

Determinants of House Committee Chair Selection

Republicans Play Musical Chairs in the 107th Congress

Christopher J. Deering

Paul J. Wahlbeck

George Washington University, Washington, DC

In 1995, House Republicans adopted a conference rule stating that that seniority would no longer be the sole criteria for advancement to a full committee chair. In addition, they adopted a standing rule of the House limiting chairs to no more than three consecutive Congresses at the helm of any given standing committee. This article examines the determinants of advancement to full committee chairs in the aftermath of these rule changes. The research focuses primarily on the large-scale displacement of chairs at the outset of the 107th Congress. We find that with the demise of seniority, a candidate's position relative to the party and funding prowess figure prominently in Republican steering committee decision making.

Keywords: *House of Representatives; congressional rules; party leadership; seniority system; committee; subcommittee*

I think we proved as a party we're not afraid to take a chance on someone, we're not afraid to take a chance on new ideas. American voters know this Congress needs new faces. It needs new ideas.

—Speaker of the House Dennis J. Hastert (Eilperin, 2001b)

Average people are saying why wouldn't they in this day and age have a qualified woman as a chair? I worry about it, but what can we do?

—Representative Marge Roukema (Eilperin, 2001b)

On January 4, 2001, the House Republican Steering Committee met in a room on the west front of the Capitol to cast nominating ballots for the 107th Congress committee chairs. Votes were cast serially (by secret ballot) for each of the positions, although the results were not revealed until after all the ballots had been counted. Later that same day, the Republican Conference endorsed the entire slate on a single motion. Only five House committees were to be chaired by the same person who held the gavel in the 106th Congress (1999-2000). The remaining 15 standing committees all would have new chairs in the 107th Congress, though in four instances these individuals simply shifted from one chair to another. In 6 of the 13 cases, the nominee would not be the next most senior member of the panel. Aside from circumstances of majority party change—when, in any case, ranking members simply took over as chairs of the respective committees—this sea change is unprecedented in the annals of the modern House.

In 1995, House Republicans adopted rules stating that seniority would not be the sole criteria for advancement. But they went an important step further by limiting chairs to no more than three consecutive Congresses at the helm of any given standing committee.¹ The latter rule virtually assured that someone other than the most senior committee member would be elevated to the head of most House standing committees once the first 6-year period came to a close.

For 6 years, relative calm ensued the changing of these rules. Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA) did violate seniority in naming a handful of chairs at the outset of the 104th Congress, but none was truly dramatic, and no violations of consequence followed.² But there the rule stood. In subsequent Congresses, Republicans held their majorities, and the status of the rule began to make members skittish. Prior to the rule change, the only questions facing members were: How long will it take? How long can I last? With a change in partisan control and new rules in place, a new set of questions arose: How strictly would the rule be interpreted? Could sitting chairs inveigh on the leadership to alter or relax it? If not, who among the Republican membership would have a realistic shot at gaining the Steering Committee's nomination? Even if nominated by Steering, would Republicans see a repeat of 1974 when the Democratic Caucus rejected its own Steering Committee recommendations? And, assuming something like a free-for-all rush for positions and

Authors' Note: The authors wish to thank Paul Brewer, Eric Lawrence, Forrest Maltzman, Karen Ramsey, and Connie Veillette for their assistance at various stages, Sarah Binder for her valuable comments on the manuscript, and Robert Biersack for his kind assistance in providing data from the Federal Election Commission.

wholesale turnover, what would count, beyond seniority, in the run for these coveted slots? Would new faces and new ideas emerge, as Speaker Hastert suggests? Or would it be politics as usual as Representative Roukema (R-NJ) seems to imply?

This case study examines these matters in the context of a larger theoretical question: What are the implications of this set of decisions for theories of institutional arrangements? And, in particular, with the weakening of seniority via these rules changes, did Republican decision making conform to a “parties as policy coalitions” thesis (Aldrich & Rohde, 2001) or a “parties as electoral coalitions” thesis (Cox & McCubbins, 1993). We proceed, first, by briefly laying out the circumstances of the new rule and the process by which Republican chairs are nominated. Second, a synopsis of the events surrounding this major shift in leadership personnel is presented. We then turn to the extant theories of legislative organization for predictions about leadership appointment. This is followed by the presentation of a series of hypotheses, details regarding the data, a brief discussion of methods, and our findings.

The Decline of Seniority and the Consequences of Institutional Change

For most of the 20th century, congressional committee chairs were doled out almost strictly according to seniority. That is, with few exceptions, committee chairs have gone to the longest-serving majority member of the committee. In the early 1970s, House Democrats weakened the seniority rule within their own party caucus and then deprived three senior committee chairs—F. Edward Hébert (D-LA), Wright Patman (D-TX), and W. R. Poage (D-TX)—reappointment to their positions of power. Although additional violations among chairs, ranking minority members, and subcommittee chairs can be enumerated, clearly demonstrating the loosened grip of seniority, the vast majority of committee leadership decisions continued to be made in a fashion consistent with the norm.³

By wide agreement, Democratic changes were a serious but not fatal blow to seniority. And their causes and consequences continue to be assessed even today (e.g., Adler, 2002). But in 1994, House Republicans followed suit with an even stronger rule of the whole House. Now it may not be fair to declare this change, detailed below, a death blow to seniority either, but it certainly is a highly consequential institutional change with important partisan implications.

