Studying the United States Senate: Institutional Change and Individual Careers

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The United States Senate has changed from the inward-looking, communitarian institution of the 1950's to the more outward-looking, individualistic institution of the 1980's. This paper describes the Senate in the two periods. It then raises the question as to how political scientists might study the highly individualistic Senate of the present day. It suggests that one possible approach is to study the political careers of individual senators; and it further suggests a framework for such a study. The framework is based on the activities of campaigning-governing-campaigning which occurs sequentially during a Senator's six year electoral cycle. The framework highlights the activities of interpretation and explanation during the points of transition between campaigning and governing. The framework also highlights certain activities—such as the development of a distinctive governing style—during the period of governing in the Senate. It is suggested that research be carried out both in the home constituency (where campaigning takes place) and in Washington (where governing takes place). An example from the author's research—Senator Pete V. Domenici—is presented to demonstrate how this developmental, career perspective might be implemented.
Introduction

Among the world's bicameral legislatures, no "second"—or, less popularly representative—chamber exercises more independent power within its political system than the United States Senate. For that reason, no doubt, the U.S. Senate has attracted a good deal of research interest on the part of American political scientists. This interest comes and goes. It grew in the late 1950's and the early 1960's. In recent years, interest appears to be growing again.

In 1988, the University of Michigan's voting studies focussed, for the first time, on voting for the Senate; and this study will be repeated in 1990 and 1992. (The 100 U.S. Senators serve staggered six year terms; only one-third of the seats are contested every two years.) In the fall of 1989, a Conference on Senate Elections (at Houston and Rice Universities) was devoted to preliminary analyses of the 1988 voters survey. Several stimulating books on the Senate appeared in the 1980s—*Friend and Foe in the U.S. Senate* by Ross Baker, *The New Senate* by Michael Foley and, most recently an outstanding work, *The Transformation of the U.S. Senate* by Barbara Sinclair.¹

In this paper, I shall comment on the recent "transformation" of the Senate, suggest one approach to the study of the contemporary Senate, and illustrate that approach from some research of my own.

Institutional Change: From a Communitarian Senate to an Individualistic Senate

In 1982, the Senate decided to study itself. Two distinguished retired Senators were commissioned to undertake the task. The Senator who introduced the resolution described it to his colleagues this way. "Unlike many previous studies of the Senate, this one will be a study of..."
the Senate by former Senators," he said.

It will not be a study of the Senate by management experts—the Senate is not a business or a corporation—nor will it be a study of the Senate by academicians—the Senate is too dynamic...to provide the scientists, political or otherwise, with a fixed landscape for precise study, one where all the roads and fences have been labeled for life.2

In his view, political scientists are simply not capable of studying institutional change. He was very wrong. The Senate has not been "too dynamic" for our powers of understanding. Indeed, the one overall theme of recent political science scholarship on the U.S. Senate has been change.

The Senate of the 1980's, we have concluded, is a vastly different institution from the Senate of the 1950's.3 This is hardly surprising. During those thirty years, the country coursed through several recessions, several shocking assassinations, several failed presidencies, a bitterly divisive war, a debilitating political scandal, a declining confidence in government, a crusade in civil rights, a proliferation of activist interest groups, an information explosion, a revolution in communications technology, an expanded world market and an uncertain international environment. It is no wonder that the Senate—one of the institutional nerve endings of the American polity—would change.

Our task, however, has been to chart, to measure and to explain that change. We have been able to undertake that task, and stimulated to try, by the extraordinarily high quality of political science research on the Senate of the 1950's. Working from the baselines established by scholars like Ralph Huit and Donald Matthews, we have been able to make successive comparisons and to calibrate the institutional change that has occurred.
since the 1950's. In studies too numerous to list, we have described changes in membership, in member resources, in norms (both formal and informal), in agendas (both policy and personal), in decision-making patterns, in leadership, in external influences, etc. The composite of these studies—captured best in the recent work of Barbara Sinclair—describes the change from a dominantly communitarian Senate in the 1950's to the dominantly individualistic Senate of the 1980's.

