, an aggressive interaction with these people keeps them involved and energized in the enterprise. It reminds them that they need to "affirm their support" for the incumbent as one of B's supporters noted. For the most sophisticated elite constituents, staff interaction can be used to persuade the "organizers" to help the constituent in ways beyond their simple re-election. Staff members were observed taking many opportunities to suggest that they



were still vulnerable and could use all the help that they could get in the elections. But in other situations the designees may be more frank in their assessments that contributions can help the incumbent enterprise assist candidates elsewhere and further other goals beyond re-election.

Be careful, same people = same money

Incumbents have a tendency to see the same people, serve the same people and get the same contributions. However, districts take on new personalities with an influx of new population. More commonly, districts change because older constituents retire or move away, either way becoming less dependable supporters. I noted this transition in B's district in particular. It is for this reason that aggressive elite interaction is a good idea. It brings new faces into contact with the incumbent enterprise. Nevertheless, it is sometimes difficult to get a senior incumbent to change their style after years in office. Consequently, not having staff do elite interaction means the enterprise is in contact with fewer constituents who might potentially support the enterprise, laying the groundwork for a potential upset.

Not an unlimited pursuit

My observations of staff and incumbents suggest that the incumbent enterprise does not largely interact with elite constituents for the object purpose of raising campaign resources. While these behaviors do produce sympathetic constituents, I did not encounter any staff members who would admit that campaign contributions were a motivating factor for them. The example of B's newly elected neighboring incumbent serves to illustrate this point. A Chamber official from a town represented by both B and the new neighbor suggested to me that the numerous wealthy Republican oil and banking

officials had been waiting to become part of this new incumbent's team. Yet, after nearly two years, their invitations went unfilled and they had yet to see the new incumbent or his staff. Consequently, "the campaign money was not looking to go to him." This example says that being attentive to community interests is helpful to the incumbent enterprise. But it also says that incumbents and staff are not blindly devoted to service that will generate campaign resources. Despite the fact that the incumbent was apparently aware of whom these constituents were, one could hardly mistake calls or letterhead from banks or oil companies, he and his staff had other priorities to attend. This suggests that incumbents are not always making the most politically 'rational' decisions about their next campaigns, or the new incumbent would have made time to get to this community.<sup>14</sup> This example also concludes that there is an unmistakable value to serving some groups of constituents.

#### They contribute other resources – media and volunteers

Elite constituents can contribute more than finances to fund the campaign. I observed numerous examples of incumbents and staff interacting with elite constituents to influence media coverage and gain volunteer support for their campaigns. For one, B's AA had a relationship with a local newspaper publisher where they regularly attended baseball games when the AA was in the district. At times they were even joined by the incumbent from the neighboring district. The journalist's remarks suggested that he was positively affected by these visits. Another example was E's staff member who interacted with local journalists when he "dropped-by" a community. He would inquire about local affairs and thank the journalists for the positive coverage of E. Interacting

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<sup>14</sup> The same can be said for challengers as well. Even those that repeat campaigns against incumbents are not always likely to do the most rational things during the off-year, seeking out elite constituents, raising

with media figures from the district had a clear impact on the incumbent enterprise in both cases and reflects an important symbiotic relationship for district politics where they each benefited. On the one hand, interaction likely results in more positive coverage for the incumbent. They perceive that the incumbent is “around” a lot and is “in touch” with district interests even if they do not consider themselves supporters of the enterprise. Ultimately, this type of attitude is probably reflected in favorable news accounts of the incumbent that make the challenger’s tasks even more difficult. For the district media, interaction with the incumbent enterprise gives them valuable ‘information’ to fill their airtime or print space. Sometimes the information is valuable access to discuss issues of the day, other times it might be nothing more than an announcement of a minor grant program for farmers or schools. The interaction might also be nothing more than small talk about politics or sports that will not be aired to the district. Incumbents and staff perhaps even prefer this latter type of interaction because it requires limited work and does not tie the incumbent to specific policy positions, while at the same time developing personal relationships with local journalists that might later be utilized to get a sympathetic press release run or an opponent’s story treated more tentatively.

#### They help to further co-opt opposition

The campaign value of elite interaction is not simply to identify elite donors and resources to supplement the campaign. It is also to find potential sources of opposition. Opposition is here defined as problematic issues or individual constituents who might support an opponent. The incumbent enterprise, assisted by elites who have already been co-opted, seeks out elected officials, community activists and other “opinion leaders” who fit into this potential pool.

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campaign contributions, talking to district journalists, etc.

### Mellow the opponents

The most obvious target of opposition to an incumbent is an elected official from the opposition party. A prominent Democratic mayor from C's district offered her "non-endorsement" to C's opponent largely because of his integrity. In other cases it might be possible to win such support through active service by district staff. I observed E's staff in particular making efforts to interact with Republican local officials. While they "vary as supporters of the incumbent" it was clear that a number of them were less than enthusiastic opponents of E. His staff not only was casually interactive with them while they were in town, but they also invited them to participate in the economic development element of the enterprise and suggested that they even shared credit with them on some state-federal projects. The incumbent and staff pursued these officials with an underlying argument that their opposition would be wasteful because the incumbent was so secure. So why not work together for the development of the community? The end result is that the even some of the opposition officials became part of the incumbent enterprise; passing along political information, working with the staff and, generally being helpful to the staff. In one instance, I even observed two local Republicans solicit a staff member's help in getting E to persuade an individual to run for local office. Partisanship was less important here because they were all part of the same 'team'. Most importantly, these officials were unlikely to mobilize on behalf of challengers to E. Elites in the incumbent's party, as well as those outside of the party, recognized the security of the incumbent's electoral position. Therefore, a cooperative relationship was in the interest of both the elites and the incumbent's office. Interestingly, one might even make the case here that interacting with elected officials from the opposition party would save the staff

from having to interact with many individual constituents who are independent of the two parties base. Realistically, most enterprises spent time working on the swing voters instead of opposing partisans they were unlikely to recruit.

#### Entice those in the middle

There were numerous observations of constituents who were firmly independent, or perhaps even regular supporters of the opposition party who became elements of the incumbent enterprise. In some cases they joined the 'team' because it was the prudent thing to do if they legitimately wanted to be involved in politics in that district. These are the constituents from above who have solidary motivations to be political 'players' or 'friends'. Even with these types of constituents, staff had a role to play in that 'players' seemed to demand contact from the incumbent enterprise if they were legitimately going to be involved. One constituent of this type remarked that an incumbent "is only as good as" his or her staff, and that if they do their job correctly, they can "breed locals to be satisfied and content." In other cases, the efforts of incumbents and staff lured citizens who were not active and might not have voted for them, into becoming active contributors to the enterprise. Here the best example is the one of B's constituents who had a legislative request for his floral business. He first interacted with the district staff and then went on to B and his Washington staff. After legislation was passed, this individual began to volunteer on B's campaigns, eventually becoming a key campaign coordinator, assisting with ad production, representing B at events and generally helping out all elements of the campaign. While this is an extreme example, it is not far fetched to imagine that service generates volunteer activities or contributions from grateful constituents. Further testimony to the impact of the impact on constituents was offered

by one of C's staff members. C's RDSM noted that his relationship with district elites changed after he returned to the federal office from his stint running C's campaign. One he returned from the "other side", elite constituents offered more frank political assessments of the district requests for assistance that blurred what had previously been a strict separation between campaign and federal office. That attitude was reflected in the testimony of one economic leader who referred to this staff member as an "excellent campaigner" and a "great contact" that is "helpful" to the city's economic interests (12/23 p4). He made no distinction between the individual as a campaign or a federal staff employee.

While B clearly did not have an aggressive outreach program, the experience of one of his constituents suggests that even casual contact helps, and reminds us that staffs are an advantage for incumbents and a problem for challengers. In this case, a banker from B's district who had a couple of positive interactions with B and his staff on personal issues after he first moved to the district, has remained a supporter despite his general political independence (7/7 p6). When asked if he would support other candidates against B he noted that he "doesn't run in politically active circles so it would be a reach for anyone to call an independent, nonpolitical middle-class banker." Ultimately, when the support of these basically non-political elites coalesces with a base that is engaged, the incumbent is a daunting political force in the district, leaving only the hard-core partisans as a support base. When it comes time to raise resources to challenge an incumbent, the partisan base is not usually sufficient.

Attract all the resources

Perhaps the most important impact of interaction with opposition and independent elites is its impact on potential donations to the challengers. Elites frequently made remarks such as: “Why mess with a good and growing thing?” The constituent who noted this exact phrase was not overwhelmingly a fan of A, but was clear that he would not support anyone else. A prominent attorney who was a personal friend of C’s opponent still supported C because of his interaction with his enterprise, his integrity, and the need to preserve a senior incumbent. The more aggressive and savvy staff realized that there were other constituents out there who might be made part of the enterprise despite the fact that they were seemed to be supporters of the opposing party’s candidates. These ‘other’ constituents are individual with propensities to play both sides of the political fence, but who “stick with good things” when they interact with them. For example, B’s “organizer” mostly supported Republican incumbents. However, he became firmly committed to B and told a potential quality challenger to B that he could not help him. While he does occasionally give small amounts of contributions and advice to challengers, he does so only for prospective reasons. And the assistance he gives is clearly insignificant as compared to his incumbent support. The “organizer” went on to give an example of the one time that he went against this rule and backed a challenger to a liberal state senator whom he’d previously supported. After the senator was re-elected, the “organizer” was quick to build back his relationship and has worked closely with the official and his staff ever since. One of A’s pragmatic players worked both sides and “tried to be vanilla in his approaches.” He was a Republican who heavily supported state and local Democratic officials. As was the case with B’s senator, there does not appear to be any long-term sanction to contributing to both sides for these types of players. A is

unlikely to be upset that his constituent is giving to state lawmakers in his district even though there are possibilities that they might be future opponents. In fact, at some level A might prefer to have donors who are good with the local community so that the locals want to keep both officials and not have them run against each other. At a minimum having donors who play both sides allows the incumbent enterprise to hear rumblings early. The lesson these examples draw for the aggressive office is that they should never write off interacting with an elite contributor based on their party contributions. For the challenger, however, these examples demonstrate the difficult task in lining up a support base to run against incumbents.<sup>15</sup> It was observed that even personal friends and natural constituencies of parties were made less enthusiastic campaign contributors because of the efforts of the incumbent enterprise. Without the support of these individuals, a credible campaign is difficult to mount against an incumbent. Elite constituents can be persuaded to help incumbents not only through contributions or volunteering, but also through simply not offering political support to a potential challenger.

#### They help to deter quality challengers

The cumulative impact of all the functions of staff interaction ultimately come to a head with the final benefit this work procures for the incumbent enterprise; their efforts help to deter quality challengers from deciding to run in the first place. While the literature has established that incumbents rarely face what would be considered quality challengers, this dissertation helps to identify further reasons why these individuals keep themselves “hidden.”

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<sup>15</sup> FEC and Tray.com provide useful tools to analyze the shifting membership of the district enterprise over time. Individual contributors can be identified by name, address or by candidate support. One could use these sites to check to see who was against them in their first campaign as compared to more recent reports.



## Literature

According to the literature, quality challengers tend to appear when there is 1) an open seat or 2) the incumbent's previous election is won by a small margin (Jacobson, 1997, p35). It is a given that incumbents want to avoid close elections. So raising substantial campaign contributions and co-opting sources of contributions/votes/support then is a proactive strategy to deter quality challengers. While the presumption of some of the literature (see especially Cox and Katz, 1996) is to focus on the result of low quality challengers over the "direct influence" of incumbents or their ability to "scare off" challengers, my observations suggest that we should not sell the "scare off" element short. My findings seem more in line with those of Jacobson and Kernell (1983), Jacobson (1997), and Fowler and McClure (1990). At the aggregate level, Jacobson found that potential challengers and contributors are often scared off by the preemptive actions by the incumbents. He believed that incumbency advantage then becomes a "self-fulfilling prophecy" as viable challengers are dissuaded from launching campaigns, as seen in Figure 5.3 above. Fowler and McClure also tangentially demonstrate the impact of these subtle relationships on incumbent advantage. They echo Jacobson in the aggregate, in finding that good challengers are dissuaded from ever launching campaigns. Contextually, they also demonstrate the variables that operate in one district with many "hidden" candidates. I would argue that efforts by staff and incumbents suggest that there is nothing self-fulfilling about weak challengers. Rather, this situation requires work by the campaign to raise finances for reelection and by the district staff to interact with the relevant groups and constituents. Both of these activities feed the increased

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One might also be able to find groups of elites who play both sides and those who switched to protect the incumbent.

name recognition and support that ultimately power the incumbent to victory. The functions described in the pages above suggest that some district enterprises clearly act as causative factors that keep quality challengers and resources “hidden”. They do this by serving potential opponents, or more likely undercutting them by serving their base.

