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The Art of the Vote Analyzing Roll-Call Decisions in Congress

Zachariah Thomas Green

3/15/2013

Abstract: Our government today has a multitude of issues. Problems arising with our government appear to be systemically tied to Congress. It seems to have failed to contribute continued progress and growth to our nation. Determining where these problems exist, and even more importantly how to remedy them in a way that gives us better Congressional representatives, is the goal of this project. Factors that influence roll call voting decisions are the central focus to this study and include: Congressional monetary ties; interest group knowledge; the Presidential and Judiciary influences; legislative importance and Congressional power aspirations; the ethical background of Congressional members; and constituent influences. All of these issues are going to be examined through statistical studies and actual interviews with those in Congressional positions. This way Congressional operations can be analyzed in a more in-depth way, which is vital to actually fix the issues plaguing our Congress today.

I. Introduction:

In our nation's infancy there was a massive push against the monarchical power in Britain. Indeed the power the monarchy of Britain had was so hated that when our forefathers began establishing the framework for our government they came up with the articles of confederation. This preliminary constitution created such a weak government there was absolutely no way for it to actually work. The government could not even tax the colonies, for example. Going back to the drawing board for a draft to institute government led to our modern day Constitution, which was eventually ratified by the colonies. However, the government was still considered to be slow to change in order to maintain stability and ensure that the people were always represented in the government.

Fast-forwarding to modern day times, the question becomes is this still indeed the case. Who is it that truly has the power in government? With the massive increase in land, population, and culture; each lay person's vote has lost some serious influence. This is not necessarily a bad thing. The original goal of the Constitutional Convention was to get the collective input of the population for our leaders, and not allow the few to rule. However, with such a diverse population what a government officeholder does once they reach office becomes problematic, especially in today's time. Do they cater to the Latino vote, the southern vote, their cities own constituents, their state's constituents, what is good for the nation; the list goes on and on.

Originally national interests and arguably individual state interests was what guided congressional votes. However, with the massive filibusters seen in the Congress recently and economic catastrophes like the bank and auto-bailouts, this original idea needs to be called into

question. The floundering of Congress can also be linked to the heightened distrust in the government today and low voter-turnouts.

How this could have happened, while a valid question is not what actually gets to the heart of the problem. The real question becomes what is it that actually guides a congressional roll-call vote when a Congressperson gets into office? Why roll-call votes? The reason is they get to the heart of actual law-making. If a case-study was done on one law in particular, or one facet of the Congressional process; we cannot begin to answer how the entire institution seems to be failing. One component to any roll-call decision is the constituent influence and the possibility of re-election (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 577, 2011). A seat in congress is something that no congressional person wants to give up. Another related component is undoubtedly campaign contributions and other monetary sources. This includes the political parties themselves and the incredible amount of interest groups that try to influence all legislative activities (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 579 & 582, 2011).

In conjunction with the constituent, money, and interest group variables, more subtle strings of influence can be seen and studied. One such subtle maneuvering is through the efforts of the President of the United States (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 580, 2011). If he wants something to be passed in Congress he can use his considerable influence to sometimes push bills through that would not otherwise have gained any momentum. The judiciary is another sometimes unthought-of originator of legislation creation (Rogers, 84, 2001). If the Supreme Court were to strike down a law, claiming it is unconstitutional the legislative repercussions are immense and so legislatures must use forward thinking when the draft legislation. Related to

these two government branches may well be the nuances a position in Congress has, such as only worrying about voting for “important” legislation or campaigning demands that may be there for Congressional members (Kathleen, 1994).

These variables are all what goes into these roll-call decisions in one way or another. One other variable that needs to be mentioned in case some sort of causal link can be established could include the various backgrounds of the Congressmen and women themselves, which also includes their own ethical values (Thompson, 1992). By reviewing the scholarly works that deal with these variables, some clarity should be attainable in determining what is really going on with our Congress today. Furthermore, interviews with those that do hold or have held positions in Congress should allow a move from this largely theoretical and statistical world of scientific research to reality.

II. The Money

The government seems to absorb money and put it to unknown uses better than any other institution we see today. However, determining where the money they are given goes is not the topic of discussion in this study. The question is how money ties into these roll-call voting decisions. It is also important to note that the money for these candidates can come from a variety of areas as well, and for every campaign finance law enacted since the original in 1876 there has been some form of a loophole utilized to fund these candidates (New Yorker, 2012).

The undoubted origin for any financial backing for any candidate is from the political party. However, the party itself is not just some money-making machine. Quite the contrary,

their job is to create a campaign for a candidate, which in turn costs money. What they must do is make a candidate look so good that the average citizen wants to invest in their future. Essentially we as a people are putting a loan out on a candidate in exchange for them to follow the policies they emphasize in their campaigns. At least this is how the system is intended to work.

The consequence of this is the party then maintains a string of power over the candidate, and is a significant predictor of Congressional action (Snyder and Groseclose, 193, 2000). Losing the party's support can lead to a complete failure in any reelection attempt, or even impeachment. One reason the penalties can be so harsh is the fact that a candidate elected may have been elected by a partisan constituent base; therefore, betraying the party betrays the constituents as well (Snyder and Groseclose, 193, 2000). Arguably in today's world the constituent base is much more moderate, so the party ties cause Congressional decisions and actions that the public may not entirely agree with (Snyder and Groseclose, 206, 2000).

In any event the elected official cannot, usually, go against what the party puts forward as their agenda (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 580, 2011). Not every aspect has to be adhered to, specifically of course. However, too much leeway from left to the right leads to labels such as a RINO (Republican in Name Only). A negative label from the party itself leads to negative labels from constituents because of the vast influences the party maintains over things such as the media. The party can; therefore, undermine Congressional members before they even have a chance to explain their actions.

Despite the intent to have lay-persons invest in a candidate, this rarely happens. Money going into the parties and candidates is not usually from lay-persons, but comes from business investments. In close races, some large companies even invest in both candidates. The purpose? More favorable legislation for the businesses such as: a lessening of employee rights, no need to provide health insurance, deregulation on environmental laws, increases in trade laws such as tariffs, etc.

Regardless of the types of laws that a business is trying to influence, the amount that a business may or may not spend and at what given time can easily be hushed up by filtering the money through Political Action Committees or political parties prior to the money getting to the candidates (Straatmann, 619, 1991). Granted using PACs limits the ties between a person and the elected official, but there are other methods of ensuring the candidate knows where the money came from (Wright, 1985) & (Straatmann, 2002). As a matter of fact the need for money for these elections can put big donors at the same level of influence on roll-call voting decisions as the party itself (Green and Krasno, 898, 1988).