The communitarian Senate, as we have come to understand it, was a markedly self-contained, self-regulating, inward-looking institution. It was a place where everyone knew everyone else; and it was described, accordingly, as a club—a men's club, of course—or a small town. The conduct of affairs depended heavily on the kinds of informal understandings that regulated interpersonal relationships. These understandings, or norms, were internally generated, internally enunciated and internally enforced. They expressed, therefore, the general idea that senators should be especially responsive to stimuli that came from their colleagues inside the institution. "There is," an influential member told Matthews, "a great pressure to conform in the Senate. It's like living in a small town."

Not all senators, of course, did conform. Availing themselves of both their one-person, one-vote equality and the cherished right of every senator or minority of senators to talk at length on the floor, a few members charted an independent, externally-oriented course. But in the language of a club or a small town, they were described as loners, or mavericks or outsiders. The Senate was, on the whole, a stable, consensual, community-minded institution.

The centerpiece of the institution's internal structure was its
committee-based division of labor. Newcomers were advised to specialize in the subject matters of their particular committees, to work hard, keep quiet and serve an apprenticeship until they became well-versed in the business of their committees. They ought not, so the prescription 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 confined largely to the jurisdiction of one's committees. Committee decisions were taken in closed sessions out of public view, thus protecting committee expertise from timely challenge from outside. Given this high degree of protected specialization, each committee's work product was expected to receive the benefit of the doubt from non-committee members and their approval on the Senate floor. And that was the prevailing pattern.

This committee-centered structure gave a disproportionate share of internal influence to an oligarchy of senior Democratic committee chairmen, to a few of their Republican counterparts and to the party leaders who shepherded their legislative proposals on the Senate floor. It was these oligarchs who enunciated and, as best they could, enforced the community's informal understandings by manipulating the resources available to the other members—committee assignments, procedural advantages, information sources and social acceptance. Their decision-making and socializing successes imparted a hierarchical as well as a collegial dimension to the Senate's internal structure.

The oligarchs were institutional conservatives. They believed that the Senate was a unique institution; they liked it the way it was; and they allowed as little change to come to it as they could. They thought
of it in terms of all the bicameral expectations of the people who wrote our constitution—that it would bring deliberation, coolness, good judgment into the legislature. But the southerners who wished to keep their civil rights policies and the westerners who wished to buttress their small state leverage saw in the Senate, above all, an institution that would protect the interests of intense minorities from the assault of national majorities. In this view, the uniqueness of the Senate depended upon those rules and practices which provided for and preserved unlimited debate on the floor. Anyone or any group that felt deeply aggrieved could filibuster, and in so doing extract a hearing, or a bargain or a deadlock from their colleagues.

In the communitarian Senate, the norm governing behavior on the Senate floor was reciprocity. In general, reciprocity prescribed that everyone should get a little something out of a legislative encounter and that no party to a controversy should come away empty-handed. As applied to floor activity, reciprocity called for self-restraint in manipulating the Senate's complicated rules of procedure to gain an advantage over a colleague. With respect to the Senate's distinctive right to talk, (it takes a three-fifths "cloture" vote to stop debate in the Senate), self-restraint in the exercise of that right was understood to be a necessary informal corollary to the formal rules. Individual senators or senatorial minorities were expected to engage sparsely in "extended debate", to use the filibuster only as a signal that the most intensely held interests were at stake. And the majority was not expected to resort to the full extent of its prerogatives unless and until opposing sentiment became equally strong and deep. Only on some such reciprocal terms as these, so the argument went, could the consensual, communitarian institution
survive.

The Senate was never as tightly organized nor as impervious to change as this familiar description implies. Indeed, our very description of it depends in part on the attacks that were being leveled against it. Nonetheless, the communitarian model gives us a baseline against which to assess the changes which occurred gradually over the next quarter century and which eventually produced a distinctly different kind of institution.