#### Actually serving your opponents

In the spring of 1999, Mark Neumann, a former Representative and rumored challenger to Senator Herb Kohl of Wisconsin publicly announced that he would not be running against the Senator because his staff had done an excellent job assisting his son’s application to a service academy. One might suggest that this is the ultimate example of elite service; actually serve your potential opponent and make them grateful. While there may be other examples of elite constituents who decide not to challenge incumbents because they have been directly served by their staff, I am aware of none and would speculate that these are extremely rare occurrences. Nevertheless, the Neumann example provides confirmatory evidence of the value of constituent service. Serving every potential challenger, however, does not strike me as being a potentially viable strategy. Instead, incumbents can deter challengers by focusing on elites who are independents or are from the opponent’s base.

#### Overwhelm independents

The more aggressive enterprises clearly engaged in staff activities that brought them into contact with the independent elements of the community. A and D’s staff went well beyond their base of supporters with their advisory forums, drop-by visits, interactions with local journalists, and extracurricular involvement. By reaching out to a broader selection of constituents and groups from the district, the incumbent enterprise provides

fewer bases from which a potential opponent might emerge. Attending to the interests of these groups (and advertising them in the co-opted media) is hoped to make them content with their current representation.

#### Undercutting their base

The most aggressive staff even sought to serve individuals from the potential challenger's base. Echoing Serra and Cover (1992), my results confirm the value of serving constituents who are not initially disposed to vote for the incumbent because of their partisan backgrounds. There are limitations to this 'serve-the-enemy' theory. Staff from a liberal Democrat's office would probably not make inroads with conservative Christian activists. Nor would it be a productive use of time for conservative Republican staff members to attend Sierra Club meetings looking to pick up some environmental support. Nevertheless, I did witness Republican staff attending labor meetings and staff from an urban, liberal Democratic office actively working the town halls of the surrounding conservative countryside. In both cases, staff admitted that they were seeking to dampen some of the previous opposition towards the incumbent.

Relationships with the two mayors in C's largest cities resulted in them not "working hard" for C's opponent. Their aggressive support for their party's nominee against C might have impacted the outcome of what turned out to be a very close election. Another firm example was found in the commitment of A's DD to attend office hours in the hometown of their initial campaign challenger. This was perhaps the crudest attempt to actually intimidate or influence a potentially unfriendly constituency. A's staff provided the best example of how a potential opponent's base can be diminished. One small business owner who was actively involved in E's enterprise and contributed to A's first

opponent was reduced to political inactivity in the district. While he still does not identify politically with A, the active efforts of one staff member on two different SBA loan requests have made him “less inclined” to ever support a Democratic challenger. A constituent from H’s district who had received similar service from a previous incumbent suggested that the service even resulted in changing his partisan allegiance to become a “loyal” Republican.

Another set of staff members were more subtle in their efforts to identify problematic constituencies. They combed their opponent’s FEC reports to find what went wrong and identify particular elites or areas where they did not do so well. These findings then had an impact on how they reorganized their constituency efforts for the next term. Several towns and occupations were given a higher priority for attention by individual staff members in the hope that they would minimize their opposition and dry up potential sources of future opposition. They did not shy away from areas or occupations that traditionally identified with their opponents. The impact of these behaviors were seen in the attitudes of an economic elite who had previously been active in Democratic campaigns; her efforts would be spent elsewhere because it was a “waste of time” to challenge a well-funded and popular incumbent whose staff is “working the district hard.” Her advice to the next potential challenger who calls; “Unless there is some screw-up...I wouldn’t advise someone to run against him.”

The minimal goal of the aggressive staff in going to see the ‘enemy’ is to divert opposition elites from zealously pursuing these activities or candidacy; to dry up their resources and potential endorsements. Maximally, their goal is to actually gain the allegiance of some of their former foes. The effect of this work can be seen in a

comment from one of E's constituents, a Republican businessman; "why would I want to replace E, he's been so good to me." The overall consequence of aggressive service work then, is to solidify the incumbent's advantage whether they obtain the minimum or the maximum goal.

My observations suggest that the best advice to incumbents is that elite service is a valuable resource to increase the size of the base, recruit new supporters, and minimize the hostility of the opposition. They would do well to "aggressively" utilize district staff interactions with elite constituents to win substantially, deter quality challengers, and avoid surprising defeats in low-turnout midterm elections. This advice is especially useful because it does not require their time. In fact, aggressive elite interaction not only assists incumbents with their electoral worries, it also grants them "leeway" to pursue their other motivations with an enhanced district enterprise.

#### What it brings 4: 'Leeway' to help incumbents in other ways

##### Use elites and staff for other things after the campaign

If constituents trust their incumbents, they free them from surveillance "until they hear otherwise" (Parker, 1989, p24). This dissertation suggests that aggressive district enterprises let the constituents "hear" what they want through service and interaction. This service does not require thorough depictions of their legislative efforts. Rather they seem to focus on projects that the incumbents and staff are assisting local governments with, or the resolution of individual casework, or the incumbent's efforts on largely symbolic issues. In some ways, it is as if the staff are simply distracting the constituents from other substantive issues. Mayhew believed that incumbents don't have to win on legislation for all constituents, just put up the good fight for people with resources, votes

and endorsements (1974, pp111-125). This seems to be somewhat true for the aggressive staff enterprise and its pursuit of elite interaction.

The fourth and final benefit of elite interaction is the on-going relationship that elites have with the enterprise after the election and as the tenure in office wears on. In a way, elite interaction increases the resources and size of the district enterprise. There are more people gathering intelligence, looking out for the incumbent's interests, speaking highly of his or her record, and perhaps even more people directly supporting the campaign efforts. Consequently, the incumbent can afford to spend less time paying attention to district issues as his or her enterprise is supplemented with the involvement of reliable district elites. If the incumbent has talented aggressive staff in the district and a reliable supplement of elite constituents in the enterprise, they can possibly even transfer some resources to the Washington office to focus on goals beyond re-election.

#### Incumbents have multiple goals

My observations confirmed that incumbents are more than Mayhew's simple (1974) single-minded seekers of reelection. If Mayhew were correct, incumbents would rarely leave home. The tensions in incumbent responsibilities have long been noted. For one, Fenno (1978) depicted three disparate goals for legislators that drive those tensions; re-election, institutional influence, and making public policy. As the powers and burdens of Congress and the individual legislators expanded, so to did the resources they were provided to do their jobs and fulfill these multiple objectives. Loomis (1979) profiled these staff increases and suggested that the staff act as a "small business" in the employ of the incumbent. Salisbury and Shepsle (1981b) added that some incumbents were able to utilize their positions in leadership to procure more resources and reduce some of

Fenno's tradeoffs. Similarly, Kingdon (1981) and Parker (1992) talked in aggregate about resources and efforts at home that "buy leeway" or "allow the incumbent to maximize discretion" on Fenno's latter two goals; institutional position and policy-making. Unfortunately this literature focuses largely on Washington staff. Again, the notion that Washington is where government takes place and home is where the campaign takes place fails to capture the important political tasks of the district staff. This dissertation agrees with the above literature that incumbents have resources and that they utilize them to procure "leeway".

Staff and elites reduce the tradeoffs that are necessary to fulfill those goals

#### Re-elect

If incumbents have effective and aggressive district staff, they can heavily reduce the attention that the incumbent must pay to the reelect function. The aggressive district staff will work to increase the constituents' familiarity with and support of the incumbent. They will co-opt potential support for the opponent, and perhaps even assist to deter quality challengers from running in the first place. The aggressive enterprise helps to relieve the incumbent of re-election pressure by interacting personally with individual constituents (A) or with relevant constituency groups (D). They will seek out elite constituents who desire "constant" relationships and will use their involvement in the community to find relevant issues and promote the enterprise to their friends and colleagues. Elite constituents can enlarge the enterprise and become a presence in the district; the "eyes, ears and voice" in a fashion not unlike the staff themselves. In areas of the district where there are no offices and staff cannot regularly interact with

constituents, elite supporters are valuable “defenders and promoters” of the incumbent. A’s aggressive operation seemed to particularly recruit and interact with supporters in the small and mid-sized cities of the district that do not normally receive political attention. The aggressive staff from a newly elected incumbent will help to persuade constituents of their employer’s sincerity and hard work. The early constituency work of one of D’s neighboring incumbent’s was largely regarded as having scared off a number of quality challengers. In his first bid for re-election, this incumbent faced a third-tier opponent despite the fact that he was a freshman Republican who occupied a district that regularly votes Democratic at the top of the ticket.

Staff can also help incumbents that don’t like to campaign, or who don’t like people. As funny as it sounds, some politicians, especially some of the older incumbents, were observed to not like people very much. More commonly, an incumbent may not know or like a particular part of a district. In larger geographical districts, the aggressive staff can act as helpful surrogates. If they do not, the incumbent must spend valuable time traveling to remote reaches of the district to represent constituent interests, or risk turning these areas into fertile territory for the opponent. While staff in distant areas cannot be total substitutes for the incumbent, they can surely reduce the amount of attention an incumbent must pay to large portions of his or her district.

### Policy

The aggressive staff that interacts with constituents can go beyond a re-election impact and also assist the incumbent’s policy-making goals. The district staff members bring the constituents and their issues closer to the incumbent. Most basically, the staff enterprise has a policy impact because they serve the needs of the constituents, usually



echoing the incumbent's desire to "make good policy." Staff can also assist with this goal while they are conducting surveillance of the district. Their interactions might turn up issues or concerns that could lead to ideas for new legislation. Alternatively, this interaction provides the incumbent, and Congress as a whole, with a picture window overlooking the impact of the laws that they pass. One might even consider district staff to be part of the oversight process. They have a policy impact because they serve the needs of constituents.

Elite constituents can assist the policy impact of staff by helping to "set up" issues. In a sense, supportive elites, especially those in local government offices can be helpful to the incumbent enterprise if they are willing to do the legwork on service requests by organizing meetings, making phone calls, requesting forms, etc. In routine offices like C's, district elites have little choice but to be proactive. Nevertheless, this activism by elites is helpful to the incumbent and staff because it preserves their time. The aggressive office similarly benefits from such elite activism. In either case, the incumbent enterprise is reliant upon the expertise of local elites. In one case a mayor of a large city regularly briefed the local staff on the status of housing and transportation programs in the city and what federal bureaucracies they were working with. In another case a university official regularly briefed the district staff on the grant programs that he was working with the incumbent's Washington staff. He offered that it was useful to him to have informed and proactive staff assisting him in the district, as well as in Washington. The majority of district staff had little exposure to federal, state or local government programs. While intensive training is offered to the staff, it does not measure up to the experience of a mayor or economic development officer who have been involved in the community,

applying for grants, filling out forms for years. The assistance of such elites is invaluable to the incumbent enterprise. If these individuals have not been identified and co-opted, staff may lose valuable time having to learn about district issues, grant applications, etc.

### Institutional

Ultimately the district enterprise assists the incumbent with the third goal by allowing him or her to spend more time in Washington, accumulating the knowledge and contacts necessary to advance within the institution, or traveling to other states to help the campaign activities of potential allies in the legislature. With any of these goals, the incumbent will have less time to spend in the district and will be more reliant upon their staff to represent their interests at home. They may desire a committee chair, a leadership position in the party structure, or simply the weight amongst their colleagues to pass legislation they deem important. In short, the district staff and elite's work provides them with the "leeway" to pursue the goals that they desire most, be they electoral, policy or institutional. E's staff had long accepted that their role freed up his time to work on policy issues and chair an important subcommittee. He rarely returned home and the staff did their best to represent him in his absence. A's rise in the party leadership put his district staff under the same pressures only much earlier in their tenure in office. While they initially struggled with this responsibility, it appeared that their reaction over time was similar to E's staff; they embraced their supportive role as necessary for the greater good of the enterprise. A constituent noticed their effort: "(A) wants his people treated well, and with a big district and time commitments for the party stuff that he has to do, he is reliant on relatively confident and independent staffers."

