Doing Political Science: Reflections on a Research Program

I'm going to take your kind invitation and talk more about the development of that research project than would be normal in this setting. That is, I want to talk more about the bottom than the top of the research iceberg. Since my recent work takes place in Georgia, perhaps the subject of this talk should be: "How I happened to get to Georgia." In the broadest sense, as my title is meant to suggest, political science is what political scientists do. I want to try and outline what I've been doing over the years as a way of helping myself and you understand where I am now with this new study of representational change.

When I've finished, the story may seem like a case of arrested development, but I'll leave that to you. All I can say is: that's the risk you take when you invite an old guy to come talk. His long-term memory is likely to be a lot better than his short-term memory! (I take as my text an old Theodore Green story.) You may be listening to the Theodore Green of political science!
To begin, the substance of my research has always been about *elite political activity* in the U.S. And the central motivation has always been to help political science produce empirical generalizations about elite political activity. My research flow chart would look something like this. In terms of subject matter, it began with a study of the President's cabinet. Then it moved to the Congress, where it has remained ever since—as I say, arrested development. The substantive focus of the congressional studies began with member activity in committees and then moved to member activity in constituencies. The constituency studies began with House members, moved to senators and have recently moved back again to House members—two of them from Georgia in the most recent study. In terms of method, the research moved from dominantly library research to mixed library and field research to dominantly field research. And, as field research, the emphasis mutated from one shot interviews to extended periods of participant observation in political settings.

Whatever the focus of the research, it has been overwhelmingly qualitative, case study style research. And a lot of the development story is a story about how qualitative research projects emerge. In my case, they emerged partly as a matter of logic, partly as a matter of personal experience and partly as a
matter of the prevailing interests of the larger research community of which I have been a part. And the presence of the larger community is crucial in this sense: that every one of these research projects began with a question that grew out of and resonated with the ongoing corpus of political science research.

The new project is the third one I have written on the general subject of representation—which, as you know, has been a major topic in political science thinking and research for a long time. My work has been confined to a tiny corner of that huge enterprise. It focuses on the activities of individual members of the U.S. Congress, in a political system of single member district, plurality-takes-all elections. It is micro-level analysis, and it does not entertain macro-level questions concerning the fairness or the representativeness of the outcomes produced by that electoral system. For me, representation is a set of relationships or connections between an individual representative and that member’s constituents. And all such relationships and all such connections involve the activity of representation.

My research on representation has been conducted mostly in the constituency. That focus differs from main line investigations of representation which center on the relationship between the policy
preference of constituents and the roll call votes of their representatives--the study of policy congruence, we call it. That is, most political scientists studying U.S. politics approach representation mostly by studying the vote choices of congressional politicians. I approach representation mostly by studying the connections choices of congressional politicians--at home. The purpose here is not to downplay the study of vote choices, but to supplement that kind of study by opening up another window on the representational relationship. The representative’s problem of “voting right” is an important representational problem. But so is the representative’s problem of “keeping in touch.” The two are connected, of course. But they can be separated analytically and studied as different choices about representation. Policy is not the only medium of exchange or building block in the relationship between representative and constituents.

A major problem with this “other window,” however, is that--unlike the policy congruence studies--it does not include any material, except by inference, on constituent preferences. That’s yet another intellectual box--one I have not opened. I have only looked at constituency activity from the perspective of the representative while he or she is at work in the constituency. For now, I’m prepared to leave the constituency side alone while making
on the argument that students of representation should think of the home activity of representatives as part of their research agenda.

The first of my three studies of representation was originally designed to be--strangely enough--a roll call study of policy congruence.

The research was triggered by my dissatisfaction with the census-based operationalization of "the constituency" variable in our roll call analyses. And the dissatisfaction was triggered by an experience I had while doing research on congressional committees. (Ostertag story)

The research question I took with me into the field, then, was this: How does a House members' perception of his or her constituency influence his or her roll call votes. It was roll call behavior in Washington I was trying to explain; and I intended to use perceptual data to do it. Well, by the time I had spent a few days in each of my first four House districts, I lost interest in that research question and became interested, instead, in simply describing what House members were doing in their constituencies.
So I began to formulate a new question: How does a member's perceptions of his or her constituency influence what he or she does in their constituencies? I dropped the original, motivating roll call behavior question entirely, and proceeded to study the behavior of some House members in their districts. That research resonated with what was going on in political science with our growing emphasis on the individualistic, independent, self-starting, entrepreneurial, non-party produced members of Congress written about by Mayhew, Fiorina, Fowler, Jacobson, Loomis and others.