The underlying causes of change were the changes taking place in the country—changes in the policy agenda and in the political process. But the direct causes of change were a series of elections. It is through elections—and the prospect of elections—that change in a democratic country gets transmitted to representative institutions like the Senate. Change came to the Senate, therefore, when new people got elected to it.

In this respect, the crucial Senate elections occurred in 1958, in which the Democrats scored the largest net gain (15 seats) of any party in any Senate election in the 20th Century. This tidal wave of newcomers more than doubled the number of liberal Democrats, a change in proportions which has not been duplicated since. Overnight, the Democrats became a huge majority (64-34), less southern and more liberal. The Democratic class of 1958 destroyed the equilibrium within their party and, hence, within the chamber, thus threatening the stability of the entire community. While institutional change did not come immediately, the newcomers of 1958 became the carriers of change. They initiated a process which, by fits and starts, with regular infusions of likeminded recruits, and with the impetus of external conditions gradually changed the character of the Senate from a communitarian to an individualistic institution.
The individualistic Senate, as political scientists have described it in the 1980's, is markedly less self-contained and more outward-looking than the communitarian one. It has been shaped more by member responsiveness to external conditions than by member responsiveness to internal understandings. The members of the contemporary Senate are the products of a radically changed environment, and they have come to the Senate with an acute sensitivity to stimuli coming from that environment. New and controversial issues—from the Great Society, civil rights and Viet Nam to environmentalism, religious fundamentalism and arms control—produced successive waves of issue-oriented senators linked to issue networks outside the institution. Changing political processes—more openness, more special interest group participation, more media visibility, more candidate-centered elections, weaker partisan ties and party organizations—produced newcomers with an ever stronger sense of their political independence.

In the midst of this process, one of the Democratic newcomers of the Class of 1958 summed up 17 years of change in the Senate influence structure. "The Senate," he said in 1975,

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 hierarchial arrangement with the leader at the top of the pyramid and everybody else in his proper place waiting to climb and all 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.

The newer Senators were described as policy activists or entrepreneurs or prima donnas. Their style, once attributed only to mavericks or outsiders now dominated within the Senate. They were too eager to get involved in making policy or in polishing their personal reputations to make good club members or model small town citizens. They had little tolerance for hierarchical or collegial constraints. They sought a greater equality of influence internally. And they were unwilling to subordinate their personal political objectives to the norms of any collectivity.

As might be expected, many of the changes in internal structure centered around the committee system. The average senator came to serve on more committees and subcommittees than previously. And given the greater complexity of the new issues, members worked increasingly across jurisdictional boundaries. These changes so broadened the policy reach of each senator as to render the norm of specialization almost meaningless. And new members were able to secure the best of committee assignments, thus eliminating a major bulwark of the apprenticeship norm. Committee deliberations were gradually opened up to public view, thus distributing information to all interested parties and facilitating the work of senator-interest group alliances. These changes militated against the survival of an oligarchical structure of influence. And with 6 years of active encouragement by Senate leader Mike Mansfield, the hierarchical...
aspects of Senate life slowly gave way to a more egalitarian structure.\textsuperscript{10}

In order to help them realize the potential for influence that came with their committee positions, all senators sought and secured larger and more professional staffs—both personal and committee—an essential resource in augmenting their influence. A senator's expertise, once exclusively committee-based, now became staff-based, further facilitating a policy activity beyond one's committee jurisdiction. Each senator—together with his or her 25-50 staffers—now constitutes a small but formidable "enterprise" for furthering the entrepreneurship and independence in policy making they have increasingly sought.\textsuperscript{11} On the interpersonal side, moreover, these staff enterprises have become little cocoons, insulating but also isolating senators from one another. Members no longer see each other or know each other to the degree they once did in the cozier communitarian Senate. Not only, therefore, have the interpersonal understandings of the older Senate eroded or vanished, but so too have the intimate social relationships necessary to generate and enforce such understandings. Collegiality, that is, declined along with hierarchy.

