The Changing Senate in the Cannon Years

Richard F. Fenno, Jr.
University of Rochester

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The purpose of my remarks today is to try to be of some modest help to those people who will come to the UNLV library to study the life and times of Howard Cannon. They will come, doubtless, with many perspectives, because the public career of Howard Cannon was as broad as it was long. And, as such, it touched upon, and revealed, many aspects of American political life. To put it a bit differently, Howard Cannon lived and worked in a great variety of contexts; and the people who come here to study and write will need to understand those contexts—at least, those which are relevant to their particular research projects. Among such contexts would be the state of Nevada, the United States Senate, the American political system, the American economy and the international arena.

I want to focus my remarks on one of these—the United States Senate—to try to provide some understanding of what that context was like in the time that Howard Cannon served there. Let me make it clear at the outset. I do not have anything special to tell you about Howard Cannon. That is, after all, the task of people who will come to work in his papers. But I
do know a little bit about the United States Senate, mostly because it has been a favorite subject of political scientists and journalists. And I have, myself, spent some time in recent years looking at the institution and a few of its members.

My main point about the Senate will be this: that the Senate Howard Cannon left in 1982 was a vastly different body than the one he entered in 1959. Indeed, it may well be the case that the Senate changed as much in that 24 year period as it did in any comparable period of its history.

That period was, we all know, a turbulent time in the life of the country. It began in the middle of one of several recessions and coursed through several shocking assassinations, several failed presidencies, a bitterly divisive war, a debilitating political scandal, a declining confidence in government, a revolution in civil rights, a proliferation of organized, activist interest groups, and an uncertain international environment.

Small wonder, then, that the Senate—one of the institutional nerve endings of the American polity—would be affected and would undergo change.

Changes in the country can be thought of as the underlying causes of change in our political institutions, but not as the direct cause. In a
democracy, elections are the vehicles of institutional change. It is through elections—and the prospect of elections—that change in the country gets transmitted—more or less—to representative institutions like the Senate. Change comes to the Senate, therefore, when new people get elected to it.

I say all this by way of introduction to the Senate elections of 1958, one of which here in Nevada, carried Howard Cannon to the Senate. That set of elections produced the largest net gain for one party of any Senate election in the Twentieth Century. The Democrats gained 15 seats. In the previous congress, the Democratic party majority in the Senate had been only two; but as a result of the 1958 elections the Democratic majority jumped to 30. That is, a thin Democratic majority of 49-47 suddenly became a lopsided 64 Democrats and 34 Republicans. The 1958 election produced a tidal wave of newcomers. They became the carriers of change; and they initiated a process which—by fits and starts, with regular infusions of likeminded recruits, and with the impetus of external conditions—changed the face of the U.S. Senate.

The only other comparable Senate election since that time came in
1980, when the Republicans made a net gain of 12 seats, the third largest sweep in the Twentieth Century, and took control of the Senate for the first time in 26 years. That influx, too, changed the face of the Senate—at least in the short run. That election cost Howard Cannon his position of influence as Chairman of the Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs; and two years later, he left the Senate. So it is not much of an exaggeration to say that his career was bracketed by two historic elections—the Democratic sweep of 1958 and the Republican sweep of 1980. We can, then, think of the Cannon years 1959-1982 as a distinctive, recognizable era in the life of the United States Senate. And the hallmark of that era was change.

The Senate of the 1950's which Howard Cannon joined in January 1959, was a fairly self-contained, self-regulating, inward-looking institution. It was a small and intimate place which was described by observers as a "club"—a men's club, of course—or a "small town." Everyone knew everyone else and, therefore, the conduct of business depended heavily on interpersonal relationships and on the informal understandings that regulated such relationships. Like most clubs or small towns, the Senate
was formally a community of equals. But, except for their one-man, one-vote equality, some members were a good deal more equal than others.