The most sophisticated elite constituents will understand these demands. It is for this reason that they are so valuable to the district enterprise. If they comprehend that the incumbent must purposely be away from the district, they will perhaps make fewer demands on the staff and act in ways that are more supportive; gathering surveillance, acting as an “opinion leader” who speaks highly of the incumbent to the local community, and maintaining their involvement in the campaign enterprise. The elite constituent can further assist the institutional goal by not only cooperating with district staff to maintain the district position, they can also continue to make generous contributions to the incumbent’s campaign that can be forwarded on to other more vulnerable incumbents, thus enhancing the incumbent’s position in the legislature. I would speculate that this is a very limited class of constituents however.

#### Progressive ambition

Finally, staff enterprises that have done an effective job with elite interaction help that incumbent when he or she wants to run for higher office. From the incumbent’s perspective it is useful to cultivate elites for moves to higher office, for their contributions, connections and personal encouragement. As was just noted, incumbents who have desires beyond their current situations need to travel to other parts of state, in the case of H running for Senate, or even other parts of the country, in the case of A running for position within the party.

The relationship is also useful from the constituent’s perspective because they may desire a connection to a high profile figure for material, policy or purposive reasons. Constituents regularly made remarks that confirmed these motivations. Some dropped names, like the constituent who repeatedly mentioned that he “knows a senator” quite

well. Other suggested that higher-ranking officials would be useful for their communities. Still others held out the hopes that their current incumbents would “go higher” as if they vicariously advanced with them. Even elite constituents who were not disposed to ideologically agree with the incumbent were seen to become part of the incumbent enterprise if they were “being groomed” for higher office. In this case, a constituent felt that ideology was less important than working with staff of a high profile incumbent who could do positive things for the home state.

The campaign lingo suggests that incumbents need to maintain a solid base of contributors, resources and votes. The base is worked for campaign resources and the development of a solid reputation to ensure regular re-election but also to make sure that the incumbent gets extra votes from them in case they make the jump to higher office. A quick example, while H was utilizing his staff to “aggressively” interact with his partisan base as he traveled across the state in anticipation of a Senate run, E had allowed his staff to operate in a more routine fashion. Ironically, an unexpected opening for the Senate occurred in E’s state and his base was not prepared. He was out-raised and out-campaigned by an opponent who beat him even in his own congressional district. H probably continues to work his base, five years on, still waiting for his chance to run for higher office.

It did not appear that all incumbents and staff behaved as if progressive ambition figured largely into their motivations. The best example here was B’s newly elected neighbor who had yet to visit a portion of his district. The district, as one constituent characterized it, was rife with Republican money seeking a “fresh face”.<sup>16</sup> It often appeared that incumbents and their staff could be overwhelmed by the demands of the

early years and were more concerned about simply getting to first base than swinging for complete adulation and higher office at their first crack at bat. The behaviors of the newer incumbents suggested that they thought they could move around the bases later in their career. The behaviors of the senior routine incumbents who were comfortable in their House seats confirmed this metaphor.

### Conclusion

This chapter suggests the following piece of advice to incumbents and their district enterprise: be aggressive, avoid close elections, don't be afraid to reach out to elites from the opposing party, and use the extra time that staff provide by working on legislation and seeking position in Congress. This dissertation is about the varying ways in which district staff are allocated and utilized and the ways that they affect representation and election outcomes. This chapter detailed a specific and very important function of district staff: the manner in which they interact with elite constituents. It found that a significant part of incumbency advantage can be traced to service to elites, which engenders future support and decreased opposition at the polls.

After reviewing the literature on incumbency advantage and the value of constituency service, I laid out the case for why incumbents, staff and elite constituents interact on a regular basis. Elites are constituents that have greater levels of political interest and knowledge and consequently enjoy greater access to the incumbent enterprise. From the incumbent perspectives, elite interaction is a cheap and effective way to both represent constituent interests and advance their own multiple, and even competing, goals. Variations in elite interaction were explained largely as a consequence of the varying motivations of each of the three actors in this equation. Specifically, elite interaction was

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<sup>16</sup> Redistricting could give him more of that city? An elite thought about this.

seen to provide surveillance of the district, the co-optation of elites into the district enterprise, a source of campaign resources, and an on-going source of political support and surveillance that allows the incumbent to focus on re-election and their other goals.

This chapter showed the important function of staff in their most useful purpose to the incumbent enterprise. The final chapter will examine the larger consequences of the activities performed by district staff.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Consequences of District Staff Activity**

#### Conclusions

Congressional district staff members are important assets to members of the U.S. House of Representatives. Along with elite constituents they perform important functions and provide considerable “leeway” for the incumbents to pursue other activities. The functions and relationships of district staff have been previously understudied. The evidence offered in this dissertation leaves the discipline with some new concepts and variables to ponder, the consequences of which are deserving of heightened attention from the discipline and society at large. Most importantly, congressional district staff enterprises serve to subvert the free, fair, and competitive electoral process designed by the founders.

Why do incumbents employ district staff? Before the roles and functions of district staff could be explained it was necessary to first place them in the context of the incumbent. Much of the literature’s understanding of the behavior and motivations of congressional incumbents is centered on the concept of incumbency advantage. Chapter One detailed the rise of incumbency advantage from the 1950s and the subsequent explanations offered by the literature. The increased utilization of resources by incumbents, district staff included, seemed to be tied into a paradoxical trend related to incumbency advantage. Despite the fact that incumbents have enjoyed impressive reelection rates in the House of Representatives, they continue to have a perception of vulnerability and

allocate resources that they might use both in Washington and at home in the district.

The literature seems to satisfactorily address incumbent's perquisites as far as it concerns Washington-based staff and the aggregation of resources such as travel, mailings, and the amount of casework. Nevertheless, my observations suggested that there were elements of the district enterprise that were neglected by the discipline's treatment of congressional staff. A review of the discipline's literature on congressional staff revealed a body of evidence that was almost exclusively centered on Washington staff and its impact on the legislative process. There were virtually no takers to the calls to study the shape and contributions of those staff back in the district. Chapter One concluded that this research was necessary and would help to further understand incumbency advantage.

Chapter Two turned to the question: why not district staff? The literature has not deemed district staff to be a vital element of the incumbent enterprise. So I took forth to study them in depth, while also looking at the types of people they interact with as well as the incumbents they serve. Chapter Two laid out the need for a theory-building dissertation about district staff that would be based largely on contextual examination. The dissertation was justified precisely because there was little investigation of the district behaviors of incumbents and what existed was largely based on survey results and aggregations of staff behaviors. While there are limits to contextual research based on a small number of cases, Chapter Two suggests that the benefits of observation far outweigh the limitations, especially in the case of a theory-building dissertation. Neither journalists nor political scientists were found to provide adequate explanations of the tasks performed by district staff. Chapter Two went on to lay out the methods of research and descriptions of the thirteen case studies included in this dissertation.



Who are district staff? And what do they do? Chapter Three provided both basic answers to these questions and also a direction for more comprehensive analysis. It found that all offices confront issues of hierarchy amongst the different types of individuals employed in the office. Generally speaking there are a number of routine behaviors that each district enterprise performs and these tasks help to build a “reputation” for some incumbents. It is at that point, however, that the similarities end. Some offices were found to have more aggressive orientations where they reached out to different sets of constituents in different fashions than their more routine colleagues. Most importantly, the aggressive staff members performed many political activities that seemed to have a larger impact on the constituents and the political campaigns in the district. Chapter Three also suggested that the discipline would profit by understanding district staff behavior as being partly driven by the staff motivations. In other words, the elected officials are not the only “rational” actors in the incumbent enterprise. Staff members, like incumbents, were found to have a variety of motivations driving their behaviors. These motivations were also reflected in the varying manners in which they came to work for the incumbent.

The fact that some offices operated differently than others was the central question of Chapter Four. While the case set was too limited in size and diversity to completely answer the question of why offices vary, it did propose a number of variables that seemed to impact observed behavior. As part of a theory-building dissertation, this Chapter merely sought to lay out some possible variables worthy of future research on district staff. The observations suggested that the incumbent’s “personality” or philosophy about staff were of greater importance in explaining the variation between the offices than were

more typical factors such as seniority, geography, partisanship or age. The “personality” seemed to be a hybrid of the incumbents’ electoral status, philosophy of representation and their own personal connection to the district interests. Whether the incumbent was a “trustee” or a “delegate” was secondary to the district “personality.” Based on the case studies, four different “personalities” were developed that seemed to capture the nature of why incumbents allocate their staff in different fashions. Chapter Four, like the preceding chapter, suggested that the motivations of the staff themselves also have an impact on the overall structure and functions of the district enterprise.

Finally, the dissertation turned to the function that most starkly divided the different types of offices: the degree to which they interacted with elite constituents. Previous research on incumbent and constituent interaction had focused exclusively on casework and had mostly concluded that service was of some electoral value to the incumbent. This research did not, however, address the value of the more aggressive staff behaviors. The fifth, and final question of this dissertation then, was: why elites? The simple answer to that question is that incumbent enterprises interact with elite constituents because this is a cheap and effective behavior that has multiple rewards. It is cheap and effective behavior because elite constituents are well informed, easy to find, enjoy access to incumbents and staff, and perhaps most importantly, have resources that the incumbent enterprise desires. Elite interaction satisfies not only elite motivations, which are diverse in and of themselves, but also the requirements of incumbents and the district staff. In sum, incumbent-staff-elite interaction satisfies the motivations of each actor and brings rewards to the incumbent enterprise. These rewards vary from personal political goals, to desired social contact, to communitarian impulses. The interaction also serves some very

specific political purposes. The interaction provides surveillance on the nature of the district. It brings an important “slice” of constituents closer to the incumbent, making them feel like part of the team. Staff members were observed to co-opt this “slice” of elites into the incumbent enterprise in a variety of fashions, from one-on-one interactions to formal incorporations of the constituents into the district office. Once part of the team, those elites were more prone to offer resources that facilitate the re-election of the incumbent. Finally, the continuing support of the elite constituents (providing information, campaign resources and other modes of assistance to the enterprise) allows the incumbent to reallocate his or her personal time and staff resources to other goals, usually more Washingtonian in nature. Staff interaction with home elites is even beneficial to candidates with progressive ambition because of the scarce nature of the incumbents’ time and their need for greater campaign and political resources. Chapter Five argues that a significant part of incumbency advantage can be traced to service to elites, which engenders future support and decreased opposition at the polls.

### Consequences

The consequences of this research have an impact on numerous levels. First, the findings suggest to incumbents and staff that there are varying ways in which they can perform what many of them seemed to think was one universal way of carrying out district tasks. Second, staff functions, most notably elite constituent interaction, have consequences for the nature of representation and the outcomes of congressional elections. Much congressional research fails to examine the normative implications of incumbency advantage. Because of this impact, I will suggest the possibility of perquisite reform. Finally, the nature of the district enterprise and the role of district staff

have an impact on how the discipline should look at a number of district political behaviors such as incumbency advantage and the incumbent enterprise. These are significant issues especially given how frequently absent the incumbent is from the district. All of these levels would benefit from a deeper understanding of the wider incumbent “enterprise” and the impact it has on the American political system.

#### For Staff and Incumbents themselves

The allocation and utilization of district staff have important consequences for individual legislators and staff. Observations showed that district staff were utilized in varying numbers and at different levels of aggressiveness by incumbents. The more aggressive incumbents and staff perceived their behaviors to have a definite electoral value. As such they devoted greater time and resources to their interactions with the elite constituents that could most assist the incumbent enterprise.