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 made more accessible to outside groups, the protectionist walls erected by the older committee-based division of labor began to be breached. And the committees began to lose some of their dominance on the Senate floor. An increasing number of decisions were pushed to the Senate floor—resulting, Sinclair tells us, in more roll calls, more floor amendments offered and passed by non-committee members and junior members. While the committees certainly retained the largest share of influence,
the balance between the committee rooms and the floor as arenas of decision-making changed markedly. The Senate floor became the place where the policy activism and the policy individualism of the newer senators was most prominently displayed.12

A major indicator of the changed balance was the commonplace exercise of the cherished senatorial right to talk—reflected in more "extended debate" on more subjects, more filibusters and threats of filibusters, and more cloture votes in an effort to cut off debate.13 What was once regarded by most senators as an ultimate right to be invoked sparingly for the good of the community became an everyday weapon in the fight to gain a temporary advantage over one's colleagues. "It used to be" said Democratic leader Robert Byrd, "that (the filibuster) was resorted to only infrequently and in the great national issues, mostly civil rights. But anymore, it's just resorted to promiscuously, I think."14 Barbara Sinclair sums up her outstanding study with the comment that "The typical member of the contemporary Senate is generously endowed with resources...and is little constrained by norms in their use."15

The community norm of reciprocity has been another casualty of the more atomistic Senate. Party leaders now must manage business on the floor by means of ceaseless negotiations among large number of individuals who are quite willing to hold the threat of extended debate over the schedule unless they are given the personal and/or policy consideration they seek. Floor activity is dominated by myriad individual preferences and by the procedures devised to accommodate them—"unanimous consent", "time agreements", "two track scheduling" and "holds." The increased difficulty in moving legislation the Senate floor is perhaps the most vivid reminder of the individualistic ethos pervading the Senate of the
1980's.

Party leaders, more than anyone else, are in a position to see the changes that have taken place. For it is they who have the task of making the Senate act as a collectivity. What they see is a dominant individualism. "Going back to my earliest years in the Senate," reflected Democratic majority leader Robert Byrd, another member of the famous Class of 1958, "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."16

Byrd's successor, as majority party leader of the Senate, Republican Howard Baker commented that trying to get the Senate to move was "like pushing a wet noodle."17 And he reflected further, that senators inside the institution simply did not care if any of their colleagues listened to what they had to say.

(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 (Johnson) 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.18

The availability of television and the individual politician's skill in exploiting it—either to get reelected or to advertise a personal policy position—this feature alone makes it nearly impossible to think of the Senate any longer in communitarian terms. Both leaders were describing a change from the dominance of party agendas in shaping Senate activity to the dominance of personal agendas in shaping Senate activity. There is, perhaps, no better indicator of the drift from a dominantly communitarian
to a dominantly individualistic institution.

**An Individualistic Approach: Career Studies**

If we view the U.S. Senate from the perspective of these changes, the question arises as to how we might study the individualistic Senate. There are, of course, many approaches. The suggestion of this paper is that we might study some individual Senators and see how they behave. If the change to a more individualistic Senate is the essential context in which we are working, an examination of some of these individuals might enhance our understanding. Further, if we study them over time, we, too, can incorporate the idea of change over a period of time—when, where and how much. For these purposes, it is suggested that the idea of the political career is a useful organizing concept.

We can think of the political career as a succession and an accumulation of experiences gathered by working in a series of public offices and/or by undertaking a series of public responsibilities. Careers develop over time and in changing circumstances. To study careers is to study a broad range of political activity—private ambition and public institutions, external events and emergent opportunities. There is nothing novel about this approach. Political scientists have long been concerned with the motivations which propel people into politics and keep them there; the paths which politicians follow into, within and among public institutions; the responses of politicians to job opportunities presented to them by external events; the sequences of learning and adaptation, success and failure that mark the movement of politicians as they change offices, jobs and responsibilities.19 In these several respects, researchers assume, political careers display regularities which can be described and which, once described, will help us to better
understand political life.