The Senate was run by an oligarchy of senior southern Democrats and conservative Republicans. These oligarchs drew their power first, from their numerical strength as the dominant wings of their respective parties, second, from their seniority and from the formal positions they held as a result of their seniority and third, from the consensus among them as to the kind of institution they wanted. Their consensus was an altogether conservative one, both as a matter of policy—the southerners' civil rights policy being the most important—and as a matter of internal structure and management. These two conservatisms, policy conservatism and institutional conservatism, interlocked and were mutually supportive. But it is the institutional conservatism—the desire of the oligarchs to keep the kind of institution they had—which I want to factor out and highlight.

As the institution has been described to us by journalists like William White, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak and by political scientists like Donald Matthews and Ralph Huitt, it had a number of distinguishing characteristics. Most central to its ways of doing business was its
committee-based division of labor. This fostered a high level of subject
matter specialization, with the result that each committee's (or
subcommittee's) product would receive the benefit of the doubt from non-
committee members and, normally, their approval on the Senate floor.
Committees made their decisions by bargaining in markup meetings that were
closed to all outsiders. If coordination was needed, that was the job of
the party leader. In the 1950s, the party leadership was highly
centralized under one of the oligarchs-in-chief, Lyndon Johnson. But even
he was dependent on the committee structure and on the committee chairmen
who ran the committees. The policies Johnson managed and maneuvered
through on the Senate floor were the policies of the Senate's committees.

Alongside the committee-centered decision-making system there existed,
as befitted a club or small town, a set of informal traditions or
understandings—what social scientists call norms—which regulated the
relationships among the members of the institution. As the oligarchs saw
it, these norms had to be observed if their kind of Senate was to be
preserved.

One of these norms—the specialization norm—buttressed the decision—
making dominance of committees. The prescription was that Senators should specialize in the subject matter of their particular committees and subcommittees, that they should work hard, do their home work and become experts in the matters within the jurisdiction of their committee. They ought not, so the idea went, to roam all over the policy landscape, pursuing a broad and varied policy agenda, interfering in the work of other committees and, in general, spreading themselves thin. Expertise was important; but it should be expertise based upon one's committee work.

An even more general norm was the idea that new members of the body should serve an apprenticeship in their early years, should be seen and not heard, learn the ropes, defer to their elders, wait their turn before speaking out or acting out. The apprenticeship norm—which regulated the interpersonal relations between seniors and juniors—buttressed the more formal seniority rule for choosing committee chairmen. In combination, the apprenticeship norm and, the seniority rule gave a distinctly hierarchical cast to the institution's internal structure. And they protected the influence of the oligarchs.

Another important norm, one which regulated the interpersonal
relationships among all members, was the so-called reciprocity norm. It prescribed self-restraint in manipulating the complicated rules of the Senate to gain an advantage over a colleague. Reciprocity was thought to be especially important in the exercise of a Senator's ultimate weapon—the right to talk at great length, or, to filibuster, and in so doing disrupt the work of the Senate or, perhaps, bring the institution to a halt. This right to talk and the difficulty of shutting off an individual Senator is a distinguishing characteristic of the institution. And Senators will not give it up. As one of them put it "You've got to keep in mind that old saying of Daniel Webster—'Once a senator takes the floor, only God can take him off.' That's the essence of the Senate." But in the Senate of the 1950s, self restraint in the exercise of this right was understood to be a necessary corollary to the rules that created and protected it.

These beliefs and prescriptions held and enunciated by the oligarchs were heavily communitarian in their emphasis. And they culminated in the idea that the Senate was a very unique institution and should be kept that way. They expressed the general idea that Senators should be especially responsive to stimuli that come from their colleagues inside the
institution. Senators who wished to achieve influence in the Senate were advised to observe the internally generated norms. And to the limit of their capacity, the oligarchs tried to enforce their prescriptions, rewarding the conformists with good committee assignments, special attention to their bills and social acceptance. "There is great pressure to conform in the Senate" an influential member told Donald Matthews. "It's just like living in a small town." For the oligarchs who had already achieved influence or for the incoming Senators who were willing to get on a committee, do their homework, accumulate seniority and not rock the boat, these communitarian, inward looking arrangements were satisfactory. And so long as such people constituted a substantial majority of the Senate's membership, the decision-making patterns and the structure of influence remained stable. And the Senate remained very much a club, a small town, a community.