A thorough description of the potential uses of district staff from Chapters Three through Five might cause some incumbents and staff to rethink their district operations. Some of these thoughts would reflect the hierarchy of their offices: How is the hierarchy of their office structured? Is their most significant adviser at home or in Washington? Other questions would center on the political and campaign needs of the incumbent: Is their staff structure at all determined by constituent opinion? Do they want their district staff to be more or less “aggressive”? Are there certain types of outreach functions that might be more successful at reaching constituents than what they are currently utilizing? Do they want to establish a larger enterprise that helps them to fulfill their multiple goals? Can an expanded enterprise save the incumbent trips home? Do they find their enterprises to be effective? And finally, they might think about what constituents they

grant the most access to: Do they make a distinction between average and elite constituents? Do the staff and incumbent interact with constituents in extracurricular settings? Is one behavior more appropriate than the other? Is it appropriate for staff to act on behalf of the incumbent? Does being a campaign supporter or donor grant one special access? Does interacting with these individuals help at election time? There are many more questions that might be posed, but one can see that the subject matter of this dissertation might give incumbents and staff pause to reconsider their purpose and functions.

One of the main implications this research might have for incumbents is how to deal with the tradeoff of time and staff resources. Many of the previous questions center around the issue of whether the incumbent wants to spend relatively scarce resources in the district or in Washington. So the first clear temporal tradeoff is between pursuing divergent goals. The literature largely suggests that incumbents tend to sacrifice district resources as the electoral pressures become less threatening and they seek to utilize more resources for their Washington goals, spending less time being attentive to district interests.<sup>1</sup> The questions above (and the answers provided in Chapter Five) suggest that many of these questions are not mutually exclusive. Utilizing valuable staff and resources in the district can assist the incumbent with the policy and the institutional goals in ways the literature had not previously discussed. Yet, I would admit that reallocating more staff to the district would result in a net loss to the incumbent's ability to pursue their other goals. Instead, the argument might be made that incumbents should

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<sup>1</sup> See especially Born (1982). This is not to suggest that incumbents do not protect district interests in other fashions, perhaps through committee membership or funding that "represents" the district. Alternatively, Parker (1989, p107) and others refute the "decline" theory and suggest that most incumbents retain a constant "home style" for the entirety of their careers.

be less hasty in reallocating staff to Washington as they acquire seniority. Incumbents might be best advised to keep one or two empowered surrogates in the district who can act to represent the incumbent with important political constituencies and who can play important roles in the incumbent's campaign. Keeping these resources in the district will keep elite constituents content and allow the incumbent to focus on the Washington goals.

The other tradeoff concerns how incumbents would like their district staff to spend their time. Because there are relatively few district staff and because each office represents roughly half a million people, there are definite constraints on their time. Most staff offered that the longer the incumbent and staff are in office, the more invitations, drop-by visits, letters, phone calls and emails come into the office. If the district enterprise is going to remain aggressive it will probably have to sacrifice the extent to which it can deal with many of the routine functions, especially given that the very nature of aggressive interaction generates more routine work for the staff. Part-time employees, interns and caseworkers can only perform so much of this workload. So incumbents and their ranking district staff members (RDSM) have important decisions to make about how they will allocate their resources and whether they will "aggressively" engage the district. These kinds of decisions will most heavily impact the remote district offices where one staff member represents a portion of the district and must conduct the aggressive and routine tasks for that area. For example, individuals who were overwhelmed with routine tasks staffed three of the four remote offices in B's district. Any attempt at aggressive behaviors would have severely cut into their casework responsibilities. District

enterprises that are more geographically concentrated and have only one office can much more easily make these allocation decisions.

A third tradeoff is reflected in the types of people that incumbents might hire for the district office. Incumbent C's staff introduced the possibility of hiring other "fresh" or "campaign" faces for the district staff. The "fresh faces" are more like the "professionals" from Chapter Three; they are not tainted by partisan or campaign experience and tend to be hired because of their contacts, abilities and experiences outside the realm of the permanent campaign. The tradeoff is that while the "fresh face" might have more clear motives, maturity, and patience, they tend to have more limited electoral connections and value. The "campaign face" is the opposite side of the coin; they seemed to be younger, more willing to perform extracurricular activities and continued to be involved in the incumbent's campaign activities. Their motivations were, problematically, more self-serving and many expressed a desire to 'make a difference' or move to Washington. One of B's staff members was "in a hurry" to get on with her political career and demonstrated little or no patience or interest for the district but was energetic in her routines. Not surprisingly, she was a "campaign" face who had just recently graduated from college. Perhaps the tradeoff was best seen in the two US Senators from C's state. According to constituents and C's staff, the senior senator preferred to hire staff that were older, more experienced and tied to their communities, even if it meant that they might cost the office budget a bit more and their energy levels would not be as high.<sup>2</sup> The junior senator's staff were almost universally younger, more aggressive and from his campaign. The style of person in these offices definitely

impacted the style of representation the offices carried out and was confirmed by virtually every elite encountered. It was generally not a problem identifying staff members who preferred the aggressive tasks to the routine functions. Rather, to fulfill the advice from above about keeping qualified surrogates in the district, the incumbent would be best served with a hybrid of the “fresh” and the “campaign” faces; someone who has the interest and the energy levels to be active in the extracurricular affairs of the district but at the same time is content to focus on the district and not wander to other political arenas.

From a different perspective, it might also be suggested that staff already do too much and incumbents should restrain their reliance on surrogates. This normative focus finds its roots in questions about the impact and appropriateness of Washington staff raised by Rosenthal (1971, 1973) and Malbin (1980). Malbin’s work suggested that Washington staff have too much authority to initiate legislation, negotiate policy compromises and that they cause incumbents to be distant from each other, insulating them in their own large enterprises. Rosenthal demonstrated that legislative staff gave incumbents “alternative” sources of information and similarly impacted the distribution of power within the legislature. The observations of this dissertation suggest that the same argument might be made relevant to district staff; that the incumbent who has an effective district enterprise and does not return home regularly might insulate themselves from district interests. Whether or not their reliance on district staff representing their political interests causes them political vulnerability was an issue discussed in Chapter Five. The issue here is whether it is appropriate for incumbents to rely upon district staff

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<sup>2</sup> This difference is also partly explained by the fact that the senior senator is a senior member of the majority party and has supplemental committee staff that the junior incumbent does not enjoy.



to represent them. My inclination is that district staff provides a different kind of representational dilemma than do Washington staff. In Washington, the enterprise is confronted by a multitude of competing interests, some from the district, others from outside the district. Choosing to represent some interests outside the district might even negatively impact district interests. The district staff members, on the other hand, almost exclusively interact with constituents and interests from their home districts. Therefore, their interactions are driven by the desire to find out important district interests and represent them to the incumbent. This is not to suggest that the activities of home staff do not raise representational questions. The issue of elites, access, and competing district interests will be discussed below.

This research also suggests to incumbents and staff that the staff members themselves are potential beneficiaries of the service that they perform on behalf of the absent incumbent. While not all staff harbor ambitions to run for higher office, elite interaction minimally helps them to interact with larger numbers of constituents in a shorter period of time than by relying on simple case-by-case interaction with average constituents. Perhaps it is the case that significant numbers of aggressive district staff will seek political careers as a result of their employment. Numerous staff suggested an interest in future runs for elective office. Most likely, their activities have an impact on the candidate pool and the ability of quality challengers to get elected.

Finally, this research demonstrates to staff and incumbents the potential electoral value of their behavior. Interactions with elite constituents, elected officials and potential campaign supporters have a demonstrable impact on the outcomes of elections whether they were simply passing along information or were “aggressively” supporting the

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Consequently, it was less of a tradeoff for the senior senator to spend extra resources at home.

campaign enterprise. Observations suggested that some staff were more aware of the electoral connection than were other staff, the literature and the average voter. With the increasingly personalized nature of congressional campaigns, and the individual enterprises that go with them, it is unlikely that incumbents will cease using their staff to perform political tasks that ultimately help them at election time. In fact, I speculate that the future trend will be towards more aggressive district functions.

For Congress and our political system

#### A mixed bag

Based on analysis of staff characteristics, Hammond (1984) suggested that future research should study the consequences of varying distributions and goals of staff on the wider political system beyond the legislature. Following Hammond's advice, I was able to identify a number of areas in the wider political arena that are impacted by district staff. The justification often used by members of Congress in expanding their perquisites is the increased level of representation that such resources provide. The increased numbers of staff in the district offices certainly enhance representation in many ways. Yet, district staff members in some settings also serve to bias representation in favor of a select group of elite constituents at the expense of the rest of the constituency and the nation at large. The more aggressive offices tended to spend significant portions of time and resources interacting with elite constituents.

Representation and campaigns seemed to be intimately related in the area of congressional district staff. Here, the aggressive district enterprise detracts from the free, fair, and competitive election process through their interaction with district elites. aggressive staff courted a specific group of constituents (elites) with the hope that they

would become supporters of the incumbent, or at least less active supporters of the opponent. Their gratitude for being served might cause them to be co-opted by the enterprise, bringing the elite constituents into an on-going relationship with the district staff. Because of their contribution to the maintenance of incumbents in office, district staff members also have an impact on political parties, interest groups and the overall spending of the federal government.

Staff vary by number, by mission, by aggressiveness

As Chapters Three through Five demonstrated, district enterprises vary in their levels of staffing and the aggressiveness of their mission. My observations suggested that different “personality” types influenced the focus of the different offices. The personal and the policy offices were relatively less aggressive about pursuing elite constituents than were the electoral and partisan enterprises. Where the personal office seemed to drift between elite and average constituents depending on the incumbent’s interests and time, the policy incumbents more aggressively targeted certain types of constituents or issues, regardless of their standing. For example, a number of Incumbent C’s staff worked intensively on community housing issues because the incumbent stressed the issue, an issue that affected both elite and poorer constituents. The electoral and the partisan enterprises were generally more active in their interaction with elite constituents, albeit with different types of elites. The partisan office was often focused on maintaining existing relationships with elite supporters who were long part of the incumbent’s base, while the electoral enterprise sought to interact with and co-opt new faces. As one of A’s constituents noted, the electoral enterprise appears to be more highly motivated by issues of “image” and popularity than are the other offices. Along similar lines, a constituent

from C's district suggested that some officials were "finishers" while others seemed more content to simply be "door-openers" for the constituents. The implication in both cases is that representation by the electoral incumbents is much more superficial than it is from the other incumbents. At any rate, representation is definitely affected by the "personality" of the incumbent enterprise.

#### Things staff do that enhance representation

The routine

Many district staff were observed conducting activities that enhance representation. Given the long-standing argument by incumbents that they need many staff to help them serve the needs of their constituents, it is not surprising to find the district staff engaged in these activities. Staff members keep the incumbents apprised of the issues and the personalities in the district. They serve as a contact for constituents and provide them with information through letters, phone calls and forums for those with particular problems. Also in every office I witnessed some staff members who were responsible for the representation of general district interests. They covered meetings that the absent incumbent simply did not have time to attend. In every office I observed that at least some staff were responsible for mediating constituent's casework concerns with local, state and federal government agencies. In fact, incumbents and staff would probably argue that this is their most substantial enhancement to the representative process. They would argue that they give the access and responsiveness to individual constituents that anonymous ombudsmen and bureaucrats do not. In a word, they suggest that they 'care' more about their individual constituents. This was the central argument driving most of the increases in perquisites available to incumbents over the past four decades; because of

the increasing complexity of government it was important for individual legislators to be able to appropriately provide representation for their constituents. Whether the concern is about the constituent's issues or currying electoral favor is a moot point, in either case the staff members are motivated to serve. In fact, one might make the argument that district staff members help to equalize some of the inadequacies of representation in American politics. Staff members were observed interacting with or on behalf of lower income constituency groups on issues like health care, low-income housing, and impact aid for poor school districts.