In 1978, I began a study of several U.S. Senators, with the idea that I would follow their activity over one complete six year electoral cycle. I travelled with them during their election campaigns, went to Washington a couple of years later to monitor their activity there and returned to travel with them, again, in their reelection campaigns. I did the same thing with several other Senators beginning in 1980. The six years of activity which I studied are, of course, embedded in a much longer career -- one which began many years before I came on the scene and one which, in most cases, has lasted well beyond my time of observation. Nonetheless, my research does shed light on a six year segment of each senator's career. And the study of several such career segments has suggested a descriptive framework that may help in understanding the behavior of elected legislative politicians. I want to lay out this framework and apply it, illustratively and briefly, to the career of one senator.

The basic regularity which gives shape to this descriptive framework is the six year sequence which begins with a period of campaigning in the home state, is followed by a period of governing activity in Washington and is followed in turn, by a reelection campaign back in the home state. Campaigning and governing are the two main activities of legislators. And the campaigning-to-governing-to-campaigning sequence is the controlling sequence of every legislator's career. Without a doubt, these stages overlap and intertwine to a considerable degree. But the assumption is that the emphasis of these two activities varies substantially and with regularity over the course of a six year electoral cycle. The further assumption is, of course, that a legislator pays more attention to campaigning in the periods closest to election time and more attention to

...
governing in periods more remote from election time. To the degree that
these assumptions are valid, we can examine the activities of campaigning
and governing separately and in sequence.

Our sequential framework derives from the notion that activity at one
stage influences activity at the succeeding stage through the operation of
cause and effect. It also derives from the notion that activity at one
stage will be influenced by the succeeding stage through the operation of
anticipation. Thus, during the governing stage a legislator's activity
will be influenced by the election which went before and by the
anticipation of the election to come. In our framework, it is the
legislator's causal interpretation of his or her recent election that
mediates the transition from campaigning to governing; and it is the
legislator's anticipation of the need to explain his or her governing
activity to a constituency that mediates the transition from governing to
campaigning. We expect these mediating influences to be strongest near
the beginning and near the end of each legislator's term in office. When
legislators are successful at retaining their jobs, we would expect these
sequences to recycle, with longevity effects having some independent
impact as careers lengthened.

During the governing stage, we can distinguish several sorts of
activities. There is an early period of adjustment to the legislature;
there is a record of accomplishment sufficient to end the adjustment
period; there is the gradual development of a recognizable governing
style; and there is the acquisition of a legislative reputation.
Presumably this reputation will have some effects in Washington and some
effects at home at election time. These activities have a developmental
character to them. They can be traced over time during the governing

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stage and can guide our study of that stage. They may take on a different meaning for a veteran member of the Senate than for a newcomer—readjustment, for example, instead of adjustment. But the differences would be a matter for empirical investigation.

Schematically, the basic sequence, the intermediate influences and the focal points within the governing stage would look something like this:

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Electoral Interpretation  Explanation of Governing Experiences

Campaigning → Governing → Campaigning

↑  Adjustment
↑  Accomplishment

↑  Style
↑  Reputation
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We can think of this diagram, tentatively, as a guiding framework for the study of a six year segment in the career of a U.S. Senator.

An Illustration

One of the senators whose career I followed, on and off, for six years was Pete V. Domenici, a Republican elected from New Mexico in 1972. I met him when he was campaigning for reelection in 1978; I observed his governing activity in Washington during the academic year 1981-82; I revisited New Mexico in 1980 and 1981; and I returned there, again, to watch his successful reelection campaign in 1984. The central event of this six year career was Domenici's elevation—as a result of the Republican party's capture of the Senate in 1980—to the position of Chairman of the Senate Committee on the Budget. With his new position came a wholly new opportunity to exercise governing influence. The suddenness and the magnitude of this career change—illustrates vividly
the impact of external events on the shaping of careers.