Not all senators, however, found this kind of tight little communitarian arrangement to their liking. Either because they did not put a premium on achieving internal influence or because they could not wait to achieve it or because they were, by temperament, boat rockers, the Senate
had within it a number of non-conforming Senators—described by observers as outsiders or mavericks or loners. They were overwhelmingly liberal Democratic activists, who found the prescriptions of the conservative oligarchs impossibly constraining. But, so long as they were a minority in their party and in the chamber, the Senate remained in a kind of equilibrium.

Enter the Senate class of 1958. What the 1958 election did was to bring into the Senate community, in one sudden burst, a large, indigestible group of feisty newcomers ("runnin' rebels" you might say) the largest element among them being a group of liberal Democrats. Indeed, between January 1957 and January 1959 the number of liberal Democrats more than doubled, a change the proportions of which has not been duplicated since. Overnight, the enlarged majority party became less southern and more liberal. The Democratic Class of 1958 destroyed the equilibrium within their party and, and hence, within the chamber, thus threatening the stability of the entire community. Michael Foley, whose book The New Senate, highlights what he calls "the central importance of the class of 1958," writes that "this abnormally large number(s) of confident liberal freshmen changed not only the political
composition, but the whole atmosphere within the chamber." While
institutional change did not come overnight, it began in January 1959. And
the Senate has not been the same since.

A scholarly career could be consumed recording and explaining the
quarter century of change that occurred inside the Senate. My general
notion of what happened is that changes were taking place in the country,
that newcomers to the Senate were influenced by those changes and that they
brought with them experiences and ideas and desires that motivated them to
change the internal operation of the Senate.

Changes in the country were of two general sorts—first, changes in
the policy agenda, new issues, more complex issues, more controversial
issues—for example, great society economic programs, civil rights, Viet
Nam, consumerism, environmentalism, abortion, school prayer—and second,
changes in the political process—more openness, more media visibility,
more interest group participation, more single-issue groups, fewer party-
dominated elections, more candidate-centered elections, instant
communication and an information explosion. The country's policy agenda
expanded rapidly and so did policy activism in the country at large. These
changes in policy and process had their effect on the Senate as successive
groups of likeminded newcomers—first Democrats, then Republicans—built on
the base established in 1958. And, of course, each newcomer replaced an
old timer. By 1977, for example, only 14 Senators remained who had
belonged to the club or had lived in the small town Senate of 1957.

What the newcomers wanted was a chance to change the substance of
policy and to become more active in policy making themselves. They were,
often, active participants in setting the new policy agenda; and they were
associated with the burgeoning policy networks outside the Senate. If not,
they were responsive to them, because most of these issue groups and issue
networks, while active in Washington, had roots in their constituencies.
The new members came to the Senate, that is, much more attuned to these
external stimuli than to the internal stimuli emanating from their senior
colleagues.

I remember talking with a young 38 year old Senator in his office
during his first week in the Senate in 1979, when a veteran of 20 years
stopped by, he said, "to welcome you to the Senate." The newcomer stood
stiffly in his doorway looking puzzled while the elderly southern gentleman
behaved like a member of the club's hospitality committee or the small
town's welcome wagon. After he had said 'thank you,' and the old timer had
left, the newcomer turned to me and said, "What in the hell was that all
about?" I refrained from lecturing him on the changing Senate.

He was a prototypical 1970's Senator. He had come to the institution,
like so many of his colleagues, with a full policy agenda and with an
eagerness to participate in the making of policy. He was preparing to live
in a more outward-looking political world than the community-minded old
timer. And he was possessed of a lively sense of his own independence as a
politician. For he had been elected on the strength of his own personal
skills rather than those of his party—skills exhibited in his fund
raising, in recruiting his volunteer organization, in his media
presentation, in his personal attentiveness to his state, and in
accumulating support with his customized package of policy promises. Many
new senators, like him, campaigned as individuals rather than as party
people and brought that same spirit of independent entrepreneurship with
them into the Senate. Indeed, they believed that only by acting in this
spirit, only by demonstrating their ability to respond to external forces
would they be able to win reelection. Certainly they wanted influence inside the Senate but they wanted direct and quick policy-making influence rather than the kind of indirect and gradual influence on policy that grew out of the establishment of good interpersonal relations within the club.