Whether the staff members are conducting a typical casework request or interacting with an elite constituent they are assisting with oversight of local, state and federal bureaucracies. Regardless of the socioeconomic status of the constituent, the interaction allows the district staff to demonstrate to the incumbent the impact of legislation and executive decisions. Johannes (1979) and Macartney (1982) both found that casework was an effective means of oversight as staff members see the impact of laws and regulations firsthand. Elite interaction can take that oversight even further than the typical complaint emanating from casework. Here, the district staff will interact with elite constituents and obtain better, more timely feedback than waiting for the average constituent to be negatively affected and write or call the district office. For example, I observed this type of interaction between staff and a tax attorney in one case and with a local economic development specialist in another case. Furthermore, the elite constituent will likely have already done some of the legwork or will be able to more accurately specify the problem and a potential remedy, while the average constituent merely supplies symptoms that require fixing. The average constituent is much less likely to

know about the district staff or know where to contact them. In this sense, proactive oversight with elites might help to represent the concerns of the average constituents before they become problems. Finally, district staff members not only give effective representation to all the district's constituents, but because they tie together local, state and federal policies, they also provide a healthy support mechanism for the maintenance of federalism.<sup>3</sup>

And the aggressive

Some of the more aggressive staff behaviors also serve to enhance representation for district constituents. While it was established that all offices listen to their constituents to some extent, my observations portrayed some offices as being much more effective "listeners." In other words, because they went to more meetings, sought out more constituents with drop-by visits, and had more interactive settings with community groups and elite constituents in the district, the aggressive staff had a better understanding of district issues and were more active in facilitating private and public assistance to those needs. In fact, the aggressive staff enterprises were more likely to "listen" and assist with cross-jurisdictional issues where there was little that they could do beyond adding their voice to those of the community. In these cases and others, the aggressive enterprise could often act as a central organizing point for a community. Along those lines, surrogates and extended enterprises were much more commonly used by the aggressive incumbents than by the more routine. The aggressive offices were also more likely to be staffed by individuals who belonged to community groups in their spare time, or by individuals who were much more proactive in communicating with community leaders. Finally, some incumbents, especially conservative Republicans, made the case

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<sup>3</sup> See especially Burkman, 1993.

that allocating staff resources to the home district was consistent with their ideology to bring government closer to the people. Others might suggest an electoral motive as well!

The average congressional district today contains well over a half million constituents. Even the most homogenous states and districts are home to a myriad of individuals, groups and concerns that even the most proactive incumbent cannot hope to effectively contact and represent. In this sense, the presence of a handful of district staff members assists the incumbent in reaching out to the multiple “arenas” of district elites, interests and issues. An aggressive district staff enhances representation by reaching out and connecting the incumbent to these varying concerns.

It might even be argued that the campaigns of incumbents enhance the representation that they provide. Based on the issues collected by their travel, their staff’s interactions with constituents, and with polling data, the incumbent’s campaigns usually seek to reflect major constituent interests. In short, the work of all the incumbent’s enterprise seeks to find and highlight areas of agreement between the incumbent and the constituents.

Each of the functions above suggests that district staff members are effective tools of pluralist representation. Staff members toil in obscurity and anonymity to help different interests throughout the district. At a minimum, one might find evidence of Dahl’s polyarchy of competing group interests, where staff members interact and serve the multiple “arenas” of elite-led interests.

The reality of my observations underlined a more mixed conclusion. While the presence of district staff members enhance representation in some manner, they also serve to undermine or bias it as well. Several examples show that it can be difficult to

assess which constituents are actually benefiting from staff behavior. Clausen (1973) suggests that much of the incumbents' representational behavior is "involuntary" in nature and stems from their personal attitudes and cognitions as much as it is a deliberate political activity. The same might be said about district staff. For some, elite interaction is a "cheap and effective" means of representing all district interests. For others, elite interaction is motivated by a desire to promote the incumbent enterprise or maybe their own political career. When district staff members assist a local government or business with the recruitment of a new industry or the provision of a subsidy (as was the case with E's economic development staff member) the impact is probably more diffuse. While the elite community leaders improve their political and economic positions, one might also make the argument that the average members of the community will experience a "trickle down" benefit of jobs and growth. From this point of view elite representation is simply a quicker way of representing mass interests and it really does not matter which constituents directly contact the district staff as the ultimate beneficiaries are the entire community. Another mixed example would be the consequences of district staff as community leaders. Surely it can be argued that staff who are active in the economic and social groups provide the entire community with a positive link to the federal government and any assistance it can provide. Again, the staff presence helps to make jobs "trickle down", and the funding for a road or dilapidated school improves the entire community. Yet, when staff attend Rotary meetings or drop by a banker's office they just as frequently were discussing issues of personal political or economic interests as they were focusing on the entire community. In some cases staff even admitted that they were performing the interaction for their own benefit.



### Aggressive service often biases representation

Things that staff do that bias representation

“Who gets what takes place far from Washington and differs from what is in our civics books” (Macartney, 1982 p80).

Despite their shared service to low-income constituents and federalism, I did observe variation amongst the different offices’ commitment to serving the entire district equally. In some offices elite constituents received relatively more attention than in others. One of H’s district staff said bluntly, “you will treat those you know and recognize much better” than those you do not know. As was mentioned in an earlier chapter, 8 of 10 constituents know that incumbents can help them but only 1 of 2 will likely call or write the office. Because elite constituents know where to find staff and appreciate the service, access and political information that they provide, they are more likely to be the 1 or 2 constituents. Some district enterprises focused more of their time and energies on continuing to assist these 1 or 2 constituents at the expense of finding more general problems throughout the district that would benefit the other 8 or 9 constituents. Given the discussion above about the tradeoffs that staff experience in performing their jobs, the issue of how much they interact with certain constituents gains relevance. My observations suggest that some aggressive staff focus considerable time and resources on representation of relatively small portions of their district. Consequently, one of the major consequences of the district staff perquisite is that it serves to bias representation in favor of some constituents at the expense of other. As I will also note below, this service also has an impact on the entire size and nature of the federal government.

In addition to the mixed evidence cited just above, other observations more clearly portrayed district staff acting directly on behalf of elite concerns. With numerous cases of cross-jurisdictional issues, requests for bureaucratic relief or government assistance, district staff admitted that they were assisting the direct personal interests of elite constituents. Elite service is fed by two complementary impulses. First, district staff seek out a smaller “slice” of elites from the multiple “arenas” in the district simply because they do not have time to inquire as to the economic needs of every constituent. Second, because elites are more knowledgeable about the process, attend similar social events, and are more comfortable approaching and dealing with district staff, they are much more likely to find themselves in contact with district staff than are more ‘average’ constituents. Consequently, district staff often see the district through the eyes of their elite contacts. My observations of these interactions suggested that the elite constituents were making requests that would benefit their personal financial settings at least as frequently as they were interacting on behalf of broader community interests. This is not to say that this style of representation is wrong or unethical. Rather, it does suggest that much of the representation conducted by district staff is biased to a certain segment of constituents at the expense of the broad majority. Some elite constituents were aware of this disparity and enjoyed the access granted to them. One elite, clearly a member of A’s extended enterprise, suggested that his input to A was worth “ten tallies” from average constituents. I did not generally observe staff interacting with constituents in a manner reflective of Dahl’s polyarchy. Rather, each incumbent enterprise appeared to have a distinct electoral base and set of political friends and allies with some smaller group of interests and personalities that they were reaching out to co-opt. Perhaps it is the case, as

Parker suggests (1992, p.105), that the American people can find some virtual representation of their interests among the ranks of the other 434 legislators if they do not find dyadic similarity with their own incumbent. This style of representation is troublesome, again considering the fact that elite constituents have the knowledge and resources to seek out representation. The average constituent has neither the time nor the resources to contact incumbents from other districts who might share their economic, social or ideological point-of-view. Elite constituents appear to receive better representation all the way around. A recent editorial sums it up accurately:

But the poor do not have any money to throw at Congress and poverty is not a matter of great concern to the donor class. So it's not at all surprising that this Congress would be voting to kill home heating subsidies for the poor, and summer jobs and other programs for disadvantaged youngsters (Herbert, 1998).

Furthermore, there were numerous examples of staff interaction that were more clearly aimed at specific material or social benefit for the elite constituents, with no diffuse benefits to "trickle down" to the masses. For example, elite constituents appeared to be more likely to receive intervention from district staff to assist with bureaucratic regulations. In some cases this intervention freed up programs or funding that did indeed probably create more jobs. In other cases with the RTC or IRS, the intervention benefited a much smaller class of people. My observations suggested that average constituents were much less likely to approach staff with the requests for help about their own or their business's financial health. As Macartney (1982) identified with constituent casework, there is a cost to such service. There is a zero sum cost to staff time and

resources where service to some constituents “comes at the expense of others.”<sup>4</sup>

Macartney suggested that interactions for constituents have four possible results, ranging from no impact, to an expedited assistance for a constituent, to assistance that they would not have gotten without staff assistance, and ultimately to service that they should not have gotten (favoritism). My observations of elite assistance confirm his general finding that staff assistance usually helps to expedite inquiries more quickly (the second possibility). As opposed to Macartney, I also suggest that staff regularly assist elites with programs that average constituents are not aware that exist. I would specify that the “others” are frequently elite constituents who “get more of what there is to get and get it sooner.”

The elite relationships that incumbents have in Washington with individuals from the telecommunications, banking or cable industries have all resulted in “reform” efforts in recent years that were heralded to benefit consumer interests. In each case, the beneficiaries were ultimately the industries themselves. My observations suggest that the same interactions take place between elites and district staff but with the same basic impact.<sup>5</sup> A banker from B’s district suggested that he interacted with staff members so that they might be “helpful” to the entire community. It is doubtful that his lobbying

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<sup>4</sup> Interventions on behalf of specific constituents have zero sum costs. Perhaps the best example of the tradeoff was the small business owner who asked C to request that the DOT perform a costly study before they built a new bridge which would cost \$125,000 and take 1 ½ years to complete). The city engineer suggested “it was completely unnecessary but C did what any member of congress would do.” The zero sum is notable here because it was requested by an elite constituent. I speculate that elite constituents know how to ask the staff for assistance and can make their cases more effectively as compared to a regular constituent whose house or small business would have been moved without the intervention of incumbent.

<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, because of the ability of elite constituents to evade campaign contribution limitations through donations of soft money resources that ‘indirectly’ benefit the incumbent’s campaign, the opportunity for access and quid pro quo relationships has expanded considerably in the past ten years. In simple dollar terms, it is much more worthwhile to sit down with an elite constituent when they are not limited to a \$4,000 per couple per election contribution. One would have to be naïve not to imagine that elite constituents who donate thousands of ‘soft’ dollars to the incumbent’s parties do not want to talk about

efforts have a diffuse impact that is as beneficial to the entire community as it is to his bank's shareholders. In another case a prominent attorney and banker (who were usually Democratic donors but subsequently appeared on A's contributor list) had an hour-long meeting at an exclusive social club with A to discuss several legislative issues that would affect the home state. In still another case a journalist from B's district detailed the efforts of sophisticated elites to make alliances across race, party and interest group lines. In a quest for local power, some elites were willing to sell out broader community interests. The incumbents and staff can figure into this equation with their involvement in these local alliances. This is especially the case for incumbents who actively encourage the civic and political involvement of their staff. In all three cases above I would suggest that average constituents did not have the opportunity to discuss their political and economic interests with the incumbent and it is doubtful that the elites take it upon themselves to be "helpful" to the entire community.

Staff and incumbents are active in elite social circles

As Bullock and Brady (1983) found that senators largely share the policy positions of the reelection constituency and not the geographic constituency, I would assert that incumbents and staff pursue the service interests of the "slice" of constituents with which they most frequently interact. Some will justify an elite focus as a "cheap and effective" means of representing the entire constituency. I would simply echo Bullock and Brady (1983) in that the distant and untouched constituencies are less relevant to the incumbent enterprise. The proximity of district elites to the incumbent enterprise not only serves to

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their legislative priorities with staff and incumbents. In this sense, the district enterprise is an element of campaign finance reform that has previously been overlooked.

bias representation, it also has a negative impact on the competitiveness of congressional elections.

### The campaign activities detract from free, fair and competitive elections

#### Free, fair and competitive elections?

Madison's designed a U.S. House of Representatives that was to reflect immediate shifts in public opinion because its composition was determined by frequent, free and competitive elections.<sup>6</sup> For the first century and a half, this vision largely applied and congressional careers remained short. Tenure in office and incumbency advantage have changed quite dramatically in the past half century. Perquisite use by incumbents is certainly a factor in these developments. In that sense, congressional district staff members detract from the free, fair and competitive electoral system designed by the founders. As if incumbents were not already ensconced in their seats, this dissertation outlines yet another factor that assists them in maintaining their positions. Jacobson and Kernell (1983) identified that the outcomes of congressional elections are influenced by a number of strategic actors: incumbents, challengers, and the political parties themselves. This dissertation suggests that district staff and elite constituents be added to the list of strategic actors that set the stage for the outcomes of congressional elections.