Now, is there any sort of a method to fix this huge money issue and the ties they make to a Congressional roll call vote decision? The answer is, I believe, to take the Political Action Committee purpose to a new level. Essentially make all of the money given to candidates as anonymous. Now this may seem as a radical change, everything in Congress is about the money and businesses tend to budget a part of their profits to influencing legislation. However, if everyone was held to the same standard Political Action Committees would actually work as they were intended; a grassroots movement for candidates to obtain campaign funds (Wright,

1985). Only those that appealed to the most people would be elected. The guesswork as to why a congressman voted a certain way would no longer be an issue like it is today because they would need to ensure that whatever they did, did not alienate any of the constituents they have to explain their actions to. Why? They would have no idea who was supporting their campaigns and would have to appeal to a broader base of people to get the necessary contributions to run for office. Granted, there are other issues that affect these roll call votes, but making all campaign contributions nonpublic would help the situation with money immensely.

III. Interest Groups & Business Groups

Our forefathers predicted that an attempt to have each faction represented in our government would cause the government grind down to an eventual and dreadful stop. As a matter of fact the political parties themselves were seen as the beginnings of a place of disunion. Keeping interest groups out of the Nation's capital was never going to be avoidable, however, and so now here we are at the second pull on the vote.

Interests groups are there to push an interest that someone somewhere deems to be important, and they could be helped or hurt by legislation. Granted this must be within reason. Convicted felons are not going to have a prison rights lobbyist in DC. However, nearly every big business does, and small ones have a state-level lobbyist too usually. This even includes universities and schools. What is the point? With so many people there how can any actual lobbying be done? The answer is so simple it is scary: constituent demands and a congressional lack of knowledge.

Constituents are the only guaranteed source for political officeholders for keeping their jobs. Yes money helps, and so do connections. However, if they do not get the actual vote they cannot keep their office. Therefore, when constituents from a Congressional district call for something, then the best lobbyist to inform the congress person is called in to inform them (Evans, 1996). This is the lobbyist's time to shine, since they may not get a similar chance to push their agenda again (Alpin and Hegarty, 446, 1980). In exchange for not making the congress person bungle through a topic that they may not have absolutely any knowledge about, the lobbyist's agenda will, in theory, be passed through or stopped by the same Congressperson (Evans, 1996).

Interest groups can also push certain issues to the top of the agenda and move others to the bottom (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 582, 2011). The problem with this is that whatever a Congressional campaign was based on could change the second that they reach office. Furthermore, we as people are powerless to do anything to change or challenge the powerful interest groups without creating our own. Then by creating another interest group we are only compounding the problem of having too many interest groups.

So, essentially the problem of interest groups is a two-fold issue. The first problem is the fact that one person, paid to push the interests of a single group has the access to influence the vote of a congressperson all on their own (Alpin and Hegarty, 446, 1980). Also if a business or group has enough lobbyists there may not even be anyone to point the finger at if a law is passed and has negative consequences for the nation at large, because everyone in Congress may have voted the same way due to that interest groups ability to out lobby the opposition (Evans, 300,

1996). The second part of the problem is that interest groups may change the political party agenda. Due to this they may also be able to influence or change the key issues a Congressperson was planning on focusing on in their campaigns (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 577, 2011).

So how can this issue with interest groups be changed, specifically when it has been shown just how much of an influence they can have over Congress? The first challenge can partially be helped by making all monetary forms private so that one interest group cannot claim to be financially backing a candidate more than any other (Wawro, 2001). Granted, they could still claim to be substantial donors, but the Congressperson could not know what “substantial” was and it stands to reason that the interest groups would not donate as much before.

How to deal with the position of knowledge and agenda setting is still not fixed, however. I propose a new disclosure rule; this would mean that prior to any vote Congressional members would have to explain briefly who advised the Congressperson to vote that way. For example: “As per the advice of John Smith of the National Rifle Association and Gallup polls of my state constituents I vote nay on the new gun control policies.” In this way we would have a public record of calling into account who advised the Congressperson on a piece of legislation and be able to call them out if they were caught flip-flopping on legislative policies through-out their political career. Essentially, the point is to have more government transparency to avoid the issues that interest groups create.

IV. The Other Branches:

As our nation's leader, the president can get an unprecedented amount of support for anything that he decides to go for in his/her political agenda. However, there are numerous limiting factors to the support that a president may be able to get. One such limiter is his/her public approval ratings (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 581, 2011). The less approval a President has, the less likely anyone in Congress will want to be seen siding with his agenda because they risk needlessly angering their constituents. Also the party affiliation of the legislative body and the President's own affiliation can seriously limit his ability to get tasks accomplished (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 581, 2011).

Regardless of the limiting factors a President may encounter, they can motivate Congress to get things done and the examples of them doing so litter our Nation's history. Lyndon B. Johnson's massive civil rights legislation packages are one such example of a President's ability to dictate Congressional legislation, especially considering it was during the tumultuous Civil Rights Era (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 581, 2011). Women's suffrage is also another prime example during Woodrow Wilson's presidency. This ability to influence the Congress will by definition, change what Congress members originally were seeking for their constituents or themselves. Thereby also changing their purpose from what the people really wanted.

The people elect the President to get certain necessary measures accomplished for the country as a whole, however. Therefore, it would make sense that sometimes the interests of a few have to be discounted or at least set aside while the nation gets fixed itself. This is especially true in very complex issues like foreign policy decisions (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 580, 2011).

It becomes rather difficult then to determine if the relation of the President and Congress is actually going to change in a negative way the things constituents wanted their Congressional members to accomplish. The President's veto power will always be something that can "control" the passage of legislation, and can put a stop to the passage of a law that may have held vital importance to constituents (McCarty and Poole, 282, 1995). However, this is a necessary check on Congressional power. It could be that we as constituents miss out on added measures in a bill that our representative added for our benefit because of a veto, for example, but the national consequences of a bad law being passed can spell disaster for everyone and needs to be vetoed (McCarty and Poole, 1995).

