My view of Senate elections that comes from studying the activity of a few individual Senators—in Washington, at home and back and forth—over one six-year electoral cycle—from election to election. The large question that interests me is the relationship between governing activity in Washington and campaign activity at home. How do they affect one another? One part of that question asks whether governing activity has any effect on the reelection. Can Washington behavior—alone or mixed with home behavior—over the six-year term help us to explain election outcomes for Senate incumbents?

The answer to the question requires research over time—longitudinal research—in the spirit of Goldenberg and Traugott's study of the Michigan Senate campaign, or Jacobson and Wolfinger's study of two reelections of Alan Cranston. In my case, the actual research involves off and on personal observation over six years; and the research emphasizes governing activity between elections. For most studies of election results, the inter-election period is pretty much a black box. Perhaps, in that situation, case studies can open up the box for scrutiny.

Among the Senators I picked to look at, one has turned out to be especially interesting. I don't have the story well in hand yet; but I'm beginning to try and I'll say a few things about it.

Mark Andrews of North Dakota—elected to the Senate in 1980 by 70%—defeated in 1986 by less than 51%. He's one of Jacobson's "non-vanishing marginals" or Bauer and Hibbings "safe losers." What makes his case fascinating for me is that the 1986 outcome was totally unimaginable to me in 1980. When I traveled in his election campaign in 1980, I thought that his relationship with his small, homogeneous, state-wide constituency was so strong that he could never be beaten. In all the districts I had ever visited, I never saw a better fit—this farmer representing the largest agricultural state in the nation—or anyone safer electorally than he. On the record, he had been elected to the House nine straight times—the last four as the only congressman for ND and thus in the Senator's constituency—with an average 64% of the vote. Everywhere we went in every group we met with, I saw a close sense of identification and trust between representative and constituents. He spoke of the relationship as family. Yet six years later, he lost. [There is a possibility that I was all wrong, of course; and that raises questions about...
participant observation. We can talk about that if you wish.]

- But assuming, for the hell of it, that I was right, how do we explain the outcome. Well, to a large degree, I think we can explain the outcome. Andrews faced a quality challenger, the State Tax Commissioner, who raised a good deal of money and conducted a hard-hitting campaign. The farm economy was depressed. And there was a personal problem—Andrews sued the best doctors in the state for malpractice in the treatment of an illness that had left his wife brain damaged. There is evidence that all these factors were necessary in explaining the outcome. But if you think of an incumbent with such longstanding popularity and such an apparent cushion of trust—they may not seem sufficient. At least there is a temptation to look further. After all, he had faced quality challengers and low wheat prices before, and personal problems, we know, can be interpreted sympathetically or negatively, depending on whether constituents give legislator the benefit of the doubt. In 1986, we might guess, Andrews didn’t get the benefit of the doubt in any of these respects. Put another way, he didn’t enjoy that cushion of trust he had enjoyed for such a long time. And that is not a change that takes place during a campaign or on election day. Trust erodes over a period of time, and as it erodes, it produces electoral vulnerability. Somewhere along the line during his six year term, I would argue, Mark Andrews had become vulnerable. That’s what attracted the quality challenger; and the same things that made him vulnerable, also cost him credibility on matters of farm policy and personal conduct. So in order to complete a satisfying explanation of the election outcome, we need to go back to explain his vulnerability. In the causal chain leading to the outcome, vulnerability comes first. And vulnerability is an inter-election phenomenon, especially for senators—six years is a political life time. That is how he saw it, too. When we talked after the election and after he had tried several explanations, he said to me, “You’re the political scientist. Perhaps in your analysis you can tell me when my love affair with North Dakota ended.”

- The evidence that Andrews had become vulnerable and that the love affair had faded came in March 1985 when the respected state UND poll showed him losing to Congressman Byron Dorgan 64–30. The figures are partly indicative of Dorgan’s enormous popularity; but they also showed a long time incumbent in big trouble—a year and a half before any election campaign would begin. There’s no evidence in the poll as to what the voters were thinking [and one pitch I would make would be for surveys

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at points like this during the six years.] But the poll certainly raised the problem of his vulnerability. [Dorgan did not run against him; Dorgan's success as a Tax Commissioner and Democratic party sidekick, Kent Conrad did.]

- What had happened in the first four years of his term?

- There are many pieces to the vulnerability puzzle. It's no easier than the election puzzle. But the part that I've been most interested in so far is his governing activity in Washington. My curiosity and my research centers on a number of points which I will simply tick off without fitting them all together.

  - Re career: He served in the House an abnormally long time for a Senator.

  - Re continuity: He developed a particular governing style in the House and he did not change it in the Senate. I can demonstrate that in terms of committed behavior—Budget Committee and Appropriations Committee.