A July 1981 Newsweek article, "Rating the Senate Bosses," captured the change this way: "Few Senate Republicans have seen their roles enlarged more drastically than New Mexico's Pete Domenici... (who) suddenly found himself in the forefront of the Reagan Administration's drive to balance the budget." Three months later, Domenici's home town Albuquerque Tribune, in an article entitled "Constituents Proud of Domenici: Some Say Presidency Next Step," wrote.

In the last few years, Domenici has made the meteoric rise from local boy to U.S. Senate, from Albuquerque's Young Man of the Year in 1967 to Chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, from Chairman of the City Commission to confidant of a President. Until recently Domenici was just another nameless face in the Senate. Then he shot to prominence...

He had been handed an opportunity that would change his career.

Good fortune, of this sort, can open up a career opportunity but it cannot sustain the exploitation of the opportunity. For that one needs, at least, ambition. And that Domenici had. "I am not one of those that planned for a long time to be in politics or to be a Senator" he told some political scientist interviewers six months after his first election,

In anything I did in life, whether it was typical high school activities or a ball team or a civic group, I have generally filtered up to being president or chairman of the group or some such thing. That's an ingredient that has been part of my life. I guess I've always had a yearning to be something in whatever I did.

He sought and he welcomed any opportunity to take on additional responsibilities. The chairmanship presented that kind of opportunity. And his political career underwent a huge change because of it.
I did not observe his earliest years of adjustment to the Senate. But I was able to observe the impact of his 1978 reelection campaign on a later period of readjustment. He conducted a very low key, low profile campaign in 1978, emphasizing—"like a congressman" he said—his personal integrity and his constituency service. His opponent was a flamboyant, crusading, publicity-seeking, high profile Attorney General of New Mexico. Domenici's polls told him to the end of the campaign, that he was more than twenty points ahead. But he won by only six points. He was very upset by the outcome; and he interpreted it not as a victory but as a cause for worry and for remedial action.

His interpretation (and that of his staff) was that his opponent had done better than anyone expected because he had been able to capture media attention while Domenici, had not—that Domenici had overwhelmingly lost the media contest to his opponent. As a result of this electoral interpretation he determined to give top priority to publicity when he returned to the Senate. His staffers spoke of his post-election press emphasis not only as "high priority" but as "insatiable" and "paranoid." Their internal office memos in early 1979 carried such guidelines as "the press section will begin a weekly column in the New Mexico press", "one of the Senator's goals is to publish more articles, not only in trade journals, but in the national media" and "the number one concern of this office is press." My point is that this heightened emphasis on publicizing himself was the result of his campaigning experience and of the interpretation he chose to place on that experience.

One way to chart the course of a career inside the Senate is to trace the succession of a legislator's governing accomplishments. It is a characteristic of the individualistic Senate that each legislator is able
to participate early and actively in a broad range of decision-making and
to take credit for his or her part in it. But it is also true that the
bulk of the governing accomplishments of most senators are still related
to the work of their committees. That was Pete Domenici's pattern. What
he called "three successes I'm proud of" during his 1978 campaign, and the
major accomplishment of his 1979-1980 years, took place in his committees.

As a minority senator, he worked closely with the Democratic majority
in his committees to bring about compromise policy results—on clean air,
on energy conservation, on budget resolutions and on synthetic fuel
development. He developed a governing style that was bipartisan and
consensual, based on a knowledgeable and sustained involvement in the
production of policy outcomes. He was a strong conservative, but he was
not an ideologue. A staff aide said of him in 1979 that, "He's not a
political guy. He's the least political Senator around. He's a policy
senator. Most of his friends who come in the door are Democrats. He's
not partisan." He was by temperament cautious in his legislative
undertakings—more a broker than an initiator. His goal was to "be
something" in the Senate, by contributing to the making of public policy.

By 1980, he believed that his legislative involvements had earned him
a reputation as a contributor or as "a player" in the Senate.