Indeed, the incoming senators did not want a club at all—because the club’s institutional conservatism dulled the sensitivity of its members to outside groups and because its inward-looking norms constrained individual initiatives. Even less did the newcomers accept the oligarchical arrangement which had kept influence so unequally distributed among the members. They were happy to be outsiders, mavericks or loners. As policy activists, they almost had to be—at least in the beginning. By the mid 1970s, however, the one-time outsiders had become a majority in the Senate, and the distinction between insiders and outsiders had vanished.

Sensitivity to external change and equality of individual influence had become the dominant desires of most Senators. These desires were not compatible with a club, or a small town, or an oligarchy or, in general, with a communitarian Senate. First within the Democratic party and then within the Senate as a whole, the new senators created a new Senate—one
increasingly less communitarian and one increasingly more individualistic than before.

As might be expected, a large number of these changes centered on the committee system. Through changes in party rules, for example, more senators got more committee assignments, and more subcommittee assignments. In 1957, the average Senator sat on 2-plus committees and 6-plus subcommittees. By 1976, the average was 4 committees and 14 subcommittees. As issues became more complex—issues like energy, environment, transportation, regulation, taxation—the jurisdictions of these committees and subcommittees overlapped—thus encouraging members to work across committee boundaries. Taken together these changes indicate such a broadening of the policy reach for each Senator as to render the old norm of specialization nearly meaningless. Senators were deliberately ranging widely over the policy landscape, and spreading themselves thin.

As one put it in 1983,

By being a member (of a committee) you get a certain leverage on a lot of deals, in a lot of different ways. So even though it's impossible really to participate in three committees, four committees, ten subcommittees—whatever it is—if your interest is in affecting the outcome of legislation, there's an incentive to be on every committee you can get on.
In addition to more committee assignments, the average senator received better assignments, as the most important committees were opened up to all. In the mid '50s, a little over half of the Senators held membership on the four most powerful committees—Appropriations, Finance, Armed Services and Foreign Relations. And 10% of the members were allowed to serve on two of the top four. In 1970, both parties passed rules prohibiting assignment to more than one top-four committee per Senator. By 1981, this oligarchical distribution had been broken up—80% of the Senators now had membership on one of the top 4 committees and only a pair of elderly Senators were still "grandfathered" into membership on two top committees. Furthermore, these four influential committee spots were increasingly given to freshmen. In the mid '50s, only about 15% of the freshmen were assigned to them. The change began in 1958. Two years later, a veteran southern Democrat commented disapprovingly,

When I first came here, you had to wait a good while before you came on (the) Appropriations (Committee). Now, the Democratic policy is to put some newcomers on the committee. With all deference to them, they don't have the running knowledge of the workings of government. I had to wait six or seven years and I was seasoned for the job.
In 1981, 70% of the freshmen won assignment to one of the top-four committees. This change indicates the demise, too, of the old apprenticeship norm. Top committee assignments were no longer held in abeyance as a reward for a period of good behavior in the club.

As more and better committee positions became accessible to all Senators, so did the committees themselves become more accessible to outside groups. Senate secrecy became a casualty of the post-Watergate period. A change of Senate rules in 1975 opened up all committee decision-making to public view. Thus Senators and their external policy allies could work jointly and more effectively in the committee arena.

Information on substance and on politics was thus more widely distributed and more players were brought into the game.