So with that said, attempting to remedy this issue of the President's power of persuasion on Congress is completely futile, mostly because our Constitution already has done so with the creation of the checks and balances system in our government. We have to trust in our President to not directly try to harm us as a society and move us towards the greater good or progress. Even more than that, we have to trust in our Congressional representatives to stand-up against the pushes of a President unless there is a benefit for us, his/her constituents. For the most part trust will be easier to come by with blind donations in campaigns and more transparency in what makes up a Congressional roll call decision as well.

Besides the Executive's veto power, laws can be undermined through judicial interpretations, or judiciary avoidance. One example of this are the three strikes laws, which had the best intentions from the Congress, which was to remove repeat offenders from our society. However, it was and still is largely avoided by the judiciary. Therefore, the relationship between

the Judiciary and the Congress is incredibly relevant to this study, and it creates the question of how to control later interpretation of the law (Rogers, 2001).

A lack of Congressional knowledge on what will be latter judicial interpretations of a law can cause voting apathy on the part of Congress members (Rostow, 194, 1952). Essentially if Congressional members believe that a law will not stand up to the Judiciary there is no point in showing up to vote on it. Granted, more talks and revisions could theoretically fix the issues with judicial interpretation, but there is no absolute way to know for sure until the law is called into practice in a court of law.

The need to attempt to ensure a law will not be called “unconstitutional” and be struck from the books, along with the need to guarantee the interpretation of the law is followed as originally intended, leads to more work for Congressional members and their staffs. Granted, the consequences of a law need to be examined minutely, and thought experiments (which can be very lengthy) must be conducted to push a law through our Congress in the first place. However, an already slow and deliberative process is bogged down even further by trying to appease how the courts will interpret a law (Frickey and Smith, 2002). In addition to that we could be discouraging Congress members from even putting forward their own legislative ideas because they may feel as though whatever they put through Congress will be undermined by the courts later as the legislation receives a different interpretation than what was originally intended.

Again much like with the executive branch we see that little can actually be done. I could propose another committee to first view a proposed bill for how it will be interpreted by a court of law. That would then allow the necessary revisions to a bill to be applied immediately at the

outset of its journey to become a law. After the bill passes through the Congressional process it would then go through another committee. That committee could then interpret the law as they would a normal law and mimic how a court would interpret the law. If it is interpreted in a way deemed fit by the Congress, which would be decided by a vote, it could then go onto the President for approval. If not more revisions could be done. However, this adds even more time to creating and making bills that forward thinking Congress members should be doing in the first place. Also an institution like this could become more of a rubber stamp than actually having effectiveness. The nature of judicial review is a check on the Congress and is embodied in our traditions; therefore, while a source of roll-call influence it should not and cannot be tampered with much like the Presidential influences cannot.

VI. Legislation Importance and Power Grabs

The call to declare war can easily be one of the most impressive motivators for Congressional action or inaction, and may very well be one of the most important things that Congress does. On the flip side, when regular or even minor bills pass by Congressional members it is rare for everyone to show up to the floor to make a roll-call vote, despite there being a public record of all who were present for a roll-call decision. Nowhere are examples of legislative shirking of responsibility more prevalent than when they are about to retire (Lott, 1990). The issue of legislative shirking seems to arise specifically on how important legislation is deemed to be according to the Congressperson, regardless of the length of time they plan to stay in Congress (Lott, 1990).

Besides avoiding certain run of the mill laws that could have crucial long-term effects for constituents, Congressional members also may not establish proper clauses within a law itself. Morris Fiorina looked at regulation failures in the late 1800s and early 1900s as one example to show how legislative divisions could stall or completely alter the political agenda (1986). This was the original intended goal of a bicameral legislature, to have each house be a check on the other and could stop a flawed bill all on its own (Hamilton, 1995). However, this leads to the second problem that legislative shirking has, which is that check is removed between the houses. Put another way, if a Democratic senate fails to change certain areas of a bill set forward by a Republican house by not being there to cast a vote on it, some seriously drastic policies could find their way onto the President's desk for signing.

Moments of minor law-making become interesting indeed when you view how opportunities were seized by someone missing a roll call vote. One such example that was relatively recent was when Virginia utilized the absence of a democratic state senator to push through a redistricting law for a republican advantage (Drum, 2013). On the state level this absence had the ability to change the future of Virginia for a very long time indeed, and equal ramifications can come into being when there are missing votes in our National Congress as well.

Another issue that is very similar to the legislative importance issue outlined above is what it is that a Congressional person may be aspiring too. Campaigning for another term or office will hurt someone's ability to be an efficient Congress member. Both jobs are full-time occupations. With that said, the constituents lose the meaningful representation by our

Congressional member as the campaigning politicking game begins. Marci Hamilton and many of her peers are very critical indeed of this type of problem, saying that our representative democratic system may have to be entirely scrapped (1995).

How can this issue be changed in order to put the constituents back at the forefront again, or put another way, avoid our Congress members from overlooking or shirking their responsibilities? The answer I believe is to impose a quota of absences for all Congress members. The quotas could each have different thresholds or they could be split into levels. One level could be if someone misses too many days they may not even be able to keep their position in office and their replacement would have to step into office. The next level could be the limit on what it took to get into a committee at all, much less chair it. At the top level would be a relatively small number of allowable absences that you can have and still run a presidential campaign. In this way Congress members would have a more direct incentive to attend roll call decisions, especially if there was a higher calling than what we as constituents hold them too. Granted, in theory having the matter of who attended these roll call decisions should be enough for us to call attention to them whenever they try to make a grab for power, but since it is such a common practice we do not really have that capability. Of course exceptions could also be made for this rule regarding family emergencies and other things that would render an absence allowable.

VII. Other Sources of Influence

Family backgrounds can have an impact on a host of things that are relevant to someone in Congress and what we as voters use for consideration on whether or not to elect someone. For

example someone's feelings towards gun control may be directly correlated to having parents who hunt. Family life, how hard or easy a childhood was, can have similar impacts on a Congressional members feelings towards certain policies. Not only that, but looking at a Congress member's current family life while in office can be a large distraction from regular office duties they must attempt to cater to. Regardless, all of these aspects should be easily discernible to voters and we will not vote in someone who is going to be morally against the policies that we want to see passed. The family life of a Congress member becomes incredibly relevant; however, when they run into the paradox of government ethics: to vote for what the constituents want, or what they believe is best (Thompson, 1992).