I'm a player now. I don't go down there and vote no.
That synthetic fuel bill is as much mine as the
Democrats'...Now I'm an important person in the
Republican party in Congress...I can get 42 votes on
nearly anything I care about—and sometimes 52 or 53.
Not many people can do that.

And, he would add "I want the people of New Mexico to know what I'm
doing...I want the people back (home) to know what my colleagues know.
(But) it's not easy." At that stage of his career his accomplishments and his reputation were progressing more successfully than the public attention being paid to them. He was still concerned about getting favorable publicity. But he remained, as his hometown paper said "another nameless face in the Senate."

With his elevation to the chairmanship in 1981, Domenici entered a new and recognizably different stage of his career. He had to make another series of adjustments; he reached a new level of policy accomplishments; he developed a different governing style; and he acquired a vastly different national—and local—reputation.

The chairmanship gave him his first formal position of leadership—and resources such as legitimacy, staff, procedural prerogatives and respect. He was given an enlarged opportunity to pursue his most basic senatorial goal to "be something" in the Senate by helping to make good public policy. At the same time, he had thrust upon him a second senatorial goal—to protect and preserve the congressional budget process, in which he now became the central player. This new and complex process was Congress' effort to organize itself internally to make coherent budget policy and to equip itself externally to compete with the executive branch. Any Budget Committee Chairman was expected to make the process work and to keep it alive. One constant problem for him was how to balance these two goals of good public policy and institutional maintenance.

Chairman Domenici also had thrust upon him a wholly new relationship with the President—and a President, now, of his own party. Moreover, the President had decided to make budget policy the centerpiece of his entire national program. The President would be closely dependent upon
Domenici's cooperation; and Domenici would be closely dependent on the 
President's cooperation. Another constant problem for him was how to 
balance loyalty to the President against his responsibilities as a 
legislative leader. This personal drama and the larger budgetary drama 
would be played out in committee and on the national stage. All of which 
would make Domenici a central figure in national politics. He would soon 
get all the publicity he had ever wanted—immediately from the national 
media and gradually from the local media. The latter part of the career 
segment we are studying (1981-1984) was shaped by these multiple 
adjustments—new position, new goal, new political relationship, new 
publicity.

The full story of his governing accomplishments and his development as 
a legislative leader during the years of his chairmanship must be told 
elsewhere.23 For purposes of this paper, I wish to note only the change 
in his governing style which developed out of these new circumstances.

As a member of the minority on the Budget Committee, in the first 
years 1979–80 of our career segment, consistently operated in a bipartisan 
manner—supporting every Democratic budget resolution, for example. As 
chairman, however, he adopted a far more partisan style—building 
committee and Senate majorities out of Republicans whenever it was 
possible and resorting to his traditional bipartisanship only when 
necessary. What made it possible in the beginning was the Republican 
election victory of 1980, the President's desire to implement his 
budgetary plans, and the determination of Senate Republicans to stick 
together in order to prove they could govern. What made it necessary 
later on was the emergence of individualistic tendencies among the Senate 
Republicans—most importantly, the members of his Committee. As political 

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and economic conditions changed, this individualism increased, and partisanship was not always possible. In at least two years out of six as chairmen, bipartisanship became the basis for majority-building.

One major theme of Pete Domenici's chairmanship, therefore, is the extent to which his leadership position forced him to curb his own individualism in order to act as a partisan coordinator of legislative action. In this stage of his career, therefore, his governing behavior is at least as illustrative of some continuing possibilities for collective activity as it is of the increasing evidence of individualism.

Chairman Domenici's partisan leadership was strongest in his first two years. In those years, he had the support of the President, his committee members and the other Republican leaders of the Senate. He thought of himself as part of an administration-oriented team. There was, however, a vast difference in the execution of his partisanship in those two years. In 1981, he acted as the President's loyal lieutenant, following the President's wishes even against his better judgment. In 1982, he became an independent force, telling the President what would and would not pass his committee and persuading the President to do things the President did not want to do—to accept new taxes for example. When, in 1982, the Chairman drew up his own budget plan and won the President's support for it, the Wall Street Journal's front page headline read, "In High Stakes Fight Over Budget, Domenici Just Outmaneuvers Democrats." And the New York Times lead editorial was entitled "President Domenici?" The Senator who had "yearned to be something in whatever I did" had become a national political figure of recognized influence and importance.