Senators, moreover, were greatly aided in their activism by another major change. In order to help them realize the potential for influence which came with their committee positions, newcomers pressed for larger and ever more professional staffs, both personal and committee. Committee staffs which numbered about 500 people in the mid fifties doubled to over 1000 by 1981. And personal staffs—those over whom each Senator had
maximum control—nearly quadrupled from 1000 in the mid 50s to 3700 by 1981. These staffs are, of course, divided between Washington and home.

And home staff is concerned mostly with constituent services—an invaluable aid to reelection. Inside the Senate, however, more personal staff meant more knowledge and an improved capacity to work in multiple policy areas. A senator's expertise, which once had been exclusively committee-based has now become staff-based—thus further encouraging activity beyond one's committee jurisdictions as well as within them. Each senator—together with his or her 20-40 personal staffers plus the half dozen or so committee or subcommittee staffers under his control—now constitutes a small but formidable little enterprise for furthering the entrepreneurship and the independence in policy making that Senate newcomers have increasingly sought.

On the social side, moreover, these staff enterprises have become little cocoons, insulating but also isolating Senators one from another.

As one Senator put it in 1978,

I think the exclusive club that we thought we were part of implied that we related to one another; mostly club members are supposed to be friends. They are supposed to see each other. I think one of the major
frustrations in this institution is that there isn't any time for that. The thrust of this institution is against rather than in favor of that kind of relationship. That is yielding some very strange things, like relationships with staff almost exclusively instead of with fellow Senators.9

In the individualistic Senate, clublike interpersonal relationships among Senators have given way to interaction among staffers—from "my boss" to "your boss". The members simply do not see each other or know each other as they did in the cozier communitarian Senate. When a retired Republican Senator returned to study the Senate in 1982, he commented, "I meet senators now and mention a colleague and they say they hardly know him. Most of my (17 year) career I individually knew every guy on the floor."10 Not only have the interpersonal understandings of the older Senate eroded, or vanished, as we have seen, but the intimate social relationships necessary to generate and enforce such understandings have disappeared too.

All the changes I have discussed militated against the survival of an oligarchical structure of influence internally. That structure did not, of course, disappear overnight. The senior committee leaders of the 1950's retained much of their power so long as they were reelected. But gradually, the distribution of influence inside the Senate broadened and
the structure became markedly less hierarchical. This change was
immeasurably aided by the election of Mike Mansfield as Democratic party
leader in 1961. In a manner almost exactly opposite to that of Lyndon
Johnson, Mansfield decentralized and democratized the party and protected
the policy-making rights of individual Senators. For 16 years, he applied
laissez faire, egalitarian principles to the running of the party and the
Senate—principles which further doomed the old norm of apprenticeship.
The leader, in short, became the ally of the policy entrepreneurs among the
newcomers.

Looking back in 1975, one of the Democratic newcomers of the famous
Class of 1958 summed up 17 years of change in the Senate influence
structure. "The Senate," he said,
is no longer an establishment kind of place. And every
generation of young Senators who have come along have
changed it a little bit. The times have changed it.
The last 10 years have come along; the war and other
issues have changed the Senate. It is no longer the
body it used to be. The Senate is no longer made up of
men who are willing to be part of a hierarchical
arrangement with the leader at the top of the pyramid
and everybody else in his proper place waiting to climb
and all of the rest of it. The institution just has
been opened up too much. A simple thing like the
majority party caucus. You could never get Lyndon
Johnson when he was majority leader to even agree to
hold a caucus. There was one at the beginning and that
was it. The (Democratic) policy committee didn't meet
as often under Lyndon. And when it met it was only
there to receive Lyndon's pronouncements of what was going to happen and when and why. Mansfield made it a consultative process. That is the way he wanted it in the first place and I doubt if he could have made it otherwise even if he wanted to. Just as in all aspects of American life there is no such thing as blind followers anymore in this country—blind acceptance of political leaders and institutions. And the same thing is true here. 11

Seven years later, in 1980, a second member of the Class of 1958—Mansfield's successor as Democratic leader—reflected similarly on the changed Senate. Said Robert Byrd. "Going back to my earliest years in the Senate, I think there was more of an allegiance to party, more of an establishment-minded feeling. There was more cohesiveness on the part of political parties than there has been in recent years. The emergence of the individual has been a kind of phenomenon." 12 He was describing a change from the dominance of party agendas in shaping Senate activity to the dominance of personal agendas—one more sign of the drift from a communitarian institution to an individualistic one.