Federal staff are "not allowed" to impact elections.

"It is clear from the record that Congress has recognized the basic principle that government funds should not be spend to help incumbents gain reelection."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See especially Federalist Papers 52 and 53.

<sup>7</sup> Common Cause v. Bolger, 574 F. Supp. 672, (D.D.C. 1982), aff'd, 461 U.S. 911 (1983).

This U.S. District Court ruling emphasized existing federal statutes prohibiting certain types of electoral involvement by Congressional staff. As was noted in Chapter Five, while the Hatch Act does not apply to Congressional employees, there are nevertheless some restrictions on staff involvement in their employer's campaigns. Most specifically they are prohibited from using federal government resources or working on the campaign while they are on the federal clock. There are also strict procedures governing leaves of absence and part-time employment to ensure that the federal and campaign settings are kept distinct. In the words of a House ethics attorney, staff members are advised that dual roles are proper "as long as the two are kept apart" (Morgan, 1997). It is a mistake to think that Congressional staff only impact election outcomes with their involvement in campaigns. As Chapter Five laid out, district staff (and government funds) most likely have a more substantial impact on election outcomes through their 'federal' work over the eighteen months before the campaign season truly begins.

The "Gray" area – the real "permanent campaign"

The District Court ruling just mentioned seems comically out of touch with the findings of this dissertation. While arguments were made above for the legitimate representational value of both the routine and the aggressive staff functions, some incumbent enterprises clearly utilize government resources to prepare for re-election. It is often hard to distinguish between the 'federal' and 'campaign' impact of many of these activities. For example, some staff and constituents talked about efforts to build a "reputation" for the incumbent for the first eighteen months of the two-year term. To build the "reputation", the staff will listen to constituent concerns and seek to address the

issues at hand. Some staff will also “listen” much more intently and proactively seek to address these types of issues before they become problematic. Finally, staff will “talk” to constituents in drop-by visits, community meetings, or through the local media. They will “talk” about the success of the incumbent in representing district interests. While journalists and the literature talk about the “permanent” fund-raising campaigns of incumbents, it is an oversight to not also consider the “reputation”-building activities of district staff as part of the “permanent campaign.” This is clearly a resource that challengers do not enjoy.

#### Elite interaction

The activities of district staff provide an advantage that challengers have little chance of counteracting; an advantage that begins operation two years before the election actually takes place. The main advantage of this work is the interaction that the district enterprise has with elite constituents over that two-year period. The aggressive district enterprise will surveil the district for issues, personalities and groups that potentially would have political interests or concerns. The aggressive enterprise will then usually seek to interact with and co-opt any such person or group.

Elite constituents generally provide the mechanisms to identify, recruit and finance candidates for elective office. This small group of constituents has a disproportionate influence over the campaign contributions, news coverage, and organizational endorsements in a congressional district. While there are plenty of elite constituents with resources who are not touched by the incumbent enterprise or are not active in their communities, those who are active are often linked to the incumbents, and they are the constituents who are often most likely to ‘play’ in political campaigns. In short, the



incumbent enterprise has the motive and the opportunity to solicit these constituents long before a potential opponent can hope to mount a challenge. Given the influence of this select group of constituents, aggressive political activity by district staff makes the slim chances of electoral success even more remote for the average challenger. Consequently, many decide never to run in the first place. Chapter Five maintained that elite interaction by aggressive district enterprises co-opts elites and their resources and ultimately deters challengers and results in high rates of re-election for incumbents. Staff and incumbents serve elite constituents from all parts of their districts; their electoral base, “slices” of independents, and possibly even some elites from interest groups or communities who are ordinarily opposed to the incumbent’s party. An aggressive district staff can further solidify the incumbent’s position by working to make elites content and not interested in recruiting or financing a challenger. The “unseen” candidates and resources remain hidden in part because of the efforts of district staff.

Even if a quality challenger emerges and finds resources for his or her campaign, they must still confront an incumbent enterprise that has spent the previous two years serving constituents and advertising its connections with district interests. The advertising that will come from the incumbent enterprise over this two-year period often serves to district voters from potentially significant topics that could become campaign issues. Rather, the incumbent enterprise will seek to remind the constituents of the active service provided by the incumbent and his or her staff over the previous term. They also might highlight clear areas of agreement with constituents (e.g., the importance of

protecting Social Security). Most importantly, this advertising is a taxpayer-financed perquisite not enjoyed by challengers.<sup>8</sup>

It usually does not get this far, however, as most incumbents do not confront quality challengers. Fowler (1995) concluded that the lack of quality challengers in congressional elections poses a threat to the health of American democracy. The most recent elections provide some numbers to consider. The victors in the 2000 congressional campaigns outspent the challengers in over 400 races. Incumbents accounted for nearly 400 of those cases. This dissertation maintains that it is not so much the fact that the victors outspent the challengers as it the case that most of the challengers ran anemic and under-funded campaigns with no chance of winning. Elite constituents in the vast majority of districts did not appear interested in recruiting and financing challengers to current incumbents. In the months prior to the election, the pundits announced that there were only about thirty truly contested congressional races in the entire nation. Clearly, the health of American democracy suffers when only seven or eight percent of congressional elections are truly competitive. It can be argued that low turnover increases legislative oversight of the executive and retains more specialized knowledge within the legislature. Yet, in the current electoral setting of rough partisan parity, low turnover will continue to drive legislative gridlock and the propensity of each party to blame the other for the lack of policy accomplishments.<sup>9</sup> With such electoral parity, oversight is almost a given and because the legislative pace is so slow there is

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<sup>8</sup> I do accept that there are strict rules governing the disbursement of campaign mailings in the weeks leading up to an election. I would also accept that the amount of mail disbursed by incumbents has declined over the past decade. Yet, I would also point out that district staff themselves serve as advertising tools throughout the two-year term, speaking to groups, writing letters and dropping-by to visit elite constituents.

<sup>9</sup> See Jones (1994) for the counter argument; that the contemporary divided government is as electorally productive as previous areas of unified party control.

more than adequate time for voices outside of the institution to weigh in on legislative decision-making. With gridlock, incumbents can return home to their constituents and make the case that they continue to work hard for district interests.

Elites promote longevity of incumbents

Chapter Five recognized that elites value the stability and power of a long-serving incumbent. Their relationships with incumbents and staff seemed to frequently be built on years of interaction, and some even spoke of their relationship as an investment worthy of protection. Many constituents suggested openly that they supported incumbents despite personal or ideological disagreements. The incumbent enterprise is a useful tool to promote the personal and community interests of elite constituents. Furthermore, elite constituents would seem to have little interest in abandoning senior incumbents given the competitive electoral situation nationwide. This attitude is confirmed by the small number of quality challengers financed by elites in the 2000 elections. Here again lies the deleterious impact of congressional district staff. Their longstanding relationships with elite constituents and the 'investment' that elite constituents perceive lead to limited electoral choice and accountability for the majority of constituents in a congressional district.

All gray is not gray: Quid pro quo

Given that staff members play a role in subverting the competitive election process, it is also logical to connect their influence right back to the act of representation discussed earlier in this chapter. The uneasiness of elite constituent access was confirmed by C's RDSM after he returned to the federal office from running C's reelection campaign. Because federal "designees" are allowed to be actively involved in

all facets of campaigns, some district staff members never truly leave the campaign world and operate in a murky gray mixture of both settings. For example, A and D's RDSMs were continuously involved in the political and campaign matters of their employers. Conversely, C's RDSM was surprised to note that when he returned to the federal staff his conversations with people from the "other side" were more "openly about politics." He had entered the murky gray area where "designees" will talk to constituents about legislative issues and then cross the hall and talk to them on a different phone about financial support of the campaign. Incumbents who operate in this gray area will employ a "blurred line" between the two worlds. In the words of former Democratic senator Sam Nunn, "you always want someone in (the top job) who is in close touch with your constituents" (Morgan, 1997). In both campaign and research settings I have observed staff lurking in the gray area that exists between the clearly demarcated federal and campaign worlds. The aggressive enterprises seemed to operate quite comfortably in a system with such permeable barriers.

Ultimately, I would suggest that some elite interaction is based on quid pro quo relationships. Whether aggressive interaction with elite constituents is truly representative behavior is in the eye of the beholder. However, interaction based on quid pro quos is truly not defensible. I did not observe any staff engaged in quid pro quo exchanges given their illegal, or minimally unethical nature. Secondary depictions and my personal campaign observations suggest that such exchanges do take place. By their own admission, one of the military communities from A's district and several bankers and attorneys from other districts clearly established that their relationships with incumbents were based on their need for help in exchange for the campaign support that

they offered. While the military community might make the “trickle down” defense for a quid pro quo relationship, the other examples much more clearly benefited a small group of elites at the expense of the wider community. One Republican staffer suggested “being on Ways and Means, there may be some cross-pollination but every effort is made to never have any quid pro quo” (Jones, 2000). A top Democratic staff admitted that the practice of fund-raising by legislative staff has been “going on forever, but it’s much more prevalent now.” These journalistic accounts of staff activities (and “cross-pollination”) suggest that one would be naïve to believe that quid pro quo relationships do not occasionally take place between incumbents, staff and elite constituents.

Staff themselves detract

It is not only the aggressive political behaviors of staff that serve to exacerbate the problems of uncompetitive elections. It seems that staff themselves are becoming more directly part of the equation and are detracting from free and competitive elections because they themselves become candidates. Some district staff are active in the same social and political circles as incumbents and elite constituents. When incumbents leave office their own staff members often replace them. Hernnson (1994) noted the increasing electoral success of former staff in congressional elections. Like Fowler above, he concluded that having more staff as candidates will continue to reinforce the lack of turnover and the presence of careerism. Given that some staff have electoral motivations (Chapter Three) and that these same staff often “aggressively” interact with elite constituents (Chapter Five), it is not surprising that staff are running for and winning seats in Congress. Because staff largely share the ideological positions of the incumbent and because they have interacted with constituents that “matter”, one might even argue

that a staff member replacing an incumbent is really not electoral turnover as much as it is a continuation of present representation. When staff members are factored into the candidate pool of open seat races, the number of competitive elections diminishes even further. The same arguments about congressional careerism would seem to apply to staff members who assume their positions in office. While the staff members bring experience and contact with district issues and personalities that will help to represent district interests, they also bring contact and experience that will make them difficult to remove from office. They may also enjoy that same “leeway” that they worked so hard to provide for the incumbents.

#### Weakens party and collective accountability

One might argue that aggressive representation by district staff and the types of campaigns that they conduct are reflections of American culture. The campaigns are expensive and media-driven but they are also disproportionately centered on the advancement of the individual. The motivations of individual incumbents, staff members and elite constituents were frequently observed taking primacy over more communitarian interests. If American politics are truly “atomistic” (Hertzke and Peters, 1992), then the behaviors of district staff contribute to that outcome. By maintaining “candidate-centered” enterprises, district staff members also contribute to the weakening of political parties.

Fenno (1978) and Parker (1989) found that modern incumbents are highly concerned about gaining levels of trust with their constituents, which may ironically contribute to the decline of congressional approval. Incumbents are “spending time on activities that are perceived to receive too little attention” (Parker, 1989, p58). Consequently,

constituents feel that members are both more responsive and effective than the collective body. In the final analysis, members run on their own against the institution; “the performance of Congress is collective, but the responsibility for congressional performance is not” (Fenno, 1978, p.67). Jacobson echoed Fenno’s logic twenty years later: the system encourages “individual responsiveness but collective irresponsibility” (1997 p4).

The expanded use of the congressional district enterprise has reinforced the general decline of American political parties. This dissertation noted the wide enterprise that exists in a congressional district: staff, elected officials, supporters, contributors, etc. These individuals’ participation appears to be much more driven by their connection to the incumbent than to the party structure. The behavior of these individuals, the staff and incumbents further fuels the decline of political parties detailed in Chapter One. Because staff members seek to solidify personalized coalitions of support for individual incumbents, the ranks of individuals who might previously have been party activists are being co-opted into the ranks of the individual incumbent enterprise. Because of these efforts, there are simply fewer bodies and resources to fuel the political parties. Furthermore, the decline of patronage jobs within parties and the creation of them for incumbent enterprises have shifted the loyalty of many hard-core activists who formerly worked for the party system. Candidate-centered politics are alive and well!