The Rule

The term-limits clause was included by Republicans in their package of changes to the House standing rules adopted when Congress convened in 1995.⁴ The limit currently reads as follows:

A member of a standing committee may not serve as chairman of the same standing committee, or of the same subcommittee of a standing committee, during more than three consecutive Congresses (disregarding for this purpose any service for less than a full session in a Congress). (Rule X 5. (c)(2))⁵

In addition, Republican Conference rules limit members to a single committee or subcommittee chair (as do Democratic Caucus rules) and prohibit the six top elected party leaders from serving as chairs (Rule 2).⁶ As written, the House rule does not prevent a term-limited member from becoming chair of another committee or subcommittee, nor does it clearly proscribe such a member from regaining a chair after a 2-year hiatus.⁷

Chair decisions are made, pursuant to conference and chamber rules, in a three-step process. First, retirements, defeats, and term limits create a set of vacancies. Members seeking chairs then write, call, visit, and otherwise make known their desires to members of the Republican Steering Committee. Steering, in turn, makes recommendations to the Republican Conference. Steering is made up of 26 members: 15 designated members and the representatives of 11 geographical regions.⁸ The speaker has five votes on the committee, and the majority leader has two. All others have one vote.

Second, Steering's nominations are forwarded to the full Republican Conference. Under Republican rules, the nominee "need not be the Member with the longest consecutive service on the committee" (Rule 14). Although secret-ballot Conference votes are prescribed for each nominee, Republicans, pursuant to a motion from the floor, approved their chairs as a slate for the 107th Congress.

Third, chairs are approved in conjunction with other committee members by separate majority and minority resolutions approved by the House.⁹ As to this last step, it is important to note that House rules clearly provide that the respective parties are responsible for nominating their members for each committee (Rule X, 5(a)(1)).¹⁰

The Events

As the first round of forced turnover approached, nervous critics emerged in the Republican ranks. Representative Don Young (R-AK), who would vacate the chair on Resources, said the rule was "a stupid idea to begin with"

(Gugliotta, 1998). Representative W. J. “Billy” Tauzin (R-LA) spearheaded a move that would have altered or abolished the House rotation rule. Late in 1997, Tauzin met with Speaker Gingrich to make his case, but these and subsequent pleadings fell on unsympathetic ears. Proponents of congressional term limits linked the two issues closely, and most back-bench Republicans opposed any relaxation, much less the abolition of the rule.

In mid-June 1999, the Republican leadership announced that sitting chairs would not be prohibited from moving from one leadership position to another (see Table 1 for the outgoing lineup, ranking members, and actual winners). The issue arose because some members were uncertain about how strictly to read the language of the rule itself, which provides only that a member may not chair the same committee for more than three consecutive Congresses. By a very narrow margin, Republicans retained their majority in the House on November 7, 2000. Within the week, the Speaker and other members of the Republican Steering Committee began to receive entreaties from would-be chairs.¹¹ This, by itself, is unremarkable. Members have been sending entreaties regarding committee assignments for years. But these missives were for chairs. Chair candidates, with and without seniority, began to tout their money-raising prowess as a trait worthy of consideration. Now there was money on the table.

With barely a ripple, Republicans reelected their leadership team on November 14. The next day the Conference rejected two different proposals that would have eliminated term limits. Meanwhile, the leadership announced that candidates for the various chairs would have to appear before the Steering Committee early in December and interview for the positions. On December 5, 6, and 7, a parade of 29 chair wannabes appeared before the 23 Steering Committee members to tout their qualifications, including seniority, expertise, fundraising, party loyalty, and so on.¹² Although no public record of the interviews exists, journalistic accounts based on interviews are in abundance. Candidates made presentations, brought tokens, and answered questions. The morning session of the first day was devoted to four candidates for the Budget Committee. The other three sessions appear to have had no particular theme. Most of the candidates followed up their appearances with thank-you notes to Steering’s members. Some included copies of their formal presentations. And a handful attempted to mend damage they felt might have been done during the interviews.¹³

The 107th Congress convened on January 3, 2001. New members were sworn. Hastert’s reelection as Speaker was formalized. And the House readopted its formal rules. Those rules, unveiled the previous day by leaders, included a substantial shift in two committees’ jurisdictions by moving insurance and securities issues from Commerce to the renamed Financial Services

Table 1

Republican Standing Committee Chairs: 106th and 107th Congresses

| Committee | 106th Congress | 107th Congress Seniority ^a | 107th Congress Actual |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Term limited or open | | | |
| Armed Services | Floyd Spence (SC) | Bob Stump (AZ) | Bob Stump (AZ) |
| Budget | John R. Kasich (OH) | Saxby Chambliss (GA) | Jim Nussle (IA) |
| Education and the Workforce | William F. Goodling (PA) | Thomas E. Petri (WI) | John Boehner (OH) |
| Energy and Commerce | Tom Bliley (VA) | W. J. "Billy" Tauzin (LA) | W. J. "Billy" Tauzin (LA) |
| Financial Services | James A. Leach (IA) | Marge Roukema (NI) | Michael G. Oxley (OH) |
| International Relations | Benjamin A. Gilman (NY) | James A. Leach (IA) | Henry J. Hyde (IL) |
| Judiciary | Henry J. Hyde (IL) | James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (WI) | James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (WI) |
| Resources | Don Young (AK) | James V. Hansen (UT) | James V. Hansen (UT) |
| Science | James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (WI) | Sherwood L. Boehlert (NY) | Sherwood L. Boehlert (NY) |
| Small Business | James M. Talent (MO) | Joel Hefley (CO) | Donald A. Manzullo (IL) |
| Transportation and Infrastructure | Bud Shuster (PA) | Don Young (AK) | Don Young (AK) |
| Veterans' Affairs | Bob Stump (AZ) | Christopher H. Smith (NJ) | Christopher H. Smith (NJ) |
| Ways and Means | Bill Archer (TX) | Phil Crane (IL) | William M. Thomas (CA) |
| Term not yet expired | | | |
| Agriculture | Larry Combest (TX) | Larry Combest (TX) | Larry Combest (TX) |
| Appropriations | C. W. Bill Young (FL) | C. W. Bill Young (FL) | C. W. Bill Young (FL) |
| Government Reform | Dan Burton (IN) | Dan Burton (IN) | Dan Burton (IN) |
| Intelligence | Porter Goss (FL) | Porter Goss (FL) | Porter Goss (FL) |
| Speaker nomination or nonlegislative | | | |
| House Administration | William Thomas (CA) | Vernon J. Ehlers (MI) | Robert W. Ney (OH) |
| Rules | David Dreier (CA) | David Dreier (CA) | David Dreier (CA) |
| Standards of Official Conduct | Lamar Smith (TX) | Joel Hefley (CO) | Joel Hefley (CO) |