Which leads me to the discussion of another indicator of change—the increased importance of activity on the Senate floor. For that has become the place where Byrd's "emergence of the individual", or the impact of personal agendas has been most visible. If, as I have indicated, there has
been a movement toward greater equality of participation and influence over the years, then we would expect to find it especially manifest in the one place where member equality is formally the greatest—on the Senate floor. After all, that is where the rock-bottom one Senator-one vote equality exists and it is also the place where the distinctive right of each Senator to talk at great length exists.

In the communitarian Senate as we have described it, floor deliberations were dominated by committees; and non-committee members tended not to challenge committee judgments. The norm of specialization was backed by voting majorities. As one liberal activist put it, "The conservative committee chairmen all supported each other and created a bloc that was very difficult to break." But as Senators became active over a wider range of committees and as they developed their own staff-based expertise and as committee decision making was opened up to the surveillance of outside groups, the walls erected by the committee-based division of labor began to be breached. And the committees began to lose some of their dominance on the floor. This trend was abetted, too, by the controversial nature of the policy agenda of the 60's and 70's—which led
single-issue policy activists to want to pursue their strongly held policy preferences wherever and whenever possible, regardless of committee judgments to the contrary.

An increasing number of decisions have been pushed, therefore, to the Senate floor. In the mid fifties, Senators voted on about 400 roll calls each year; by 1981, the number had escalated to over 1000. The increase was not accounted for by more bills but by more challenges to bills on the floor, hence more bills with amendments and more roll calls. Everybody was getting into the act. In 1982, the complaints of a long-time southern oligarch illustrated the change.

In the first calendar year I was here, there were 73 roll call votes in that entire year...in this body. In 1980, there were 703 roll call votes...We have been too good to each other, too lenient. I have known days when you could not get a roll call vote unless at least one of the floor leaders backed you up. They just would not do it unless they thought it deserved a roll call vote...That is why we only had 73 in 1948.14

From the mid-fifties through the '70s, there was a steady increase in the number of floor amendments offered by non-committee members and in the number of floor amendments offered by freshman Senators. And there was an increase, too, in the success rates of both these groups in challenging the
While the committees and their members retained the largest share of influence, the balance between the committee rooms and the chamber floor as decision making arenas changed measurably in 25 years.

To put it a bit differently, the Senate floor became the place par excellence where the policy activism and the policy individualism of the newer Senators was on display. Alongside the greater use of amendments by all members, there occurred the increased—even commonplace—use of each Senator's distinctive right to talk. From 1955-1960, the Senate averaged less than one filibuster per year; from 1975-1980, the Senate averaged over 10 filibusters per year. Whereas civil rights was the main target in the 1950s, filibusters were launched on a wide variety of issues in the 1970s. And whereas conservatives were the main users in the 1950s, Senators of all ideological persuasions filibustered in the 1970's.

And that is the smallest part of the story. The threat of a filibuster may be a more effective weapon than the filibuster itself; and threats became far more commonplace than before. Filibusters, we know, can be stopped only by involving what is known as the cloture rule—which used to require a two-thirds vote, but now requires a three-fifths vote of the
Since cloture is often invoked in anticipation of a threatened filibuster an increase in cloture votes would give us some indication of the increased use of the overall filibuster technique. And cloture votes have increased markedly. Between 1955 and 1960 only one cloture vote was taken; but between 1975 and 1980, over 60 cloture votes were taken.