Ethics, while usually absent from sentences that include the word politicians, is something that is tied to all Congressional decisions (Stone, 2003). By using current environmental ethics legislation we can get some idea as to how ethical paradoxes arise in the Congress today. So at the outset, it is important to note that environmental laws or ethics seems to be largely lacking in the political realm of today (Stone, 2003). Reasons for this include ambiguity in how to determine the value of animal or plant that is harmed through human intervention in the biosphere (Stone, 2003). Another reason is it is rather difficult to determine who actually deserves the blame (Stone, 2003). Regardless a growing majority of constituents are concerned with the way we have been treating our environment, and want to see some form of change occur in that realm of policy. Thus, a paradox of political ethics emerges: do something, even if ineffective, to keep appearances of progress (Thompson, 1992). This politicking tool is utilized on a variety of issues, including things like the gun control debate.

Lessening the amount of ammunition in a magazine will not realistically remove the danger or even ability of those that want to harm others, but the idea that they are doing something substantial to control our guns has taken political steam.

Getting back to the environmental ethics laws that Stone looks at in-depth, another political paradox emerges: the difference between public and private political behavior (Thompson, 1992). As voters and citizens outside of official affairs we really have no idea how an issue hits the public agenda. Of course we can guess the media or some interest groups are involved, but we do not actually see it. We also have no idea how other issues seem to just lose relevance. Stone seems to believe that limiting factors for policy moves include those who stand to lose out majorly on said new policy (2003). One could argue this is why we as a nation have lagged behind in removing our oil dependence. Oil companies have money and do indeed use it to help expand their wealth. Indeed, there are numerous ethical scandals that have been uncovered where outright bribery was utilized to stop or push legislation (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 580, 2011). This is where the paradox arises, and it was touched on in the family background section; Congress members use whatever issues the public finds relevant to gain offices, but then can easily be tempted into losing sight of that when they get into Congress.

Now, bribery as I said previously is utilized, but is not a common practice, and most of our Congressional members are indeed ethical people (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 580, 2011). However, there is enough of it occurring to cause scandal, which means there has to be more instances that we as the public simply do not know about (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 580,

2011). The solution, I believe then, is more ethics officials or even a fully-fledged ethical counsel in Congress.

No matter where you look in society, home life, and family backgrounds will always influence someone's work. However, we hold these Congressional members to a higher standing than most other people and so must do our homework to see how a Congressional member would deal with a voting dilemma. We should be able to determine, at least to some extent, what type of moral values a Congress person has to ensure that they will vote the way we as constituents want. This could be helped through ethics officers that are secretly scattered throughout the Congressional ranks. This entire secret society could be utilized to root-out bribery and other instances where Congress members foiled what we as constituents wanted to have passed. After all, as established with family life and background influencing anyone's job, there will always be someone who uses their job position for the sole purpose of benefiting themselves. The only way to catch them is usually through accidents. With a secret ethical counsel, they would be caught much more efficiently and effectively. Also we could use this council to carry out some of the already prescribed solutions.

VIII. Constituents

The purpose of this entire study is to somehow re-establish the congressional need to retain a focus on us as constituents. As alluded too, it becomes very difficult in today's time to determine what influence that we as a people actually have on anyone in Congress. They are busy people. They may be well stuck in their own ways. They, arguably, have access to educational and other opportunities we may never even conceive of, making them seem that

much higher up on the economic scale than they originally were. They have the power to influence the whole country with the work that they do on any given day.

With all of that said, at the end of day, they need us; the lay-people. We are the reason that they have their jobs and continue to maintain their positions and that is shown by a multitude of studies that show a direct correlation between Congressional decisions and constituent interest (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 577, 2011). Some research even goes a step further to show that the ties to the constituents increase as seniority of Congressional members increases (Fioriana, 1975). The reason for this is because an interruption in someone's political career leads to the impossibility of actually getting any aspirations of power realized (Fioriana, 1975). The heart of the constituency issue is not the fact that there is an undisputed need for the Congressional member to represent their constituents, but whether or not we as constituents are doing our job in effectively enough to punish bad Congressional members and elect those that we truly need.

The first factor that contributes to the heart of this issue is voter apathy. Voter apathy has been a problem, and it has only grown in size for today's world. Indeed, one study found that, while an assumed relationship between economic displeasure and unhappiness in private life will increase voter turn-out, the opposite is actually true (Kinder & Kieweit, 1979). People were less likely to punish incumbents who caused them direct economic problems (Kinder & Kieweit, 1979). Instead the collective perceived ability for the party to actually create economically sound policies and the overall general business climate whether good or bad; was what drove voter turn-outs to increase (Kinder & Kieweit, 1979). In addition to this study it has been a long-time belief that an increase in voter importance and a more direct impact voters had on politics, such

as through national level ballot initiatives, would increase voter turn-out. This, however, was disproven as well (Everson, 424, 1981)

Besides voter apathy being a huge constituent issue, a citizen's actual knowledge on the candidates is also a massive problem. One study examined what citizens had to know in order to effectively vote. It found that, for the most part, citizens are tasked with having to do quite a lot of research in order to have an effective grasp over who it is we really should vote into office (Bennett & Bennett, 1993). However, we are desperately lacking as a nation to even know the basics. For example, this same study found that over 90% of those asked about how a Congressional member voted on any law in their district, answered with having no idea about how they voted about anything (Bennett & Bennett, 1993). Not knowing at least basic facts about the candidates can lead to later miscommunications on what a vote for a candidate really meant. In addition, not knowing at least basic facts about a candidate can lead to the candidate's ability to use their position to whatever advantage they want to, especially given the relative difficulty to beat an incumbent in an election campaign (Green & Krasno, 1988) & (Bennett & Bennett, 1993). The only time any form of knowledge on the candidates seems to increase is when one party maintains control over a long period of time (Bennett & Bennett, 1993). This, however, is largely attributable to the media's constant questioning of that particular party in power (Bennett & Bennett, 1993).

Neither of these two problems are enough to actually discount the two main prevalent facts through this whole paper. Congress does not seem able to get anything into motion anymore period, especially something that can have a meaningful and lasting impact on the

American public. Similarly it is nearly impossible to distinguish what it is that actually impacts Congress members when they finally decide to do something. There is no question that our vote to retain, or put someone into office has a large impact in roll-call decisions even in today's time (Theriault, Hickley, and Blass, 577, 2011). However, we have limited our ability to make this constituent tie as forceful as it was during our forefather's time. We need to accept the responsibility as citizens to go out and vote, but even more than that, not blindly follow campaign promises. In order to do this we have to take time out to actually research the candidates and spread the word on our own if someone is not right for their position. Only then will we see the other factors discussed previously fall in subservience to the true constituent demands.