a. In several cases, the senior Republican chose another chair or otherwise vacated the position: Tauzin was second on Resources; Combest was second on Small Business; Talent vacated Small Business to run for governor in Missouri; Sensenbrenner vacated Science in a bid for Judiciary; McCollum (FL) vacated the second spot on Financial Services (Banking in the 106th Congress) to run for the Senate.

Committee (formerly Banking and Financial Services).¹⁴ The import of this move was immediately clear. Speculation was rife that if Billy Tauzin gained the chair at Commerce, his principal opponent, Michael Oxley (R-OH), might be awarded a gavel at an enhanced Banking Committee or, at the very least, a substantially upgraded subcommittee post (Bowman, 2000; Eilperin, 2001a). Should such a scenario play out, it would mean that moderate Marge Roukema, the ranking Republican on Banking and one of only two women given a chance to gain a chair, would be pushed aside. Roukema herself perceived the import: "I'm in favor of expanded jurisdiction, but it shouldn't be done for the purpose of buying a chairmanship" (Eilperin, 2001a). Tauzin and Oxley ranked first and third among all chair candidates in giving to the 2000 Republican campaign effort.

The next day, January 4, members of the Steering Committee cast their nominating ballots. When the dust had settled Tauzin was in at Commerce. Oxley (plus insurance and securities) had shifted to Financial Services.¹⁵ Roukema was out of luck. Phil Crane's (R-IL) seniority did not work at Ways and Means as Bill Thomas (R-CA) won that battle. Hyde (IL), Don Young (AK), Bob Stump (AZ), and James Sensenbrenner (WI) all succeeded in regaining chairs, though on different panels and not all by dint of seniority. James Hansen (UT), Christopher Smith (NJ), and Sherwood Boehlert (NY) skated, seemingly unopposed, to chairs on Resources, Veterans', and Science, respectively. Did Oxley buy Financial Services? How big of a hit had seniority taken? Did party support or money matter in the decisions made by Steering? And what does this tell us about the structure of opportunities in the House?

Theory and Hypotheses

Standard treatments of committee chair selection are brief. Only one criterion matters: seniority. And seniority, at least until recently, was considered to be virtually absolute. Polsby, Gallaher, and Rundquist (1969) stated in 1969 that for the postwar House, seniority for rank-and-file members and for chairs "was pretty much inviolate" (p. 804). In 1971, Hinckley (1971) asserted that by early in the 20th century "seniority emerged as the single automatic criterion for selecting chairmen" (p. 6). Even Cox and McCubbins (1993), who dissent from the notion that seniority was inviolate, agreed that post-Cannon speakers had lost the "independent" authority to violate seniority (p. 58).¹⁶ For most of the 20th century, therefore, scholarship on the gaining of chairs focused on how long it would take (Hinckley, 1971; Polsby et al., 1969; Shepsle, 1978) rather than on what it would take to become chair.

To be sure, some scholars focused on the choice within seniority for members senior on two different panels (Collie & Roberts, 1992), on the impact of seniority generally on chair behavior (Hinckley, 1971), and on the effect of the caucus election requirement on committee chair behavior (Crook & Hibbing, 1985; Wright, 2000). But only Parker (1979), to our knowledge, has examined the correlates of committee chair selection, finding that the level of House Democratic support was positively related to a candidate's party unity, fairness, and willingness to cede power to subcommittees, whereas it was negatively related to seniority and conservatism.

Seniority is not a theory; it is an institution. Binder (1997) argues that members choose institutions as a means of achieving "preferred outcomes" and that they will change those that "prove too costly to their goals to maintain" (p. 5). Once adopted, however, institutions are difficult to change (Aldrich, 1994; Binder, 1997; March & Olsen, 1989). Rohde (1991), Cox and McCubbins (1993), Aldrich (1994), and Wright (2000) all argue that the weakening of seniority worked to the parties' advantage. And Maltzman (1997) has argued that Republican rule changes in 1994, not least the weakening of seniority, strengthened Speaker Gingrich's hand and thereby bolstered the power of the new majority party.

As noted, the dominant hypothesis regarding advancement to committee chairs is seniority, which along with the property right norm is a benchmark of the distributive committees perspective (Abram & Cooper, 1968; Hinckley, 1971; Polsby et al., 1969). If committees exist to fulfill the institutional purpose of specialization and shared legislative expertise, it follows that, all other things equal, Steering should nominate chairs who have the greatest experience on their committees. Moreover, even in the context of rotation, choosing the next senior member assures a steady supply of experienced (i.e., expert) chairs in the queue for the future. Thus, our first hypothesis, which in this context operates as the null or accepted wisdom, is straightforward:

Hypothesis 1: The most senior member of the committee will be nominated to fill a vacant chair.