In the communitarian Senate of the 1950's, we have said, the norm of reciprocity prescribed self restraint in the exercise of this ultimate right. And to a considerable degree, it worked. It is, therefore, further evidence of the change to an individualistic Senate that the norm of reciprocity seems to have gone the way of the specialization and apprenticeship norms. "It used to be" said Robert Byrd, in 1978, "that (the filibuster) was resorted to only infrequently and on the great national issues, mostly on civil rights. But any more it's just resorted to promiscuously, I think." What was once considered by most Senators as an ultimate right, to be invoked sparingly for the good of the community has now become an everyday weapon to gain a temporary advantage over one's colleagues. It is on the Senate floor that the absence of the old Senate norms is most noticeable and is of the greatest consequence.
It is no accident that a party leader should recognize both the "emergence of the individual" and the "promiscuous" use of the filibuster. For it is the leaders task to manage the Senate's floor business. Since the threat to talk at length lies close at hand and since the disposition to use it is omnipresent, more and more floor business must be transacted by unanimous consent of all the members. Or, relatedly, by elaborate "time agreements" worked out by the two party leaders to give every interested Senator as much time as he or she wants to talk on a bill and to allow every Senator with an amendment all the time he or she wants. Behind many senatorial statements of a policy preference now stands an implicit threat to delay the business of the Senate by talking at length.

Another daily reminder of the ultimate weapon is the extensive use of what is known as a "hold"—whereby any Senator can request a "hold", i.e., a request to stop any legislation he does not like for a period of time and for no reason. Floor leaders must honor each request to "hold" legislation in abeyance, lest the bill in question become hostage to what is euphemistically known as "extended debate". Increasingly, therefore, the business of the Senate has had to be woven around the complexity of
individual policy preferences with "unanimous consent" agreements, "time agreements" and with negotiation over "holds". Small wonder that Republican leader Howard Baker compared his job of running the Senate to "pushing a wet noodle." The present-day difficulty in moving legislation on the Senate floor is a potent reminder of the individualistic ethos of the changed Senate.

We can think of the changes I have discussed as providing each Senator with more and better resources for pursuing one's personal desires independently of the desires of one's colleagues—resources like more and better committee memberships, more and better staff, more and better opportunities to participate freely on the Senate floor. And fewer constraining prescriptions. As a leading student of the Senate, Barbara Sinclair, puts it, "In the contemporary Senate, the typical member is generously endowed with resources and little constrained by norms in their use." In that vein, there remains one final resource yet to be discussed—publicity. In the Senate of the 1970's and 1980's, the opportunities for publicizing one's self and one's personal agenda expanded beyond anything
imagined in the small town Senate of the 1950's and 1960's. Senators became increasingly dependent on the media for their election; and the more they campaigned through the media the more they brought with them to the Senate a desire for media attention. Their talent for getting publicity and the media's occupational need to give it to them have done as much as anything else to underpin the more individualistic Senate. To the degree that each Senator garners publicity for himself, each senator wins a degree of independence from his Senate colleagues.

In 1984, majority leader Baker noted that no one inside the institution listens to what another Senator says.

(They don't care because they go outside and someone will listen to them with a TV camera...it makes it difficult to lead...If Lyndon were here today and tried to crack the whip (a Senator) would simply go out on the Capitol steps before the TV cameras and raise hell...(and) that man would be a hero.19

Media availability and the individual politician's skill in exploiting it for reelection or for advertising a policy position make it nearly impossible to think of the Senate any longer in communitarian terms.

Again, it is a change out in the country—the technological revolution of television—which has helped to reshape the internal life of the Senate.
When the Republicans took control of the Senate in 1980, the new majority leader's very first legislative proposal involved a substantial change in the publicity resources of each Senator. Howard Baker proposed that Senate floor proceedings be televised. Debate on the proposed change was joined in 1981 and continued off and on throughout the last two years of Howard Cannon's tenure. The proposal did not pass until four years after he left. But we might still think of it as the capstone internal change of the Cannon years. It was at once the logical extension of the increasing importance of the Senate floor as an arena for policy making and the logical extension to the Senate floor of the age of information, of openness and of television.