IX. Theoretical Conclusion

The drive for me to start this project was to discover what is most likely the root cause for voting mischief in roll-call decisions and determine what ways there are to remove it. With the scholarship seen above we can see the influencing factors on these votes and formulate some ways to remove them. Money was the first variable discussed and probably is the biggest influence in today's Congress. It is also important to note that the money could come from both political parties and businesses, each of which has its own connotations. The party money serves to tie the candidates tighter to the overall party ideology and the business money is a way to line pockets in exchange for voting a certain way on legislation. It would seem the best way to fix this based on my conclusions from the scholarly research would be to have all money be given

blindly to candidates. In this way no one could lay a claim to how much money they gave for a candidate, and therefore, could not theoretically use their money to influence their decisions.

Besides the money influences, the interest groups and lobbyists can carry great weight in the way in which a candidate votes. One such way is the interest group person, or lobbyist may be the best source of information on a given topic for a congressional person. Thereby one person, paid to change the minds of the Congressional voters, has the ease of access necessary to get the vote they want on a particular piece of legislation. Therefore, I propose a method of divulging who gave a Congressional member advice on a piece of legislation by enunciating for the record who advised them to vote a certain way. This would lend more transparency to the voting process and gives us as constituents a way to determine who is influencing our representative's decisions.

Besides the massive amount of interest groups vying to have their voices heard in Congress, the President's influence must not be overlooked. The President is of course our elected leader, and has some need to push his agenda through Congress to an extent. Failure to do so is a failure for our nation to progress. However, individual constituents cannot be overlooked in every aspect. It is our representative's job to keep our needs in mind before siding with the President's agenda. Therefore, the only way to fix this tie to the vote is to have trust in our representative that they will not overlook our own interests, which is greatly helped through blind donations and more transparency. The other branch of the government that can also have a limit on the vote is, of course, the judicial branch. With the ability to totally strike-down a law as unconstitutional, they have a legislative dynamite stick in their pocket they can utilize at any

time, which causes some worry for Congress. Even more subtle than an unconstitutional declaration by the court; the interpretation of a law can have drastic impacts on how far a law goes in achieving its intended purpose. Again, much like with the President, judicial review and judicial interpretation cannot be changed. It is a check on Congressional power and we must trust in our Congressional members to use forward thinking before passing a law so it will work in its intended way. We could have another committee that would act as a mock court to determine how well the law will be interpreted, but this bogs down the Congressional system even further than it already is. More importantly it could lose its relevance over time.

The importance of the legislation in question is a more subtle but still relevant influence. The more important, the more a Congress person will want to take a definitive side. This then leads to a lack of care on more minor pieces of legislation that may have some important implications indeed. Also campaigns within Congress can significantly alter the way that Congress persons treat legislation in general. An aspiration for a higher position hinders Congressional ability to adequately work for constituent interests. Together this seems to call for an attendance policy in Congress. Where if a Congressional member fails to appear at roll call voting meetings without a valid excuse they then lose their ability to pursue more influential positions in Congress, or they may lose their seat altogether.

The person themselves is also a part of what makes up the roll-call vote and cannot be overlooked. One of the variables in this type of category would be the family life they were raised in and the one they have in the present day, which will shape their views on policy. This aspect of the Congressional member will be known by a majority of the voters prior to the

candidate gaining office; however, so it loses a lot of importance. What retains its relevance are the ethics and morals they hold themselves to while in Congress. Essentially, I argue for a need for a secret ethical committee in Congress that reports wrong-doing by Congressional members to an oversight committee that has the ability to fire or suspend Congressional members for illicit and unethical behavior. The secrecy then creates an environment where no one in Congress knows who may report them, thus, undermining the capability of anyone in Congress to involve themselves in bad behavior. Also this committee could work to ensure that full disclosure of financing and who helped guide their roll-call decisions would be enacted.

The final variable, while not involved with the Congressional members themselves, but still directly relates to these roll-call decisions is us the constituents. There is no doubt that our vote for Congressional elections is important because without it Congressional members cannot ever hope to keep their seat in Congress. However, we have weakened our vote in two ways. The first is we do not all vote. In the days of our forefathers nearly everyone voted, it was considered a civic duty. In today's world we are lucky if even 60% of our population goes out to vote. Also the voters today are much less educated on who and what they are really voting for. Life has changed dramatically, but it is still important to remain informed on how our representatives are doing. Failure to go out and actually vote and just as importantly remaining informed, causes the entire population to suffer because we lose the biggest check on Congress itself, our own vote.

X. Real-World Application

Admittedly the solutions I have proposed above are biased. Not because of my own views per se, but because they all fail to take into account how things really work in Congress.

That does not mean they should be immediately underscored and thrown out. What it will serve to show is how disconnected the public and even researchers are from what actually goes on in Congress. Sources of this disconnect include things such as the media which works to create public perception, and of course party polarization. This is why it becomes so important to actually take a look at the real world to see if any of these potential “fixes” to Congress could actually work. In the same vein it is also important to determine how Congress actually works to more accurately determine what it is in roll-call voting decisions that weigh on Congressional member’s minds. To do so I elected to interview a variety of persons that are in a position to have some expertise on the Congress and how it works. Granted this is not an ideal picture of everyone in every situation, but it allows us to draw some tentative conclusions on what can and cannot work today; and most importantly where the real blame lies.

A. The Lobbyist Stand-point

The first person interviewed was a lobbyist in Lansing. His position as a lobbyist gives the study great insight into how interest groups are tied into Congress. The first and most important discovery from this interview was that lobbyists and other interest groups are indeed where Congressional members go to find knowledge about specific legislation. Congressional members are generalists, and only human. They cannot know everything about the legislation that they are voting on. It is simply not realistic. Therefore, they do indeed utilize lobbyists, who are paid to represent the issues their clients find a need to either change or not change, to gain knowledge about the laws. What the scholarly works fail to grasp is that interest groups and lobbyists need to maintain a good relationship with as many Congressional members as possible.