If seniority is not the sole criteria for elevation, then party theories hold that party support of various kinds will dominate the selection process. Two alternative theories dominate this discussion. One, with Aldrich and Rohde (Aldrich, 1994; Aldrich & Rohde, 2001; Rohde, 1991, 1994) as its primary advocates, advances a "conditional party government" thesis that views parties as policy coalitions. A second, with Cox and McCubbins (1993) as its

primary advocates, advances the notion that parties should be seen primarily as electoral coalitions.

If Aldrich and Rohde are correct, then we should expect to see party support become an influential factor in the appointment of new chairs. And indeed, we know at least anecdotally that Democratic party leaders used party support scores in considering their decisions about committee transfer decisions (Barry, 1989; Deering & Smith, 1997; Rohde, 1991; Sinclair, 1983).¹⁷ And, to judge from their campaign letters, Republican candidates appeared quite conscious of their records of party support—some mentioning their scores specifically as a qualifying criterion.¹⁸ Given a choice between two or more candidates, or multiple candidates across several committees, Steering is more likely to nominate members with higher, rather than lower, party support scores. And failure to do so, it would seem, is evidence for the informational position. Our hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: Members with party support scores closer to the median party support score of the Steering Committee, compared to other candidates for the position, will be more likely to be nominated to fill a vacant chair.

How else might party support be indicated? For chair candidates, money seemed to matter. News reports of the process, and interest groups monitoring it, put fundraising efforts in the headlines (Bailey, 2001; Bolton, 2000; Morgan & Eilperin, 2001). Letters written to members of the Steering Committee, and presentations made at the interview stage, touted members' party fundraising prowess. Money equals party building. But perhaps not all money is equal. There are three types of expenditures that members can make: contributions of leadership political action committees (PACs) to individual campaigns, candidate-to-candidate contributions, and contributions to the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC). The last form represents that the member is not likely to utilize private resources strictly for private gain, as may be the motivating force for the other two types of expenditures. That is, rather than use campaign funds to support other candidates for what may be the members' private interests, contributions to the NRCC are for the collective benefit of the party. Instead, the member may be counted on to use private information for the collective benefit of the party and chamber. Thus, the third hypothesis is:

Hypothesis H3a: Members with greater contributions to the NRCC will be more likely to be nominated to fill a vacant chair.

Hypothesis 3b: Members with greater contributions from their leadership PACs will be less likely to be nominated to fill a vacant chair.

Data and Method

We commence with the assumption that the decision set to be addressed here is composed of the legislative committees with vacancies—caused either because of term limits or because the sitting chair retired—for which Steering had a responsibility to provide a nomination. Four committees—Agriculture, Appropriations, Government Reform, and Intelligence—had chairs who had not yet reached the limit of three consecutive Congresses. To be clear, the Steering Committee could have recommended replacing those chairs as well. But there is no evidence they ever contemplated doing so. And there is no evidence that anyone requested they contemplate such an action. The chairs of Rules and of House Administration are nominated solely by the Speaker. And Standards of Official Conduct is a nonlegislative committee (see Table 1). Thus, our data set includes just the term-limited set of committees.¹⁹

There are two dependent variables: whether a member was given an interview by the Steering Committee and whether a member was named chair of a committee. Given the process employed by the Steering Committee, the failure to model the interview decision could result in a selection bias. Thus, we employ a Heckman probit model, a maximum likelihood estimator with sample selection (see Greene, 1997).²⁰ The first dependent variable, interview, is drawn from the interview schedule provided to members of Steering Committee by staff. We include observations for all nonfreshman members of the committees with vacancies. We excluded freshman because they had not yet been sworn in and had not yet received committee assignments. We included all potentially continuing members of each committee with a vacancy because we have documentary evidence that one such member made a formal request to be named chair on one of these panels.

The results of the Steering Committee's deliberation were widely reported in the press. And, of course, once finalized, the decisions were posted, along with committee rosters, on official congressional Web sites, including that of the Clerk of the House. Because there are numerous observations for each committee and only one chair, we account for the interdependence of observations by using robust standard errors clustered on committee.

Seniority

We know from the outset that roughly half the chairs elevated for the 107th Congress were not the most senior committee members. Seniority sta-

tus is coded as the number of Congresses that a member has served on a committee. These data were obtained from Stewart and Woon (2001).²¹

Party Unity

Congressional Quarterly's party unity scores for the second session of the 106th Congress are used to measure party support (Bettelheim, 2001). These scores represent the percentage of votes on which an individual votes with his or her colleagues against a majority of the other (i.e., Democratic) party. Higher scores represent higher support. We also calculated the median party unity score for the Steering Committee and for each standing committee. Party unity was calculated as the difference between two distances: the distance between a member and the Steering Committee median and the distance between the member and the committee median. A positive value indicates that the member was closer to the Steering Committee median than the standing committee median.

Leadership PAC

Some members of the House have registered a leadership PAC with the Federal Election Commission. This variable is the amount of money contributed by that PAC to the campaigns of other members. These data are from the Federal Election Commission.²²

NRCC

This variable measures the amount of money contributed by a member to the NRCC. These data also are from the Federal Election Commission.

Request Interview for Other Committee

This variable is a dichotomous indicator for whether the member requested an interview for a different committee. With the exception of exclusive committees, most members serve on multiple committees. But in notes made available to Steering committee members and based on their letters of entreaty, interview requests were committee specific. Thus, we sought to control for other requests. These data are drawn from the Steering Committee's briefing book. This variable was included in the interview list selection model only.