This is not the place to rehearse the six year debate. What is interesting about the terms of the debate is the effort on all sides to mitigate the individualism of the Senate with a dose of communitarian activity. Baker, the chief proponent, argued that television would enable the Senate to become "a great debating group, a great deliberative body and a great public forum," and that the Senate would, thereby, become more important, gain more prestige, and fulfill its unique function in the
American polity. Publicity would flow to the institution; and public support for the institution would follow. In Baker's view, the committees still absorbed too much of each Senator's attention. He wished to further expand the importance of the floor, but constrain the individualism of the members as he did so, by changing the function of the floor. Instead of pursuing their personal agendas, individual Senators would engage in a collegial enterprise as they tackled the great issues of the day talking to one another, debating one another, persuading one another on the Senate floor. Baker argued that, with the public watching, the quality of Senate debate would improve. The great forum would, in other words, be a community-oriented activity that would redound to the benefit of the institution as a whole—much as the Senate had dominated our national institutions in the days of Webster, Clay and Calhoun.

The opponents of the idea, led by veteran southern Democrat Russell Long argued that televising floor proceedings would lead inevitably to more publicity seeking by individual Senators, more speechifying, more grandstanding, more time taken away from the "real work" of the Senate and altogether a poorer work product. Long argued that Senators would not
talk to one another but would use the television opportunity to win votes back home or to cultivate a national policy constituency or, relatedly, to build support for their presidential ambitions. He argued that plenty of publicity outlets existed already for Senators to pursue those individualistic goals. In Long's view, legislative business should be conducted in the committees and not on the floor. To him, the floor was the arena in which minorities used the right of unlimited debate to defend their intensely held interests—and that was what the unique deliberative function of the Senate was all about. Moreover, he feared that if the television audience watched Senators exercise their distinctive right to talk, public impatience would lead to demands for change in debate rules. Long wanted to constrain individualism by preserving what was left of the committee-centered, communitarian Senate of the 1950s and 1960s. And that led him to oppose the creation of more incentives for individualistic performance on the floor.

Both Baker and Long understood the rising individualism of the 1980's Senate and its floor manifestations. Baker wished to turn it to constructive use by harnessing it to a community-minded form of floor
activity; Long wished to contain its floor manifestations as a way of protecting committee activity, and as a way of guarding against the debasement of the right to talk. Both were trying to strike a balance between an individualistic and communitarian Senate. The talented floor leader, Baker, perceived an opportunity to encourage communitarian activity on the floor. For Long, the consummate committee chairman, any increase in floor activity meant the further disintegration of the community.

The television argument was won by Baker, not because his vision of the Senate was superior, but because his proposal ran with the current of history and Long's opposition ran counter to it. It was, we might conclude, inevitable that television—already probing into most corners of our society, including the House of Representatives—would come to the Senate. It was, in Baker's words, "an idea whose time has come." That seemed to be the dominant view of the 67 Senators who voted for it. And that is a comforting conclusion in the light of our argument here that changes in the country produce changes in the Senate.

It is too early to tell how this recent change has turned out. My sense is that it has had less effect so far than Baker hoped or Long
prophesied. It has, however, put the new minority leader Robert Dole on
the nightly news from his desk on the Senate floor; and so we may see
whether the change will affect the making of the President in 1988. For
those who retain an interest in the nature of the Senate, television now
provides a window on the institution, a window through which tendencies
toward its individualistic or its communitarian aspects can be watched and
reassessed.

Only this remains to be said to prospective students of the Senate:

\[ \text{while watching the Senate, keep one eye on the country. It is the same} \]

kind of reminder I have tried to leave for scholars who will come here to
study the distinguished career of Howard Cannon. In general, keep in mind
the many contexts in which he worked. And, in particular: While watching
Howard Cannon, keep one eye on the Senate.
Endnotes


7. Interview with the author.


10. Alan Ehrenhalt, "In the Senate of the '80's, Team Spirit Was Given Way To the Rule of Individuals," Congressional Quarterly, September 4, 1982.

11. Interview with David Rohde, Norman Ornstein and Robert Peabody. Printed by permission.


21. See Long's testimony in Ibid., pp. 73-90.