The 97th Congress (1981-82) turned out to be the exception to the rule. When the initial impetus of the 1980 election passed, party

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loyalties loosened and the individualistic tendencies of U.S. Senators reasserted themselves. Chairman Domenici had more difficulty holding his committee Republicans together—and he resorted more often—in 1983 and 1986 to bipartisan majority-building inside his committee. The accompanying chart shows the changing patterns of support among Budget Committee members for their chairman—on budget decisions made inside the committee.

[Table 1 goes here]

Table 1 shows a nearly solid phalanx together with high levels of support for the chairman among Republicans in the 97th Congress, 1981-82. It shows a general erosion of support and support levels among Republican Committee members in the 98th Congress, 1983-84. The erosion is as especially pronounced among the more conservative pro-defense anti tax Republicans—Symms, Kasten, Armstrong and Hatch. Among Democrats, the pattern is the reverse—rising support levels and a scrambling of the support rankings in 1983-84. This is especially pronounced among the more conservative Democrats—Exon, Chiles, Johnston, each of whom supported Domenici on a majority of committee votes in the 98th Congress. In 1981-82 Domenici operated in conditions that were conducive to party government. But we probably should think of this as an aberration. In 1983-84, the more normal individualism of the Senate reasserted itself. The chairman could govern with the partisan tide, but he could not keep it from ebbing. As he put it "The vaunted power of my chairmanship has run within a narrow range."

By the time he ran for reelection in 1984, Pete Domenici was voted the "most effective" committee chairman and the second "most respected" member of the Senate.24 There was widespread familiarity in New Mexico with his...
budgetary leadership and his independence from the President. He
campaigned with much more emphasis than he had in 1978 on his governing
experience in Washington and on his subsequent standing as a player in
national politics. And he was helped in making the linkage by a more
supportive local press than he ever had before. He won reelection by the
largest margin in the history of New Mexico.

This time, unlike 1978, he interpreted his reelection in the most
positive terms, as a vote of confidence in his Washington work. Because
of his 72% victory, he decided to undertake a serious campaign for the
topmost position of Senate majority leader. It was a very late start, but
he finished better than anyone expected—fourth in a five person contest.
The result was treated by most observers not as a defeat, but as the
credentialling of a party leader. Four years later he was one of a half
dozen Republicans on presidential nominee George Bush's final list of vice
presidential possibilities.

We can conclude this brief illustrative tracing of a career segment by
noting that Senator Domenici lost his chairmanship in the same manner as
he had gained the chairmanship—by a set of events over which he had no
control. The Democrats regained control of the Senate in 1986, and
Domenici became, once again, a minority party Senator. It was yet another
phase of his career—one we know nothing about. We could, if we wished,
study that next career segment by placing it within the campaigning-
governing-campaigning sequence, by focusing on the electoral
interpretations and campaign explanations that mediate the transitions
between these stages and by charting the adjustments, accomplishments,
style and reputation which develop during the next governing stage.

C:\Senate-25
That is one suggestion of this paper, that the study of individual careers is a useful way of organizing information about legislators and their behavior. The larger suggestion is, of course, that the career-oriented study of individual senators will help us to understand the changing, increasingly individualistic U.S. Senate. That suggestion cannot be supported one way or the other by a single illustration. The hope is that the illustration will serve at least to keep the proposition alive for continuing consideration.
Endnotes


3. This section has been excerpted largely from Richard Fenno, "The Senate Through the Looking Glass: The Debate Over Television," *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, August 1989.


13. Ibid., Chapter 6.


22. Interview with Norman Ornstein, David Rohde and Robert Peabody, June 1973, cited with permission.