Table 2
**Heckman Probit Estimates of the Effects of Seniority,
 Party Support, and Fundraising on Gaining an Interview
 and Gaining a Nomination for Committee Chair (107th Congress)**

| | Coefficient | SE |
|--|-------------|-------|
| Interview | | |
| Seniority | 0.319 *** | 0.050 |
| Request interview for other committee | -1.060 * | 0.528 |
| Party unity | -0.016 | 0.038 |
| Leadership political action committee (PAC) donations | 0.044 ** | 0.018 |
| National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) donations | 0.010 | 0.031 |
| Candidate donations | -0.0005 | 0.010 |
| Constant | -2.810 *** | 0.449 |
| Nomination | | |
| Seniority | -0.063 | 0.116 |
| Party unity | 0.318 * | 0.136 |
| Leadership PAC donations | -0.026 | 0.009 |
| NRCC donations | 0.090 * | 0.048 |
| Candidate donations | -0.037 | 0.032 |
| Constant | 1.886 ** | 0.694 |
| Athrho | -8.373 *** | 1.089 |
| <i>N</i> 286 | | |
| Wald $\chi^2(5)$ | 66.23 | |
| Log likelihood | -55.70 | |
| Pseudo $R^2 = .3703$ | | |

Source: Stewart and Woon (2001), Bettelheim (2001), and the Federal Elections Commission.

Results

Our data suggest that seniority still matters. But it is badly wounded and seriously undermined. Seven of the 13 chairs did go to the next ranking member of the committee.²³ But in six cases, seniority did not triumph. And in each of those, the leading money giver did. Thus, we conclude that if the chair selection process ever supported the distributive committees perspective, it no longer does so. As the results summarized in Table 2 indicate, the model also confirms the hypotheses derived from the two party theories, but at different stages.

The Steering Committee's decision to interview a committee member for a particular committee chair position was influenced by the member's seniority, whether the member sought an interview for another committee post, and contributions from a member's leadership PAC.²⁴ Our model correctly predicted 94.4% of the interview decisions, resulting in a 44.8% reduc-

Table 3
Simulated Results on Winning the Chair of the Banking Committee

| Characteristic | Predicted Probability |
|---|-----------------------|
| Marge Roukema for interview | |
| Baseline | .6940 |
| Requested another committee | .2903 |
| Leadership political action committee donations | .9415 |
| Michael Oxley for interview | |
| Baseline | .2026 |
| Seniority | .6710 |
| Marge Roukema to be chair | |
| Baseline | .0101 |
| Party unity | .9996 |
| National Republican Congressional Committee donations | .8511 |
| Michael Oxley to be chair | |
| Baseline | .9769 |

Note: The House baseline probability is based on the mean value of each variable for all members. The committee baseline probability is based on the mean value of each variable for members of the Banking Committee. The calculations for the baseline probabilities for Representative Roukema and Representative Oxley use the actual values of each variable for the two members. The predicted probability for other scenarios for the two members use the other member's value on the one variable listed.

tion of error. The impact of each of these variables is illustrated in Table 3 by the example of two competitors for the Banking Committee chair, Representatives Marge Roukema and Michael Oxley. Roukema had the edge in seniority, whereas Oxley enjoyed higher party unity and giving by a leadership PAC. As it stood, with Oxley pursuing the chair of Energy, Roukema was nearly 3 times more likely to be interviewed for the Banking position than was Oxley. If Oxley had Roukema's seniority on Banking, the probability that the Steering Committee would interview Oxley for the Banking chair increased more than 3 times, from .20 to .67. In contrast, if Roukema had made contributions equal to Oxley's from a leadership PAC, her interview probability would have topped .94, a 36% increase over her observed probability of .69.

Although we saw that seniority affected the decision to interview members for committee chair positions, the choice of the chair was influenced by a member's party unity and donations to the NRCC.²⁵ Again taking our Roukema-Oxley example, the model indicates that Michael Oxley, enjoying his observed characteristics, was a near lock to be named chair as his probability approached .98. Roukema, on the other hand, had a near-zero probability of .01. A member's party unity and NRCC donations had a pronounced

substantive impact on the final choice. If Representative Roukema had exhibited the same party unity as Michael Oxley, the probability of her selection as Banking Committee chair would have catapulted from .01 to nearly 1.0. At the same time, and withstanding her party unity score, if Marge Roukema had donated as much to the NRCC as Representative Oxley, her probability would have risen to .85. It is not far fetched to speculate that either step by Roukema would have had a dramatic impact on the final choice.

Before we move on, let us pause to consider the impact of seniority on the final choice. Given the dominant role that seniority played for five or six decades, the sudden reversal is somewhat surprising. Of course, seniority was a significant factor in the selection process, but that was seen in determining whom to interview for each position. Once a member advanced to the interview round, the importance of seniority as a factor failed to propel candidates to the chair. There was less variance in seniority among those members who were interviewed. Members who were interviewed but not selected as chairs had an average committee seniority of 7.3 Congresses. In contrast, members who emerged as chairs enjoyed committee seniority of 8.5 Congresses. Although the latter represented a seniority advantage, the difference is not significantly more than those passed over after an interview ($t = -0.8714$, $p = .1958$). As a point of comparison, members who were interviewed served an average of 7.8 Congresses on their committees, whereas members who were not interviewed served only 2.9 Congresses. This is a statistically significant difference ($t = -11.34$, $p < .001$).

