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Congressional Campaigns

Introduction

The Congress is the most powerful legislative unit as its members have the ability to write and pass bills. Being an independent institution, members of the Congress have the power to make laws and keep laws from being made (Parnass). This function makes congress membership a big opportunity for many political leaders and is a mark of political influence. In our society, many leaders aspire to leave their mark in the history of a community or geographical areas as well as the nation. Hence, they present their ideas to the people, align themselves with parties and seek funding to support their agenda and attain these positions. In order to represent the state or a congressional district, they have to win by a majority vote. However, there are different factors that influence the success of an aspiring leader. An in-depth look into the works of Greenberg, and Page, shows that incumbency, political power, money, party affiliations as well as the impact one has in the society affect congressional campaigns and the capability of a candidate to win. To fully understand congressional campaigns, it is essential to reflect on role of money and the influence of incumbency in congressional campaigns.

Money plays a critical place in congressional elections. The ability of a candidate to conduct a thorough campaign relies on the funding he gets. Thus it is easy to understand that money defines if one is a quality challenger or not. Money unlocks media houses attention and allows the candidate either the incumbent or the challenger to get in touch with people through

approaches such as raising funds for different community courses. Thus, if a challenger or an incumbent has enough resources, he/she will be able to go around the district or state and inform people of his/her agenda. Also, he/she can run advertisements and fund drives that ensure he/she interacts with the people. According to Greenberg, and Page and Pearson's visual literacy on the topic, this amount accumulates to almost \$1.4 million for house incumbents and \$10.9 million for incumbent senators. The fact that we have 100 senators and 435 representatives in the 115th congress shows that a lot of money is utilized by incumbents as well as their challengers in campaigning.

On its own money cannot assure a seat in either houses of the Congress. The money will ensure one attains popularity but the voting patterns of Americans have evolved beyond popularity. In some cases such as that of Democrat John Corzine D NJ, money did lead to a win but in most cases, loaded coffers alone cannot warrant a win (Greenberg, and Page). Money may get a candidate the much-needed attention but then voters perform an evaluation based on what he/she has to offer, any proven track record and partisan politics. Hence, the effect of incumbency is much larger than that of money. Incumbents are the existing leaders who already served in the position and aspire to continue serving their people. The distinctive role of the congressional position is that they do not have a term limit like the president's term. If a member of Congress can still work and wishes to continue serving the people, they are constitutionally allowed to vote for the person.

Incumbency plays a critical role in the prospects of a leader. It gives the people an opportunity to evaluate the leader and the leader a chance to showcase his/her abilities. This is a chance that most challengers do not have, hence making it hard for them to defeat an existing leader. An incumbent aspirant is a good investment to interested parties and individuals. It is the

law of survival in a society to support an individual with a competitive advantage. The first source of advantage is their input in redistricting. Termed as ‘Gerrymandering’, incumbents can use their influence during redistricting. They utilize their influence to create a district with a high population of partisan supporters or shift the opposition supporters to a different district (Greenberg, and Page). Apart from these tactics, an incumbent has access to the people through free media coverage. Hence, the incumbent has the chance to advertise accomplishments and air testimonials of the effect of his/her constituent services. Most incumbents have an office that serves the issues affecting people in the community (Summers). Through their teams, they are in touch with the needs of the common American. This position makes them better placed to always win reelections.

In addition, the voters already know about incumbents and comprehend their efforts through their media and social media presence. Other privileges that make them more potent for funding include the franking privilege. This opportunity allows incumbents to mail newsletters, updates on legislation, self-promoting information as well as surveys for free to their constituents. Hence they are highly favored by Political Action Committees (PACs) affiliated to parties or businesses as well as well-off individuals compared to challengers who command little media attention and have no access to the people. Further reasons lie on the statistical aspects of reelection. The rates of the reelection of incumbents are high in the country. Hence, donors prefer working with an incumbent aspirant with higher chances of winning especially in partisan areas.

Gathering from statistical information provided by Greenberg, and Page, the reelection rates of incumbents has been 93% for representatives and 80% for senators since World War II. This shows there is the stability of members of Congress with most members serving to

retirement or opting to retire rather than lose the election. This stability in the membership of the Congress is one of the main facilitators of the deep partisan politics of the Congress. Partisan politics are a bad thing for democracy and the nation. It derails the process of making and amending laws and policies. In serving their purpose, members of Congress are guided by Burke's perspective of delegation (Greenberg and Page). My understanding of the delegation role is that members of congress have the mandate to exercise their own judgment and expertise at all times. Hence, it is vital to exercise their understanding of the society as well as the application of law to ensure proper representation despite party lines. However, stability is assured by party loyalty. This fact hinders the decisions of members of Congress in most cases. Consequently, it affects democracy and development of the nation.

On the other hand, stability is a good thing for our nation as it ensures that leaders can be held accountable for any decision they made in the past, present and in the future. The faces in leadership do not have to change and those supporting a particular bill can still be questioned about their stance three years later. Hence there are limited situations of quick fixes as the inconsistency would offer. However, stability still affects democracy as incumbents have an unfair advantage over a challenger who may offer the people a better and quality leadership.

Conclusion

The Congress is an institution that holds a significant role in the country. Its members hold critical roles in our society. However, the fabrics of our society allow easy reelection of incumbent leaders. This reelection is a good thing and a bad thing as well. Its goodness is embedded in consistency and accountability accorded to members of congress. Its badness is based on unfair competition during elections. I believe that every incumbent deserves a proper evaluation before being elected. Factors such as political influence and over reported projects as

well as money should not be determinants of reelection. Instead, reforms, short-term and long-term action, as well as proper ethical behavior, should be at the center stage of congressional campaigns.

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