Therefore, these lobbyists are honest when it comes to the pros and cons of proposed legislation. Most of the scholarly work seems to believe that there will be two lobbyists for each individual issue, each sugar-coating the repercussions of what could happen after legislation either passes or fails to pass in order to better their own interests. This is not how it works at all. Instead usually one trusted lobbyist becomes the source Congressional members utilize for insight on legislation. The only way to maintain this position of trust is to be totally honest on what passage or failure of passage of a bill truly means.

It is important to note here that one fear is correct; lobbyists do have a direct role in influencing policy in Congress. Also they are trying to influence votes in a way to better their clients. However, they are doing so in an honest fashion to maintain the position of trust they hold with Congressional members and cannot recklessly pursue things that only benefit their clientele.

Furthermore, this interview shed some light on how Congress needs to change in order to work the way it was intended. One such method was to remove term limits, especially on House members. The reason is that Congress members do not have the time necessary to become experts in certain committees that demand more knowledgeable and experienced members to chair them; one example used was the Appropriations Committee. This committee is tasked with knowing how to both: gather the funds and then utilize those funds, in every aspect of the State Government. It takes years to learn this valuable knowledge and by the time it is finally learned, the representative is at their limit for the terms they can run for reelection.

Another need for change was campaign financing. The suggested change was the exact opposite of what the scholarly work pointed me to, and that was making all donations public. In a sense we both were vying for the same outcome, but publicizing campaign contributions is a much more effective way to limit the way money can influence the Congressional vote. Essentially privatizing who donates for whom is not going to change a thing, the reason being is there is no way that a large donor is going to not divulge to the Congressional member how much they spent. Through publication of who voted for whom, we as voters can see two very important things. The first is how many supporters a Congressional member had. Only five donors, for example, show a very narrow representation; while 200 hundred donors show a very broad representation. Also it shows us how much money was given to the campaign. In theory the more broad based support and grassroots type (smaller) donations received tells voters if a Congressional campaign runner is looking to benefit the entire constituency base or just a few powerful elites.

The final need for clarification is how narrow of group interests a lobbyist represents. As a lobbyist in Lansing, a large majority of our constituency base is still indeed represented. The scholarly work seems to suggest that lobbyists have a very narrow focus on legislation, which may be true sometimes, but is not to a large extent. With all the clients accounted for, the lobbying firm I interviewed could easily represent some 5-10 thousand people in the district because the businesses he represent can lead to broad changes that can affect everyone in the area. Also everyone that holds a job in them, and their own individual families can all, in effect, add to the total of people that this firm represents.

So the interview with the lobbying firm gives us a great insight into what an interest group really does in Congress. They are not, for the most part, representing the sole interests of one institution, but instead represent a very large portion of the constituency base. They also see issues plaguing Congress and seek to fix them. One example is the need to remove term limits even though they give a boom they give to their business (because they could seek to be in a better position of need for new Congressional members). Also they see the need that all of us voters know who wants our Congressional representative elected, and how much they do, which could be resolved through publicizing all donations. Perhaps the most important discovery here is that lobbyists have to be realistic with Congressional members when it comes to informing them about the laws. They must share both sides of what a legislative passage, or failure to passage, would mean for the State as a whole; despite being paid by arguably one side for or against the legislation itself. Thus, they shape policy to a large extent, but are limited to a very large extent on what they do.

B. Congress Member 1:

The first Congressional representative interviewed was surprisingly tight-lipped on necessary reforms Congress needs to be better, and how he felt about the solutions I reached from my scholarly research. What the credo of this interview was, was essentially, the need to maintain strong ties to constituents to explain his actions within Congress. He would send out newsletters every month, tour through the various districts, and ensure the constituent messages were heard.

However, at the same time, when asked how he managed to balance his campaign into the Federal Congress and his work at the State level, he said “well the public does not [by and large] have any idea what you are doing” and that “only the few informed people really matter.” Therefore, he effectively dodged the question on how he maintained his role in the State Legislature while campaigning, and undercut his previous statement at the same time. How could he be informing us as constituents as to what he is doing, but then admit that we are uninformed? I took this to mean that most definitely his campaign did hinder his ability to be involved at the State level; otherwise he would not try to point out how the public was uninformed and seemingly not as important.

I also sought to see if my secret ethics council I proposed to ensure that the Congress members were doing their job both well and ethically, would actually work in Congress. Again the question was mostly avoided, but yet another cynical insight was left exposed. His answer was that by and large, constituents need to see progress in some form and it has to be in the direction they want the government to go. If they do not see examples of that then the Congress member will not maintain their office. Granted, this does seem to show that we still have very significant influence in Congress; however, it seems to suggest that someone in this position could highlight a fragment of what they were doing to show that there has been something done the constituents wanted and hide a lot of things that did not.

This cynicism held after analysis of the interview could be the result of my own interpretation, but when the entire interview was centered (despite my wanting to veer off on other topics) on “staying on top of things,” specifically trying to show how well you are doing to

the constituents, it becomes tough to see how cynicism is not merited. Based on the “uninformed majority” reply I received, I got the feeling much of this member’s time in his 80 hour a week occupation was spent on maintaining a good ‘face’ in constituent eyes, and not necessarily doing something productive. Also the district that elected this particular member is largely partisan and tends to vote directly down party lines. Therefore, someone rather ineffective could continue to be reelected because he was the incumbent member of the dominant party.

All in all this interview showed three things that are vital to not be overlooked. The first is that campaigning or having other obligations could easily hinder your ability to do the necessary job you were elected to. The second is that we as constituents do need to become more informed so that we can really call into question everything a Congressional member does and not just accept the pre-packaged newsletters they send us. The final thing shown by this interview is that the party’s money and influence plays a huge role in both maintaining your position and your vote in roll-call decisions. Otherwise a challenger to the incumbent in this case with a much higher drive to innovate policy may have ousted this person, but could not because of the Republican party’s support for him.

C. Congress Member 2:

For the next interview I sought to answer very specific questions on what they felt were the problems in Congress today, and how to go about fixing them. The reason being, I felt as though the variables in question had been covered extensively with the prior two interviews. The biggest concern and problem this particular member had was the fact that the news media would

take a huge complex issue and dress it down to a 15 second or less sound byte. Thus, robbing the American public at large on what was truly going on with this issue within the Congress.

When asked about special interests, the cynicism I have held for the Congress was actually allowed to dissipate to some degree. In the case of this member they had held so true to their values while in office, that when the National Rifle Association gave him money in the hopes of enticing him to a more favorable vote for their side of the legislation, he gave it to charity. This shows two things. The first is that interest groups are indeed there to change voting behavior and try to buy votes directly. The second is that it is tough to imagine that all Congressional members are tied to their values as strongly as this person, and there is no doubt some members cater to special interests for monetary contributions.