Because incumbents are able to solidify their electoral positions with their own enterprises, it places them in a position to be more independent of party influences within the legislature. In 1994, the Republican leadership suggested to their numerous freshmen that district interests should be made subservient to national party issues. They could do

this by sending their chief advisers to the district and solidifying their electoral bases. For two years, the House leadership was able to fight the candidate-centered impulses that had previously served to complicate partisan control of the legislature. They may have been aided in this control partly because many of the young incumbents' key advisers were in the districts instead of Washington. At any rate the partisan control of the House from 1994 was undone in the subsequent Congress by individual incumbents who wanted to pursue personal and district policy interests.

Given that the recently elected legislature is nearly equally divided between Democrats and Republicans, the prospects for changed behavior on the part of the incumbents and staff appears unlikely. The campaigns of 2002, and those for the near future, are likely to continue this emphasis on individual achievement at the expense of collective achievement. The attitudes of elite constituents seem only to reinforce the candidate-centered impulses of the system and preserve incumbency advantage. One individual that contributed to a variety of candidates ranging from liberal Democratic state senators to moderate members of Congress and conservative U.S. Senators, did not consider the consequences for divided government that he helped to finance. It did not occur to him that by supporting incumbents of opposite political philosophies that he was fueling legislative gridlock and the lack of clear accountability that voters would subsequently confront. From his perspective he was assisting individual candidates that would have a positive impact on his personal and community interests. National political divisions were simply less relevant.

The overall impact of an empowered and aggressive district staff helps the incumbent operate with less reliance on party institutions. The incumbent and staff who are in touch



with district sentiment and regularly communicate and interact with the constituents have the ability to represent and explain their behaviors to their constituents independent of the national parties' efforts. Without the aggressive enterprise, the incumbent would be much more reliant upon the accomplishments and public relations efforts of the party leadership.

### Interest groups

There are also consequences for the future of political participation and interest group activity. While the political culture is suffering from decreased levels of local participation, interest groups at the national level are actually invigorated. As Fowler (1993) has pointed out congressional campaigns today are truly "federal" because of the combination of national and local groups that candidates must utilize in order to win an election. This paradox is another reason to emphasize the political activity of elite constituents. For it is through the elite constituents spread across congressional districts that the national interest groups have the resources to be active and influential. So while many elites may not be active at the local level for their broader community, many are active through their trade, professional, religious, or ideological associations. Traditionally national interest groups mobilized their grass roots in congressional districts to influence a particular incumbent. Today, the contact of national groups with elite constituents (known as "Astroturf lobbying") reduces the cost to the national associations and allows them to target a few key individuals in an incumbent's district. If these elite constituents remain active through their national associations (by fax and email) it will be easy for incumbents to address their issues and capitalize on their combined political power (and contributions). For the incumbents that assist these national associations, the

reward will come in the form of the national association contacting their local membership lists and directing them to vote, contribute and volunteer. Alternatively, the national association might just forward their membership list to the incumbent enterprise and let them utilize the resource as they see fit.

While elites who are interested in 'local' issues will probably always exist, their dwindling numbers suggests that the face of elite interaction and representation will probably change with the nationalized issues, faxes and emails. In this way, elites will find it even easier to achieve "virtual" representation by sending their support to sympathetic incumbents in districts far afoot. Yet again, this development would bias representation in favor of those elite constituents who have the means and know how to organize national groups, and to communicate and contribute to remote incumbents. While this provides accountability in the aggregate, it does not provide an outlet for free and competitive elections for the average constituent who does not choose to be active in national associations. If this trend continues, incumbents should also be wary of focusing on the nationalized interests at the expense of losing contact with the 'local' elites and interests.

#### Growth of government programs

It is natural to expect that incumbents should serve their constituents. Procuring funding and regulatory approval for bridges, roads, schools, military bases, etc., is a basic component of representation. Yet this service has costs. Each incumbent who represents his or her constituents in such a manner comes at a cost to constituents in other districts. Government grants and new industries have a system-wide zero sum impact. Opening a new plant in one district usually means that jobs are being moved from another district.

Service to elite constituents biases the act of representation to the particular at the expense of the broader national interest. This competition is intensified when they lure businesses seek funding for roads and development projects for elite constituent in their districts, each incumbent trying to serve their own elite constituents better. There almost seems to be a cyclical process of dependency where incumbents perceive their electoral advancement or preservation to be dependent upon the good grace of the elite constituents who make the requests for assistance and are components of the district enterprise. Furthermore, efforts to assist elite constituents with their business or personal financial matters absorb staff time that might be used for other activities that could represent larger numbers of constituents. Who is being represented in each case is again in the eye of the beholder. Perhaps the argument could be made that elite service is less about a positive or a negative impact than it is about competing interests within and between districts. When pondering the relationship of district staff, elite constituents and representation, one might consider whether the founders truly intended for incumbents to become such long-serving “masters of public business” fortified with substantial campaign resources and a publicly-financed set of legislative staff dedicated to bringing even more “public business” to each constituency. I speculate that they would be shocked by the interaction of these factors and their relationship to the size of the federal budget today. They would probably call for political reform.

#### A call for reform?

Congressional district staff members are an integral part of incumbent advantage. This resource is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars per year in staff salary, not to mention the value of free media and word-of-mouth advertising that the staff members

perform on behalf of the incumbents. Calls to review the cost or basic purpose of district staff are not common. In the 1940s, several legislators sought to forbid all constituent services by incumbents and establish nonpartisan ombudsmen to mediate with constituent requests.<sup>10</sup> While incumbents had very few resources at that point in time, there was little enthusiasm to give away what they did have. Further efforts in the 1960s to add ombudsmen in each district to complement district staff were similarly met with a cold congressional response. More recent efforts to reform incumbent behavior have largely focused on term limits, campaign finance reform, or marginally limiting the overall budget for staff offices.

There have been no calls since the 1940s to eliminate congressional staff. Given the fact that staff members enhance representation on behalf of the absent incumbents and because the legislators need staff support to counterbalance a sizeable executive staff, it would not be advisable to tie incumbent's hands and remove this perquisite. However, given the enormous political value that the staff provides, any efforts to limit, remove or abolish the perquisite have been met with fierce congressional resistance.

Major reform of congressional staff is not likely in the foreseeable future because as incumbents increasingly desired lengthy congressional careers in the latter half of the Twentieth Century, they institutionalized themselves with perquisites and other resources (Fowler 1993). Parker suggested that the expansion of these perquisites allowed incumbents to "maximize their discretion" and pursue other goals: "more money, more leisure, or more political power, not just policy influence" (1992, p48). While arguments are made that these perquisites improve representation, make government more efficient, and bring the incumbents closer to the people (See Johannes, 1984), it is also clear the

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<sup>10</sup> See Macartney, 1975, p.322; Johannes, 1984, pp. 216-225.

incumbents and staff have come to realize the enormous political value that staff, offices and unlimited travel to the district provide. The fact that incumbents hire young, hungry and aggressive politicians to complement smaller numbers of staff driven by more humanitarian or communitarian motives underlies the belief of the incumbent enterprise that it can serve both political and representational goals. In 1994, when the House Republicans instituted some procedural reforms and cutbacks in staff, it is instructive to note that the numbers of district staff were left in tact. In fact, in the aftermath of these cutbacks, district staff rose as an overall portion of personal staff. While there have been few reforms and incumbents clearly enjoy the staff perquisite, I would suggest some regulation of district staff behavior is in order.

If one desires reform that will somewhat curtail incumbency advantage and perhaps reduce legislative branch expenditures, a potential avenue would be to limit the campaign activities of federal district staff. Given the fact that incumbents will always have a campaign and a governance role, it is not advisable (or perhaps even possible) to eliminate federal staff involvement in the campaign enterprise. Scheduling and planning campaign events and crafting speeches and remarks naturally combine both worlds. It would be difficult to fully segregate an incumbent's time and message so some bridge between the campaign and governance worlds needs to remain. However, eliminating the ability of the federal staff to raise or spend campaign resources would likely reduce some of the incentive to "aggressively" interact with elite constituents. The incentive to "aggressively" serve to gather information and build incumbent name recognition would remain. Yet, the elite ability to contribute to the enterprise could be made more complex. This reform is also logical given the lack of public financing of elections. Why should

incumbents benefit from taxpayer-assisted resources to their campaigns when challengers do not?

One of the arguments against reform is that it is too complex or that it impedes on reasonable representational behaviors. For example: "The same newsletter that keeps constituents informed about government can be packaged to convey images that have electoral appeal. The intertwining of electoral and representational purposes in the use of these resources makes it difficult to effectively regulate usage without impairing representational responsibilities" (Parker, 1989, p.84). But I think this is less problematic with the fund-raising behaviors of the staff. As opposed to a newsletter, there are no "representational" responsibilities that can be identified with elite interaction for the sake of fundraising. Furthermore, this is a practical, easy-to-achieve reform that has no visible constitutional implications.

An alternative to the abolition of fund-raising might be a disclosure system similar to how attorneys bill their hours to their clients. Federal staff in both Washington and the district would note their meetings and whom they called on the phones and whether each activity was campaign or federal in nature. This reform would minimally provide voters with information about the nature of the district enterprise. It would likely be extremely complex and difficult to complete and enforce, not to mention that it would be hard to relay this information to voters! Consequently, the abolition of fund-raising abilities strikes me as a much more logical reform, with more useful consequences.

I do recognize that in the whole scope of incumbency advantage, that this reform is minor. Yet, it would minimally reduce the hypocrisy identified above and clean up the system to reduce the appearance of conflicts of interest (and make them pay for it). The

co-opting of elites would likely continue. It would simply be made more complex by one more person or one more phone call. But that one person or call would not come at the expense of the taxpayers and would begin to level the playing field between incumbent and challenger.

This reform would also serve as a first step that might lead to additional behavioral changes on the part of incumbents and their staff. There are some elected officials who draw absolute divisions between their campaign and federal staff. In these cases, the “designees” are limited to the scheduling and press functions described above. In my role as the campaign coordinator for a United States Senator who follows these standards, I am limited to fund-raising and overtly political events. I operate independent of the federal staff with no knowledge of the types of issues or specific individuals they are pursuing and federal staff know not what I do. I do not knowingly solicit contributions from individuals who have been assisted by service or legislation from the senator’s federal enterprise. In the senator’s own words, I work on the “dark side” of American politics, never coming into contact with the well-lit and legitimate side of constituent service. While I accept that incumbents would still be advantaged by other aggressive behaviors of staff, this reform might spark more incumbent enterprises to operate in a manner that is both ethically more pure and imposes no campaign costs on the taxpayers.

Furthermore, one might make the argument that shifting incumbent enterprises to the “policy” nature discussed above provides ‘better’ representation and improves the general health of our democracy. If incumbents and staff were willing to forgo the political advantages that accrue from elite service, they might allocate more staff time and resources to behaviors aimed at the constituents who could more truly benefit from the

attention. For the most part, staff members do not spend time scouring the poor communities of their districts looking for problematic patterns in government assistance programs, or finding ways to help small farmers or business owners effectively market their products. Staff members defense would most likely be that they do not have the time to go out into the district and then deal with all of the service requests that these investigations would generate. Yet, some district enterprises perform exactly these sorts of behaviors with elite constituents and they would probably also argue that representation is in the eye of the beholder.

### Academic consequences and future directions of research

#### Consequences for discipline

This dissertation has four important consequences for the discipline. The biggest contribution of this dissertation was the elaboration of a fresh variable from which we can examine incumbency advantage. As Chapter Five demonstrated on a number of different levels, district staff members have an impact on the electoral fortunes of incumbents that the literature has previously not addressed. I am not suggesting that this variable has the causative impact of campaign spending or incumbent name recognition. Yet, I would argue that the behavior of the district staff enterprise not only acts as an intervening variable on the ability of candidates to raise campaign funds and increase their name recognition, I would also suggest that district staff are an independent variable directly influencing election outcomes by having a direct impact on who challenges the incumbent and the support that they are able to draw from constituents within the district. Future studies of incumbency advantage should take steps to include some measure of district staff activity.