A second point of departure between the interview list and final choices is the importance of money. A member's contribution played a role in both decisions, but there are notable differences. In the former, leadership PAC spending prevailed, whereas NRCC contributions carried the day in the final choice. We suspect that the presence of a leadership PAC evidences the position that a member has attained. Of the 50 members with a leadership PAC, 11 were interviewed. Indeed, they comprised 37.9% of all interviewees. These differences in proportions are statistically significant. In contrast, the NRCC contributions that influence the final choice indicate that a member is using resources not only for his or her benefit but for the collective benefit of the party.

Postscript—108th and 109th Congresses

We treat here the 107th Congress as our case study, and we chose this Congress because of the availability of unique information from the Steering

Committee, namely information on the Committee's interview process. Yet, it is possible that the 107th Congress is itself unique because it was the first instance where a substantial number of chairs were deemed ineligible to serve because of term limits. To determine whether our findings in the 107th Congress are generalizable to other Congresses, we examined the choice of chairs for vacancies occurring in the 108th and 109th Congresses. Although we have available to us information about the choice of chairs for the four vacancies that existed in the 108th Congress and the lone vacancy in the 109th Congress, we do not have information from the Steering Committee's decision of whom to interview.

First, the seniority of the committee members did not dictate the choice made by Steering. Of the five chairs selected to fill vacancies in the 108th and 109th Congresses, only two were the most senior member of the committee. Nevertheless, a random effects probit model of these choices reveals that seniority was a statistically significant consideration.²⁶ The only other factor that influenced these selections was the member's candidate-to-candidate giving. Of course, the results for those two Congresses are probably even less generalizable than those for the 107th Congress because of the limited number of chair openings.

Discussion and Conclusions

In 1984, Loomis (1984) described the career ladder within the House as a "structure of opportunities." That is, on entering the institution, members faced multiple choices about how to pursue their intrachamber careers (see also Hibbing, 1991). Further, he noted, reforms and innovations within the House in the early 1970s actually had multiplied the number of opportunities available to members. But with new rules requiring rotation and leading to more open competition, that structure has become more complicated still.

As noted at the outset, our intention here is to sort through the determinants of a newly wrought process in House leadership selection. And we have sought to do so with an eye toward further illuminating the ongoing theoretical debate about the locus of institutional power in the House. We recognize that no single piece of evidence is dispositive regarding distributive, partisan, and informational theories. On balance, however, the evidence reported here suggests that abandoning seniority seriously undermines one important aspect of distributive theory—the relative invulnerability of full committee chairs—and that it fits best with partisan approaches to institutional organization.

Perhaps this is not surprising because organizational matters long have been dominated by the two congressional parties. But, as at least one wag observed, it is not too far beyond the pale to suggest that it is hard to imagine a system of leadership selection better suited to advance the party's—Republican in this case—interests. As a substantive matter, committee chair wannabes clearly need to pay close attention to their positions on important policy matters relative to the conference. But they also must demonstrate an aggressive willingness to raise and donate funds to the party coffers—sending an altogether distinct signal about their level of team spirit. To paraphrase Will Rogers, the time may have come when a chair candidate will have to raise a large sum of money just to get beat.

Notes

1. It should be noted that House Republicans had applied term limits to their ranking minority members in the previous congress. But on gaining the majority, they installed the new limit in the standing rules of the House and, in effect, restarted the clock.

2. Bob Livingston (LA), Henry Hyde (IL), and Thomas J. Bliley (VA) were selected to chair the Appropriations, Judiciary, and Commerce committees, respectively, but were not the most senior Republicans on those panels. Another violation of sorts occurred when Bob Smith (OR) was lured out of his 2-year retirement with a promise from Speaker Gingrich that he would be awarded the chair of Agriculture if he won reelection and the Republicans retained control of the House. He won. The Republicans won. Smith became chair, although he was technically just a freshman with previous service.

3. Details on these and other violations, including several by the Republicans, can be found in Cox and McCubbins (1993, Appendix 1) and Deering and Smith (1997).

4. Limits are not unprecedented. House rules already required turnover in the leadership of the Budget, Intelligence, and Standards of Official Conduct committees.

5. This language is slightly different than that adopted in 1995 but with no substantive effect. The House adopted a recodified set of rules at the outset of the 106th Congress (reducing the total number of rules from 51 to 28), so it is this language that was in effect when chairs were chosen for the 107th Congress.

6. The six are the speaker, Republican leader, and whip and the chairs of the Republican Conference, Committee on Policy, and the National Republican Congressional (i.e., campaign) Committee.

7. Some members hoped to exploit the consecutive Congress language in hopes of vacating a leadership position for a session or two and then regaining it later. Republican leaders were unsympathetic.

8. These include the top nine party leaders, the chairs of Appropriations, Rules, and Ways and Means, representatives of the freshman, sophomore, and junior classes, and 10 or 11 regional representatives. The 11, Small State Representative, is triggered when the 10 designated geographic regions each comes from a state with at least three Republicans in its delegation. Although rules prohibit a member from filling two slots—a regional slot and a designated slot—Don Young of Alaska appears to have participated as the Small State Representative prior to being nominated chair of the Transportation Committee.

9. In fact, each party typically offers a series of “electing” resolutions. In the 107th Congress, for example, members of the Rules Committee were appointed pursuant to a majority resolution (H.Res. 6) and a minority resolution (H.Res. 7) on the day Congress reconvened. Additional resolutions, some more than a month later, completed the process.

10. See Hasbrouck (1927, pp. 41-48) on the emergence of this practice during the Cannon period. The rule itself dates from 1917.