  - Re governing style: It was an insider's style, bargaining behind the scenes, working with Democrats, getting things for his constituency, not a team player, party maverick on large issues, liked legislative process and was an effective legislator in looking out for farm interests particularly, and in terms of pork barrel politics more generally.

  - He was well aware that there was an alternative style that had achieved popularity in North Dakota and was encouraged in the Senate. It was issue-oriented, media-oriented, activist on the chamber floor, style-oriented with the new politicians of the post-Watergate era which Bud Lewis and Steve Smith had recently written about in the House, and Barbara Sinclair had just written about in the Senate. The research recognized this style was because Byron Dorgan, the Congressman who succeeded him and represented the same constituency he did, exemplified that style. Dorgan was the prototypical new politician who articulated issue concerns and cultivated his constituency ardously with every public relations, telephone, mobile van, town meetings, outreach, visibility technique known to the new members of the 1970's.

  - From the day he and Dorgan were elected in 1980, Andrews assumed Dorgan would be his 1986 opponent. He talked about Dorgan a good deal and he warned about Dorgan—increasingly as his term wore on and Dorgan won two spectacular reelections in

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1982 and 1984. But his attitude toward Dorgan was a mixture of puzzlement and contempt. "What has he ever done in Congress, what has he ever accomplished legislatively? [Nurses convention--general discussion of country’s problems vs. what I got for you in the Senate.] He saw Dorgan as all PR. But to the degree that Dorgan’s PR made him appear to be all over the place, visible and in touch, Andrews suffered by comparison. His constituents told him that, too.

- His response to this stylistic challenge was ambivalent. Basically, he continued to behave the way he always had. He took the view that "this old dog doesn’t want to learn new tricks" and "you can’t score points in North Dakota being a national senator," and retained the view that his job was to use his considerable legislative knowledge and skill to get things for North Dakota. It was a strong constituency orientation, but it did not require a strong presence in the constituency.

- On the other hand, when the national media called him "parochial" early on and the kind of pork later on, he worried about his style. He treated these descriptions as compliments and he did not change, but he got very defensive on occasion bout the parochial charge. Would take a position on a national issue and say “see I’m not so parochial after all.” A private poll in 1982 indicated that people would like more of a national image and he ginned up a hearing on energy policy. But it was a half-hearted effort, out of character and went nowhere. His staff didn’t think this poll meant he should decrease his efforts for North Dakota--far from it. They only believed that he should add a national dimension to what he already did so well. But they didn’t pull it off. Andrews believed that, in the end, his constituents wanted, valued and would reward an experienced legislator who knew how to cut deals in Washington and get things for North Dakota.

- One indicator of his stylistic ambivalence was his inability to settle on the kind of staff he wanted and keep them. He had far and away the highest staff turnover of my nine senators--50% turnover against the average of 30% for the group. He changed press secretaries often and never learned to publicize his efforts or get good publicity in North Dakota. He changed AA’s and legislative staffers often and never became identified with any large non-farm issues. Senators who are issue-activists need good staffs. He never got one he liked. As a legislator, he was a one-man-band. His accomplishments were always his and his alone. His capacities were the limit of what he could do. He never hit
his stride in the Senate in the sense of getting from the institution all it had to give. He remained an old style House member in a new style Senate.

I don’t think these matters of governing style to which I’ve paid the most attention lead measurably to vulnerability. But they can be thought of as indicating an unwillingness or an inability to change in a situation that may require change or in a situation where change would be welcomed. Dorgan’s popularity was evidence enough of North Dakota’s receptivity to a very different style. And that made Andrews vulnerable to a young, vigorous, out-reaching challenger who would argue the need for change and portray himself as the new generational replacement for an out of touch incumbent.

That’s the kind of challenger he got--not Dorgan, but a Dorgan clone--his 38 y/o sidekick, friend and successor for Tax Commissioner--stylist who wrote thank you notes to people when they paid their taxes! Conrad raised $800,000 and conducted a hard-hitting, negative campaign on stylistic ground--not issue ground. He attacked Andrews’ credibility. Went straight at the cushion of trust. [“Double talk” on raise and farm bill.] And he was helped in this attack by a campaign incident that seemed to implicate Andrews in some unfair tactics. He kept Andrews on the defensive. And Andrews’ only reply was “Look at all I’ve done for you.” You need someone who knew his way around in Washington and will protect your interests there. On farm bill criticism, “I got the best deal for North Dakota that was possible.” That was, after all, the product--the only product--of his governing style. It wasn’t enough. [Maybe pork barreling isn’t enough--or is a fragile reed “what have you done for me lately.” But Mark Andrews had done a lot “lately,” he hadn’t slacked off.] Had Andrews changed his legislative style to one that forced more attention to him and what he was doing, he might have been able to blunt the change before it took root. He had an opportunity, when he came to the Senate, to rethink his governing style and make some kind of change--but he did not change.