The second contribution is the suggestion to rethink the size and purpose of the incumbent enterprise. The enterprise includes more than simply the incumbent and the Washington staff. Chapter Five showed that it can also include even more than the district staff. Previous definitions, most notably Salisbury and Shepsle (1981), were useful but generally did not include district staff and completely disregarded the possible inclusion of district elites and supporters. This dissertation suggests that the discipline reconsider its definition of the incumbent enterprise to include a much wider range of actors. At a minimum, the definition needs to consider the functions, resources, motivations and ambitions of the individual district staff. Fox and Hammond (1975) were correct in their conclusion that the perceptions, goals and motivations of Washington staff affect office organization. Evidence from Chapters Three through Five demonstrates that the same conclusion applies to district staff as well. Some definitions might consider the inclusion of a few key advisers or a “kitchen cabinet.” Fenno (1978) even identifies a personal constituency of the incumbent’s key supporters and friends. Preferably, the definition would be widened to include those elite constituents who are co-opted and provide the incumbent enterprise with valuable surveillance of the district, participation in aggressive functions such as “advisories” and forums, and ultimately become campaign supporters. Conducting a longitudinal observation of an incumbent and his or her staff would most likely demonstrate the formation and impact of an extended district enterprise.

Given that some staff enterprises likely have an impact on elections and that they interact with a wide range of elite constituents, the discipline should devote more attention to understanding the circumstances which cause said variation. It should take a

much wider look at the routine and aggressive functions from Chapter Three and test whether the variables from Chapter Four have any causative or correlative relationships. What factors impact the incumbent's decision about allocating resources to the district and setting the office hierarchy? I would suggest that the research would benefit by including: cases from a wider geographical pool, from more regions, different cultures, cases where the incumbent has different levels of power or seniority, and cases from the majority and minority party. I would also suggest studying incumbents from more disparate electoral settings. One might include incumbents who face weak or strong challengers, and whether they are opposed by a new opponent or one recycled from earlier campaigns. One might also look at how staff members are impacted by open seat races. Do staff members from the previous incumbent seek to be involved? Do campaign workers from the open seat candidates become the staff upon victory? Further research on these disparate settings would contribute to our understanding of the district enterprise.

Finally, the incumbent-staff-elite interaction described in Chapter Five suggests that a two-step flow continues to operate in American politics. Whether the concept is seriously considered by academics is less relevant than the fact that a number of incumbents, staff and elite perceived their behaviors to be a "cheap and effective" way to interact with large numbers of constituents and promote the incumbent enterprise. This interaction was built on the assumptions that elite constituents exist and like to be contacted, and that interacting with them results in successful advertising to larger numbers of 'average' constituents in the elites' communities. I do not argue that all

incumbents and staff operate on the basis of these assumptions but there were significant numbers that did.

#### Future research directions

The research design utilized in this dissertation was appropriate and effective. Data gathered by a combination of observations and intensive interviews from actors on all three sides of the interaction provided a full contextually based understanding of the allocation and utilization of congressional district staff. Patience and careful data gathering resulted in a fruitful collection of observations. I would recommend that future research continue with some of the important methods and findings of this dissertation. For instance, the contextual observation of incumbents, staff and elite constituents proved very fruitful in developing the hypotheses of this dissertation. I believe that these observations were of much greater utility in understanding these actors' behaviors and motivations than questionnaires would have been. There were, nevertheless, methodological improvements that I might suggest for future research on congressional district staff and elite interaction.

#### Wider data set

The most obvious addition to the study would be the addition of a wider data set. I was able to expand on Macartney's (1975) request that staffing patterns beyond Los Angeles county be studied. Yet, given more time and resources, it would be advisable to select a set of cases that exhibit a much greater range of variables. Most obviously, I would advise utilizing cases from varying regions and distances from Washington, as well as a larger group of cases that permit comparisons based on the age, race and gender of the incumbents. A wider set of cases might confirm the importance of the

“personality” variable, or it might suggest that these more typical variables drive the variations and utilizations of district staff. Alternatively, one might use a data set with a randomized set of case studies. In either case, the conclusions would probably allow one to expand on the findings of this contextual research.

### Longitudinal study

Regardless of the number and location of the case studies, I would suggest that future studies conduct longer visits at varying points during the two-year election cycle.

My visits were largely snapshots in time, taken during one to two week visits to each of the primary districts. I offer that the visits should be longitudinal in two fashions. First, in the short term, there should be different visits to the primary case studies at different time points during a two-year cycle; early in the term, late in the term, when a controversial issue is at hand, when things are just plain slow, during a recess, during the middle of a busy week where the incumbent is gone, during a district work period, during the adjournment period just before the election, and in the months directly after an election. Limited observations of different offices in each of these time settings suggested that sequence and timing are important variables that should not be overlooked.

Second, the incumbent enterprises should be examined at different points in their life cycles. I compared junior and senior incumbents in this dissertation but it might be a more relevant finding to study the same legislator as both a junior and a senior incumbent. The longitudinal analysis would also focus on the staff. Hammond (1984) suggested that there is little data on what staff do after they leave Congress. How long do they stay in the offices? Where do they go after they leave? Do they run for office? And

are they successful? Multiple data points would provide interesting answers to these questions and that of the evolving relationship between the incumbent, staff and elite constituents.

#### Other methods

Perhaps there are other methods of observation that would provide equally fruitful data. After completing several of my observations I also realized that the Zimmerman-Wieder (1977) “diary-diary method” would provide equally penetrating analysis, especially in regard to the degree to which staff interact with elite constituents. In this method, the subjects maintain diaries of their activities. These diaries would then become the basis of intensive interviews. I felt that my research design more effectively uncovered the staff-elite interaction than did previous survey-based studies that could not really see what staff members were doing. Given the “grayness” of many district staff activities, much of their more political behavior tends to be less recorded and talked about, so a diary method provides a provocative approach if one could ensure that the subject would honestly record his or her activities. The “diary-diary method” would take that observation to an even deeper level. The “diary-diary method” is not the only other research design that might be appropriately used to study district staff. One might also do content analysis of office memos and training guides, or perhaps even do a participant-observant study as an employee of one particular staff office. Finally, after more study to build on this contextual data in this dissertation, it would be appropriate to develop survey instruments to study all district staff. This dissertation suggests the discipline has not yet grasped these variables well enough to proceed with such a research design.

### Look more thoroughly at elites

Finally, I would encourage future research to continue to look at staff functions from the elite constituent perspective. As noted in Chapter Five, I would encourage greater utilization of the FEC websites that provide names, addresses, and donor histories of campaign contributors. Their website (at [www.FEC.gov](http://www.FEC.gov) and unofficially at [www.trav.com](http://www.trav.com)) provide ready-made lists of elite constituents in a congressional district. These lists could be used simply to identify elites who interact with the incumbent enterprise or perhaps could be used to construct a larger survey in future research designs. One might even do a study of contributors to both party's candidates in a district and determine how many elites within that district seem to play on both sides. The research could be followed up with interview requests to those bipartisan contributors. At any rate, I suggest that future research is in fact necessary because of the substantial consequences of district staff functions that were mentioned above, for incumbents, for our democratic system and for the discipline.

### Concluding remarks

Congressional district staff members enhance the representation performed by incumbent members of the United States House of Representatives. However, staff behavior also biases the representational process and detracts from the competitive election system designed by the Constitution. There is a serious need for future study of the overall impact of district staff and other perquisites. The evidence of this dissertation concludes with a call for future reform to level the playing ground and return to free, fair and competitive elections. It is important that journalists and academics get beyond

merely accepting congressional incumbency advantage as an iron law of political science and begin to question the consequences of its existence and the tools that sustain it.

This dissertation and Chapter Five in particular contribute to the body of literature on incumbency advantage. The role of Congressional district staff is worthy of future consideration as there have been no new variables on incumbency advantage in recent years, and the literature's understanding of the district staff is quite limited. Observations of the motivations and behavior of the district staff enterprise demand inclusion in the discipline's understanding of what goes in the district and why incumbents get re-elected. Contextual data shows the impact of aggressive staff enterprises – how they identify elite constituents, and serve them with the goal of co-opting them into the district enterprise where they will ultimately support the incumbent with valuable resources and deter quality challengers. This dissertation is an important first step in the recognition of the impact of congressional district staff. Future research is warranted, unless of course the calls for reform are heeded. In which case, district staff would hopefully become much less electorally valuable and not so interesting to study.

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## **Appendix:**

### **A few of the topics for**

#### **Interview Questions and Observations**

##### **For Incumbent members of Congress**

- 1) What kind of district do you have? (What kind of town is this...)
- 2) What do you see when you go home and see the represented, your constituency?
- 3) Who are your strongest supporters?
- 4) What consequences do these perceptions have for his or her behavior?
- 5) Do you consult with other members (state/nearby delegation) on staff sizes? Do you wonder why or you are like fellow or neighboring members (in staff allocations and activities)?
- 6) Who do you spend time with (or who is it "strategically profitable" to be with)?
- 7) Could somebody represent you at important meetings (or do you already employ somebody to do that)?
- 8) How much latitude do you have in choosing a presentational style? (Is it your choice or does the district confine you?)
- 9) What explains your success? Is it issues, your voting record, your service...?
- 10) How much does each (especially service) help?
- 11) How (or do you) present yourself to your strongest opponents, the "never get" votes? (Neutralize?)
- 12) Could anyone else contest the district (service-wise) or is it too segmented (too many bits, too much to know)?
- 13) Do you have open Office Hours? - How do you inform constituents?
- 14) Would friends/elites tell you about soft spots?
- 15) What did you do before election to Congress and how does that impact how you carry out constituency service?
- 16) What criteria do you use in hiring staff?

##### **For District Staff**

- 1) Describe the hierarchy or relationship between the Representative, the Admin. Asst., and the District Director. Maybe use a normal day or case to illustrate.
- 2) How has the structure/function of the office changed over time? How has your job changed over time?
- 3) Does your office conduct any activities/functions that you believe are unique as compared to other offices?
- 4) How did you come to work for the Representative? (a personal friend, or previous business or political connection) Did you work on campaign for the Representative?
- 5) Are you phone bound or out in the district? Break down your day for me.

- 6) What is your preferred technique of presentation (face to face, personal, mobilize groups, issues)?
- 7) Do you consult with other staffs (state/nearby delegation)- to consult on staff sizes and activities. Why are you dis/similar to the fellow or neighboring offices?
- 8) Could you personally represent the representative at important meetings? What kind of credibility/authority do you have w/ constituents? Or who do constituents see when they see you?
- 9) Do you work with party activists in activities?
- 10) Do you work with state representatives? On what kinds of things?

### **For District Elites**

- 1) Are there traditions or expectations of service from previous incumbent? What about expectations over this incumbent's career?
- 2) Do you look to other districts to compare or even ask them for service?
- 3) Do you expect to deal directly the member or is the staff adequate? How receptive do expect each to be?
- 4) Did you work on campaign for the Representative? Or have you contributed to his/her campaign?
- 5) Why are you politically (in)active? Is it for personal, ideological, business needs...?
- 6) "Incumbent need not worry about reaching the leaders, activists, elites. They will reach him." WILL YOU?
- 7) How would you prefer to be represented? (how should MC present self to you)? (face to face, personal, mobilize groups, issues) Other people?

### **(Business Elites)**

- 1) What kinds of services could a Representative perform that would be helpful to you?
- 2) Would you not oppose a member out of a sense of "self-preservation"? In other words, can/do you see the incumbent as the best alternative, sort of like a "known commodity"?
- 3) Are there traditions or expectations of service from previous incumbent? What about expectations over this incumbent's career?
- 4) Do you look to other districts to compare or even ask them for service?

### **(Partisan/Political Elites)**

- 1) How supportive should a Representative be of the local party operation?
- 2) What is role/connection of the incumbent and his/her staff to local party? Would you consider them to be a "surrogate electoral organization"?
- 3) What kinds of services/functions could a Representative perform that would be helpful to you?