11. Not that everyone waited. Indeed, some chair candidates complained that a few sooners had jumped the gun in pushing for their slots even though Speaker Hastert had asked them to wait until after the election. One candidate tried to leverage these transgressions:

I complied with the Speaker's request [to hold off on chair campaigns], putting my energies to the task of helping our party and our candidates While some of our colleagues did not heed the Speaker's wishes (and were asking for support all during the summer and fall), I hope you understand why I waited to begin my campaign for chairman . . . until after we renewed our majority.

This quotation (and quotations in Notes 13 and 18) are from letters made available to the authors by a staff assistant to one of the members of the Republican Steering Committee.

12. According to the briefing book we obtained, three members of the 26-person committee, the chairs of Appropriations, Rules, and Ways and Means, did not participate. This is because none had yet been nominated or elected chair. So far as we know, the order of the voting is known only to those in the room and has not been reported. One account of the activities (Eilperin, 2001b) claims that International Relations was held until late in the process. A staff member to a participant reports that balloting did not proceed in alphabetical order. The Speaker's office refused to divulge the order or anything else about the process.

13. For example, one candidate wrote the following several days after the interviews were completed:

During my interview with the House Steering Committee last week, our Colleague John Linder posed a question regarding my vote on a specific Medicare issue. From his question, the inference might be drawn that I did not support the Republican position on some key Medicare legislation In recent days John and I have discussed my clear on the record support for these Republican bills and the fact that I was a strong supporter of the historic BBA [Balanced Budget Act of 1997?].

The author goes on to clarify and emphasize other positions, including the Medicare matter.

14. This was not the only jurisdictional switch contemplated or advocated. Some also toyed with the idea of breaking Education and the Workforce into two distinct panels. At least one chair candidate supported the idea.

15. Republicans made no provision for their Steering Committee in the rules of the conference. But a separate document, provided to us by clerk of the House Robin Carle, “Structure Establishing the Republican Steering Committee, 107th Congress,” was widely distributed as a photocopy. A codicil to that document reads:

The Steering Committee will consider requests and make recommendations to the full Conference on nominations of standing committee chairs and subcommittee chairs when a member of a committee which has been merged with another standing committee is eligible for such a post by virtue of seniority.

The language was written at the outset of the 104th Congress to facilitate the demise of the Post Office and Civil Service, Merchant Marine and Fisheries, and District of Columbia committees. Oxley chaired the Finance and Hazardous Waste Subcommittee of the Commerce Committee. The subcommittee had been created to make good on a deal that party leaders had made with Tauzin when he switched to the Republican party. Tauzin got the telecommunications jurisdic-

tion and Oxley got securities and hazardous waste. The enhanced Financial Services Committee gained the insurance and securities jurisdiction and Oxley with it. But even that move, with Oxley's seniority intact, would have left him behind Roukema. Roukema was elected the year before Oxley and joined Banking a full Congress before Oxley received his seat on Commerce.

16. Both Democrats and Republicans have violated seniority in selecting ranking committee members, subcommittee chairs, and ranking subcommittee members. None is in abundance, but Cox and McCubbins (1993, pp. 49-55) observe quite correctly that a larger study of seniority would need to take these into account.

17. The scores are popularly referred to as party support scores, but *Congressional Quarterly* actually calls them party unity scores because they measure the percentage of votes on which individual party members vote with a majority of their colleagues against a majority of the other party.

18. One candidate even offered a follow-up analysis on party support scores among chairs:

During my interview with you [Steering] this week for the position of Chairman . . . I was asked about whether I could be an effective team player, and whether my voting record would reflect my support for party unity According to *Congressional Quarterly*, my percentage of party unity votes was 92 percent for the 1999 session. The average percentage for a full Committee Chairman was 89.4 percent I believe this is ample indication that I can effectively represent my conservative district while promoting our Republican agenda.

19. Our model is, of course, cross-sectional and thus treats all committees as if they are subject to the same forces. We did test an alternative model using both Groswart scores and indicator variables for exclusive, major, and nonexclusive committees. Neither form of this committee value variable proved significant. And our overall results were unchanged. Thus, they have been excluded here.

20. We estimated the Heckman selection model using the Heckprob command in Stata 7.0.

21. The alternative, which has precedent in the literature (e.g., Cox & McCubbins, 1993), would be to include the most senior members or to include those (e.g., Leach, Hyde, and Shuster) who did not retire. This approach would increase the number of violations and depress the coefficients for seniority.

22. The Federal Election Commission (FEC) data used here were provided to us by Robert Biersack from the candidate and committee summary files. These data can be downloaded from the FEC Web site (<http://www.fec.gov/finance/newftp1.htm>).

23. We should reiterate that in one sense, all 13 committees feature seniority violations because the most senior Republican at the end of the 106th Congress was forced to step down. It is doubtful that any of the retirees would have chosen that course had they been able to retain their positions.

24. The same results occur here and in the final choice model if we include a dichotomous measure for the most senior committee member eligible for the chair position.

25. This finding is duplicated if we instead use nominate scores to measure ideology. Moreover, the other findings are stable. If we include both the party support and nominate variables, neither reaches significance. The correlation between the two variables is .76 ($p < .01$) and the tolerance is 0.59.