Other perspective on his vulnerability comes from a look at what happened in the years before the 1985 poll. In Andrews case, 1983-1984 produced problems--several of which fed into the larger theme of an out of touch incumbent. (1) He became an increasingly vocal opponent of Reagan administration--not just on farm policy, but tax policy, spending--one of a small band of moderate Republicans in Senate--independence valued in North Dakota, but with conservative Republicans, it hurt. (2)
Republican party decimated in 1984. Democrats took most all state-wide offices from Republicans and took North Dakota Senate for first time in history (not the North Dakota House). Point is that Democratic party had momentum in the period leading up to Mark Andrews’ reelection. He was only Republican left. No organizational help; lots of factional guardng. Top staffer left Washington—went back to North Dakota and threatened to run against Mark Andrews in primary!

3) He got into trouble over the biggest pork barrel project in North Dakota—Garrison Dam where he compromised and the water developers thought he had sold out to the environmentalists. Again, the deal cutter who cut the wrong deal. **Most important** (4) April 1984–June 1984: Malpractice suit in the courts and the headlines. Perceived as an attack on the community, or splitting the family. Small community—negative gossip became rampant. No longer “one of us,” too big for his britches, Washington big shot out of touch. Part of it was resentment against big rich farmer [3000 acres]. This surfaced, and I had not seen it, idea that Andrews was arrogant, standoffish, aloof, bubbled to surface—could be “one of us” but was not “one of the boys,” not folksy. Might have been there all the time, for 25 years—hard to say. He lost his neighboring home county for first time ever! Fargo, where hospital was.

- Andrews reaction to Conrad’s charges and to the community’s disapproval of the malpractice suit was one of disbelief. He thought that Conrad’s charges would not stick, but they did. He thought his constituents would see the malpractice suit as the protection of his family, but they did not. He thought he had a cushion of trust, that he would get the benefit of the doubt, and he was crushed when he found that he didn’t. He was more vulnerable than he thought. “I’m not loved, I’m not wanted and I’m not needed.” No longer a member of the family.

- I cannot put all this together. But I’ll close with two points. (1) If we’re interested in incumbent vulnerability, it will pay off if we look at what goes on between elections. (2) If we do this, we will need to blend this inter-election investigation with surveys at appropriate times during the period. But the surveys may need to be different from those we already do at election time.
Want to talk about specific piece of research? First a few words about this kind of research.

- Different angle on elections than one you are studying: candidate activity, not voter activity.

- Different method:
  - Personal observation, not a survey.
  - Case study, not aggregate data.
  - Exploration, not hypothesis testing.
  - Data grubbing, not other people's data.

- Same ultimate aim: generalizing about politics.
- Same beginning: a research question.

- The largest question: grew out of prior research. How does what senators do at home affect what they do in Washington and vice versa?

- Framework: (1) Activity takes places in two contexts--home and Washington. (2) The activities differ--governing in Washington; campaigning at home. (3) For senators, activities are sequential in nature: six years--C-G-C.

- Thinking about C-G-C led to thinking in terms of longer sequence, i.e., career.

- But I came to observe in the middle of a politician's career and for six years only. So I came to think of C-G-C as framework for organizing a six year career segment.

- What to watch? First idea, the Senate: nothing jelled. Second idea, take individual, whatever they did on my watch.

- A set of stories about career segments loosely connected and focused on whatever my senators were doing: DQ, JG, PD, AS and now MA, today's subject. I didn't pick case in beginning to illustrate incumbent loss.

- The research question: Why did MA lose the election in 1986? Or, why did a Senate incumbent, a very successful politician, who had been reelected to the House eight times, fail to get reelected to the Senate?

- Explain MA defeat:
  - Conventional way: aggregate data (Abramowitz) large evidential base. Collect data on variables and run regression, national/local factors, candidate variables,
constituency variables, scandal variables, ??? generalize about strength of various factors in explaining election outcomes.

• Leave individual cases to others. Not sure what cases can do.

• My research is a case, what can we learn? (1) Six year inter-election period a long time, a lot can happen, a black box. (2) For incumbent in trouble, vulnerability comes first, need to study vulnerability and understand outcome. (3) Vulnerability is a six year story—journey-outcome. (4) Narrative is useful.

- The explanation: 1,068 vote needed. (1) Local, not national. (2) Farm problems (necessary, not sufficient). (3) Malpractice suit ("scandal" for Abr) (necessary, not sufficient) (4) Gradual erosion of identification and credibility/trust. (5) Inability to change governing style, no centered style. (Insufficiency of governing performance.) Conclusion: “out of touch.” What Andrews thought: Can explain farm, will support malpractice, no matter, will vote for accomplishments. Explanation is a Senate explanation. Would have been reelected to the House.