Both of these two factoids are very relevant to the study, and another huge issue came out via this interview as well: the polarization of the Congress today. In this Congressional member's time it was no surprise to meet with members of the opposing party because compromises had to be made for progress. Today, that is not occurring. The way constituents are voting out entire parties in elections, and splitting their voting tickets shows that we are a more moderate population than ever before. However, Congress is not replicating that move. Instead most members of opposing parties do not speak, nor even really know each other's names. Therefore, innovation and progress fades to the background as people attempt to follow the party line as stringently as possible.

So this interview really gave us three more insights into how the Congress operates. The first is, as we have already discovered repeatedly; special interests give money in order to get a

vote. Foiling them by giving to charity will not slow them from giving contributions. Next was the media influence, which undoubtedly has some serious influence over the amount of knowledge that constituents can actually get. If the news corporations create a sound byte that seems to sum up the issue for them, they will not take it upon themselves to do anymore research in most cases. Thereby, fueling the lack of knowledge problem. Also we see a Congressional problem in of itself highlighted here; increased polarization. Despite the more independent party morality of the population we see Congress digging deeper into party ideology, which creates a hostile atmosphere. Even worse than this hostility is the fact that Congressional members do not have respect for each other like they once did, nor do they realistically want to work together. Since our legislative body was founded on compromise, much like our nation, it is no surprise this leads to a dysfunctional Congress.

D. Congress Member 3:

This interview, much like the one just before it went differently than the first two interviews. In the case of this person, no real questioning was needed for very much of the interview because they had such a good grasp on what this project is attempting to accomplish. The first problem addressed was repetitive of the last person, and that is the issue of party polarization. He even addressed when prompted that yes of course there is has always been polarization, but not to the extreme seen today. The electorate is increasingly splitting its ticket, but “Congress members think it is okay to constantly identify solely in their own party niche,” and it is not. Doing so only exacerbates problems that could easily be resolved through simple negotiation.

He also argues that this polarization problem is compounded due to the redistricting process, which tends to make one area more republican or democratic. Thereby reducing the political pressure on our Congressional candidates so they can theoretically do whatever they want in that particular district as long as they follow the party's ideals. Why? The reason is simple, they were elected from a politically biased constituent base that identifies primarily with one particular party, and no one else stands a chance to challenge them in a majority of the cases because the constituents fail to actually look into a candidate's own values beyond that of the party.

The person continued from this point onto the entire special interests problem. He acknowledged that there is far too much money being thrown at the members in Congress or in politics in general today. Unlike, the previous interviews he was very reluctant to give a definitive answer as to how badly do they disrupt roll-call voting behavior. Why? The reason was one I did not anticipate myself and that is for the most part people do not actually have the correct conception of what these special interests really are. A variety of examples were given such as: the ongoing battle between limo drivers and taxi cab drivers; or doctors and nurses; or foot doctors and back doctors. "What does this have to do with anything?" I asked, and he responded "each of these groups constantly struggle over how they can practice, how they can do their job, where the line falls between them, and in general, how they can make more money." Special interests are not always gun control versus no gun control; or less taxes versus higher taxes. Some of the money thrown around is to get some legislation passed that deals with a super-minority of the population. This effectively reduces the worry that interest groups always

have some connection to legislation that will always influence Congressional mindsets in big issues in the American public, and works undercut their importance to the average person in the legislative process.

The next topic for discussion was the ever elusive judiciary influence that the scholarly work seemed to show was a large influencer of Congressional activity. There have been instances where legislation has been passed that goes against judicial tradition and practices, but that is the nature of law-making. For the most part actually going through with how a law will be interpreted by the judiciary as a step to law-making is not really necessary as I had already concluded, but my beliefs were now verified. Law-makers just have to use more forward thinking when they make their laws to avoid future problems with the judiciary. In some cases they seem to want to just get something positive done, and rush through without considering all the consequences, which then causes the actual future problems with the judiciary.

So, where do we find salvation or at least some way to fix these problems? This man believes without hesitation that it rests back with the constituents themselves. It is up to us to get the knowledge necessary to have a knowledgeable vote. It is up to us to delve deeper past the media's skewed campaign commercials and figure out how a representative really feels. Most importantly the candidates have to be good at negotiating, have experience, and be more moderate. Failure to not get out of party lines from time-to-time will always lead to huge problems. In order to assist with this knowledge problem, and help deal with special interests contributions (and of course party influences) he seemed to follow a previously mentioned idea from the lobbyist I interviewed; make campaign contributions disclosed to the public. They

already are to an extent, but every contribution should be disclosed, and as quickly as possible so the public can see how the campaign is being funded.

XI. Final Overarching Conclusion

So, with the conducted interviews completed and the research analyzed what is it that I think we need to see happen in Congress? We obviously need some form of finance reform in order to better know the financial ties that Congressional members have. Even though I originally thought that making all contributions entirely private would fix the pull people may have on Congressional members, I have revised this position. As the interview from the lobbyist worked to show, the opposite is actually what needs to happen. We as constituents should be able to see who gave money to whom, and the when this occurs should be as soon as possible. This way it is easier to see if a Congressional member is receiving widespread broad-based support or is catering to a limited number of special interests.

We also need more transparency from how Congressional members reach their decisions. Even though the interviews seemed to say that having Congressional members disclose where their voting decisions came from was not necessarily a great idea because they should already be explaining their actions to constituents on their own; I humbly disagree. Simply analyzing how members voted on particular pieces of legislation does not give constituents enough information on what is guiding these roll-call voting decisions. The only way to truly get an understanding of why votes come out the way they do is through Congressional disclosure. Ensuring that the Congressional members are honest is one problem with this; however. That being said, we as constituents have to trust that this disclosure will be an honest statement by the Congress

members as to what guided their decisions. Through this formal disclosure we can better examine what is guiding these roll-call decisions for future elections, and even question Congressional motivation if they flip-flop their decisions on future legislation that is similar in nature.

As for the other branches of government and their ties to the roll-call votes, the lay-out of our government as set down by our forefather's automatically puts these ties into place. There is no way to accurately reduce Presidential control of legislation, nor reduce the Judicial control of legislation without tainting how our government was designed to be run. The checks and balances between all of our branches of government must not be tampered with, even though they will inherently cause differentiation on these roll-call votes. We have to trust that the Congressional members will pursue their constituent's best interests despite these other entities influences.