26. The model and results are available on the author's Web site (<http://home.gwu.edu/~rocket>).

References

- Abram, M., & Cooper, J. (1968). The rise of seniority in the House of Representatives. *Polity*, 1, 52-85.
- Adler, E. S. (2002). *Why congressional reforms fail: Reelection and the House committee system*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Aldrich, J. H. (1994). A model of a legislature with two parties and a committee system. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 19, 313-339.
- Aldrich, J. H., & Rohde, D. W. (2001). The logic of conditional party government: Revisiting the electoral connection. In L.C. Dodd & B.I. Oppenheimer (Eds.), *Congress reconsidered* (pp. 269-292). Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Bailey, H. (2001). Buying leadership: House Republicans and the scramble for committee chairmanships. *Money in politics alert*. Retrieved January 30, 2001, from http://www.opensecrets.org/alerts/v6/alert6_01.asp
- Barry, J. M. (1989). *The ambition and the power: A true story of Washington*. New York: Penguin.
- Bettelheim, A. (2001, January 6). Party unity: Votes belie partisan intensity. *CQ Weekly*, p. 56.
- Binder, S. (1997). *Minority rights, majority rule: Partisanship and the development of Congress*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bolton, A. (2000, December 6). House chairmanship candidates cite funds. *The Hill*. Retrieved December 11, 2000, from <http://www.hillnews.com/jump3.html>
- Bowman, T. (2000, December 6). House faces free-for-all for committee chairmanships. *Baltimore Sun*, p. 16A.
- Collie, M. P., & Roberts, B. E. (1992). Trading places: Choice and committee chairs in the U.S. Senate, 1950-1986. *Journal of Politics*, 54, 231-245.
- Cox, G. W., & McCubbins, M. D. (1993). *Legislative leviathan: Party government in the House*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Crook, S. B., & Hibbing, J. R. (1985). Congressional reform and party discipline: The effects of changes in the seniority system on party loyalty in the U.S. House of Representatives. *British Journal of Political Science*, 15, 207-206.
- Deering, C. J., & Smith, S. S. (1997). *Committees in Congress*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Eilperin, J. (2001a, January 3). GOP's new rules bolster House Banking Committee. *Washington Post*, p. A4.
- Eilperin, J. (2001b, January 5). House GOP revamps panels' leadership. *Washington Post*, p. A1.
- Greene, W. H. (1997). *Econometric analysis* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Gugliotta, G. (1998, March 23). Term limit prompts House chairmen to hunt new perches. *Washington Post*, p. A17.
- Hasbrouck, P. D. (1927). *Party government in the House of Representatives*. New York: MacMillan.
- Hibbing, J. R. (1991). *Congressional careers: Contours of life in the U.S. House of Representatives*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Hinckley, B. (1971). *The seniority system in Congress*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Loomis, B. A. (1984). Congressional careers and party leadership in the contemporary House of Representatives. *American Journal of Political Science*, 28, 180-202.
- Maltzman, F. (1997). *Competing principals: Committees, parties, and the organization of Congress*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (1989). *Rediscovering institutions: The organizational basis of politics*. New York: Free Press.

- Morgan, D., & Eilperin, J. (2001, January 12). A House GOP reform boomerangs. *Washington Post*, p. A1.
- Munger, M. C. (1988). Allocation of desirable committee assignments. *American Journal of Political Science*, 32, 317-344.
- Parker, G. R. (1979). The selection of committee leaders in the House of Representatives. *American Politics Quarterly*, 7, 71-93.
- Polsby, N. W., Gallaher, M., & Rundquist, B. S. (1969). The growth of the seniority system in the U.S. House of Representatives. *American Political Science Review*, 63, 787-807.
- Rohde, D. W. (1991). *Parties and leaders in the postreform House*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rohde, D. W. (1994). Parties and committees in the House: Member motivations, issues, and institutional arrangements. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 19, 341-360.
- Shepsle, K. J. (1978). *The giant jigsaw puzzle: Democratic committee assignments in the House of Representatives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sinclair, B. (1983). *Majority party leadership in the U.S. House*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Stewart, C., III, & Woon, J. (2001). *Congressional committee assignments, 103rd to 105th Congresses, 1993-1998: House of Representatives*. Retrieved MONTH, DAY, YEAR?, from http://web.mit.edu/17.251/www/data_page.html
- Wright, F. M. (2000). The caucus reelection requirement and the transformation of House committee chairs, 1959-1994. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 25, 469-480.

Christopher J. Deering is professor of political science at George Washington University. He is coauthor of *Committees in Congress* and the author of a number of articles and chapters on Congress, committees, leadership, and Congress's role in foreign and defense policymaking.

Paul J. Wahlbeck is professor of political science at George Washington University. His research principally examines the strategic behavior of judges. His work has appeared in such journals as *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, and *American Politics Research*.

Appendix: Heckman Probit Estimates of the Effects of Seniority, Party Support, and Fundraising on Gaining an Interview and Gaining a Nomination for Committee Chair (108th – 109th Congresses).

| | Coefficient | Standard Error |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Interview</i> | | |
| Seniority | .302 *** | .047 |
| Request Interview for Other Committee | -4.660 *** | .361 |
| Party Unity | .089 | .069 |
| Leadership PAC Donations | .058 | .041 |
| NRCC Donations | -.063 | .043 |
| Candidate Donations | .202 * | .106 |
| Constant | -2.363 *** | .546 |
| <i>Nomination</i> | | |
| Seniority | -.088 | .133 |
| Party Unity | -.007 | .049 |
| Leadership PAC Donations | .024 | .022 |
| NRCC Donations | -.099 | .075 |
| Candidate Donations | .195 | .0243 |
| Constant | 1.421 | 1.310 |
| Athrho | -1.332 | .868 |
| N=143 | Wald Chi2(1) = 2.36 | Log Likelihood = -45.860 |

Source: Authors' data collected from Stewart (2001), *CQ Weekly* (Bettelheim, 2001), and the Federal Elections Commission. See text for details.