As for Congressional motivations when it comes to seeking more powerful positions through campaigning while in office, or the level of importance that the legislation is deemed by the members, it would seem that this is simply the nature of Congress itself. Granted, there is no doubt that if a state legislator is campaigning for a Federal position, their work at the state level will indeed suffer. The same can be said for Federal level Congressional members campaigning for a Presidency. However, this cannot be changed; just like the roles other branches in Congress play. If a Congress member is failing to do their job well in Congress itself because of a campaign or if he/she just does not show up to vote on an "unimportant" bill; then it is up to the constituents to call them into question. If we were to punish their shortcomings at elections or

even through direct confrontation via mail or phone calls afterwards, I would have to agree with those I interviewed; this issue would take care of itself. Trying to use a quasi-judicial body like the secret ethics committee to catch the corrupt, or imposing attendance sanctions on Congressional members to limit their campaigning abilities will not work, nor is it necessary. The task of catching bad Congressional members is the constituent's job and the sanctions/rewards for the type of job they did while in office is through our votes; it is not the job of the Congress itself to punish wrong-doers in office.

Ethical dilemmas and paradoxes in Congress are another massive issue in Congress, but as alluded to earlier, I do not feel this can be solved with a secret ethical counsel anymore due to the interviews I conducted. It would seem that finding these immoral Congress members falls on the shoulders of the constituents. However, through the research that seems to show there is more Congressional corruption than those I interviewed believe; I use this problem as further justification for disclosing what pushed a Congressional member to vote a certain way. It is important to note here that if the member discloses that they voted a certain way due to campaign contributions, they are not going to be punished; at least right away. However, there will be a public record then of them catering to special interests in a given circumstance, which could be vital for those coming to the voting booths come election time.

With the above variables discussed, we are then left looking at the constituents themselves. To begin we as constituents are not receiving actual in-depth knowledge on a majority of the legislation being passed if the source we are using is through the mainstream media. We are being served prepackaged sound bytes that we take and do not question. This lack

of questioning leads constituents to just vote down the party line more often than not. The only time they differ from using party identity as the main source of a vote is during Presidential races. This is because constituents get more information about the President and then can make a better decision on which candidate in of themself is more representative of them. This then usually leads to splitting the ticket because below the President they tend to go back to party identity as the main source of their vote. This has two consequences: Congress is getting more and more polarized because nothing but the party line is usually taken into account in Congressional elections, and the President's party is usually different than the majority party in Congress, thereby greatly limiting his effectiveness while in office.

The media's "sound byting" practice and the growing polarization of Congress (which leads to lack of compromise and a huge lack in actually getting good policies passed) could be fixed if constituents did their homework so to speak, prior to the vote. This could be helped a lot more if we could more easily see why Congressional members voted a certain way on legislation and by seeing what members of the rich and powerful wanted a certain member in office, but there is still plenty we could do now. As a baseline constituents should look into the candidates who are running for office and what their experience is and what policies they want to pursue. Furthermore, the party's platform should be looked at and analyzed at least some degree to see if it lines up with a constituents own views. Even these two minor steps could lead to a much more informed vote. However, voter apathy is huge, and taking the necessary steps to do this research is rarely done by voters, if indeed they vote at all.

How to change voter apathy and the lack of knowledge voter's seem to have is something that is very difficult to determine. Indeed, many researchers argue it is an impossible task. What is easier to determine is at what point will "enough be enough" and the public rises against the government. Arguably the public already has with its 'March on Wall Street' movement. However, many believe there are other cracks in society forming that are getting ready to burst forth if Congress continues to falter. One such crack is the lack of importance placed on job creation and a focus on the debt instead (Thoma, 2011). Another is just general anger at the direction things are going in society (University of Michigan, 2011). Either way, the public is not going to take it upon itself to do something different with their voting practices unless there are external forces at work on them (Ornstein, 2012).

I will say that after all of this research there is no way that constituents are all to blame. The political realm has gotten to such an ambiguous point that we fail to grasp what is really going on in politics on a day to day basis. I would then even tentatively argue that this is the reason why voter apathy exists at all; the majority of us have consequently given up due to so much ambiguity. We do not have the ability like our forefather's to see what members of the Congress are doing for us because there are so many other focal points of interest for them to cater to in society, and we as people have so many different focal points of interest ourselves. What we do come away with is that our lives are not getting better, there is a lack of innovation in the bills being passed, and we see a massive amount of empty chairs on C-Span. We then use Congress as something to focus the blame on what is going wrong with our own individual lives, and the main reason why is we do not understand its members' reasons for doing what they are

doing nor do we understand how the work they do directly affects us. The cynics in society take this mindset a step further and see them only seeking to line their own pocketbooks; which as the research shows, is the case sometimes.

However, all of this can change today. We can call our representatives to work to pass a bill making it mandatory to publically disclose all campaign contributions origins. On the same note a bill could be initiated that demands the disclosure of the reasoning and influences a Congressional member used to vote a certain way for a roll-call vote. Both of these measures would go a long way in helping us as constituents understand what type of Congressional member we have elected for ourselves and whether or not they are doing a good job for us. It is important to stress that we have a responsibility ourselves, which is to come out and make informed votes. We are the punishers of Congressional misdeeds and we have not been doing our jobs very well lately either. The reforms I have prescribed serve a dual purpose: Congressional members know that they are in a more transparent position than they ever have been, and it will be easier as a constituent to get information on what is guiding our Congressional members. As time goes on and transparency increases it is my belief we will see a Congress more familiar to those that our forefather's originally intended: near perfect attendance for roll-call votes, more informed and knowledgeable voters, more legislative compromise, and less party polarization. Without an attitude adjustment for constituents and more Congressional transparency it is safe to say this problem will continue to worsen until the public has had enough and we will see uprisings even worse than the "March on Wall Street" movement.

Notes:

The Oxford Handbook of the American Congress was utilized as the main source for the variables in this paper because it uses so much literature on any subject on the Congress including roll-call voting decisions.

Those that were interviewed for this study I decided to leave entirely anonymous so that they could be as candid as possible in the responses they gave to my questioning without the fear of criticism from their peers.

Those that were interviewed and either were in or held a position in Congress came from both the democratic and republican parties equally.

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