The result, called *Home Style*, was an exploratory study of how House members perceived their constituencies, and what House members did when they were in their constituencies. Using their perspectives, some broad categories of constituency perceptions and constituency activities were derived to act as guidelines for students thinking about constituency activity. The activities were: allocation of resources, presentation of self and explanation of Washington activity. The idea of representation was everywhere, but it was not made the centerpiece of the study.

As that project came to an end, I was often asked by colleagues this question: "Are senator home styles different from House member..."
home styles and why--or why not?" So I took that question with me and began traveling around with some incumbent senators and some "wannabe" senators in their home states. I concluded that while there did seem to be some differences--in their reliance on media, and on constituency complexity, for example, there was not enough of a difference to stimulate and sustain a full scale comparison—not anyway within the categories I had suggested for the study of House member constituency activity. Within those categories--allocation, presentation, explanation--senators seemed to behave pretty much like House members.

But, as I lost interest in the original House/Senate comparison question, the travels with senators rekindled an interest in the general question that had propelled me out into the constituencies in the first place—that is, what is the impact of a member’s constituency activity on his or her Washington activity. Senators and Senate candidates, it turned out, talked a lot more about their national policy making activities than House members do. And that made a study of their policy-making in Washington more attractive. Besides which there was a special institutional feature of the Senate that might, I thought, make an extended period of research into their Washington policy-making activity more feasible--and that was the six year term.
With that in mind, I decided to spend a year in Washington studying the Senate activity of a few senators. But I conceptualized their activity not in terms of roll call votes—as in my earliest thinking, but more broadly and more open-endedly as the activity of governing. And the connections between their state-wide activities and their Washington activities, I conceptualized as the connections between campaigning and governing. I mention the genesis of a new project because once again, it was a case of launching a research project that was totally different from the project [on House/Senate comparisons] which I had originally taken with me into the field.

Which leads me to say something about this kind of research. First, the frequency of my on-the-job changes in substantive research focus—two of which I have just recounted—highlights the degree to which actual research experience in the field can change the research question. I’m sure there is nothing novel about a researcher changing focus in the process of doing the research. But the regularity with which I get blown off course as I go along, may be extreme. The pattern may be endemic to this kind of research—characterized as it is by an extended period of openness to a very wide range of observations.
You start with a research question, but when you go out into the field, you relinquish a great deal of your control over your research question. You place yourself in a situation where your broad question comes into immediate competition with other possible research questions. You have come to observe and inquire into one form of political activity, but you find all kinds of unexpected and fascinating activity going on all around you. My suggestion is that when you immerse yourself in the complexity and hurly burly of real world politics, it is especially easy to be propelled onto a new research course. The real political world is a rich market place and the temptations to buy are huge.

Which brings me to some brief comments about research method--about what I have called informally “soaking and poking,” and more formally, “participant observation.” And since I’m still doing things that way--more than ever in the new book--it probably qualifies as another case of arrested development.

As we know, research methods vary widely among political scientists. If you think of us as arrayed along a single dimension of “farthest from” and “closest to” the real world of politics, our mathematical modelers would be at one extreme and I would be at the other. Coming from Rochester, I can speak with some confidence

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about this! I share with my colleagues the desire to generalize about political activity. But in most cases, our daily research lives could not be more different. Their lives are spent moving between the blackboard and the computer. My life as a researcher is spent close by the real political world. And some of it is spent immersed in that world.

And that simple fact about working conditions is responsible for certain problems associated with the research results. One of the problems, to which I am especially sensitive, is that of becoming overly influenced by the political world, to the point of becoming an actor in that world or, at least, becoming indistinguishable from a journalist. That might happen if all the researcher did was to plop into some real world setting and sit there waiting to be shaped by the surroundings and the noise. And that way of doing things is something that must be guarded against. But the way political scientists do that--as I have tried to indicate--is to go into the field with a research question that is a political science question that is related to ongoing research endeavors. When and if you alter that original question, you produce another usable political science question in its place.

Political scientists will behave this way--as journalists will

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not--because we are members of a scholarly community from which we take a huge amount and to which we continually try to give something back in return. A list of the political scientists who shaped my various research questions, for example, would be 10 feet long. We go into the field swimming in political science research and we take our ideas and leads from that corpus of research. All the time we are soaking and poking, we keep asking ourselves, what is there about what we’re seeing that might be of interest to our colleagues--as political scientists? How might our observation contribute to the common enterprise? So, while it may look like participant observation is a passive or haphazard research method, it is anything but.

As political science goes, it is labor-intensive work--inelegant, unglamourous, blue collar, data grubbing work. It is time consuming, physically tiring, and psychologically nerve-racking. It requires a high tolerance for ambiguity--since you have to feel your way through a maze of personal relationships that differ from event to event, and from place to place. It requires persistence, patience, adaptability, a fairly modest ego and a non-judgmental posture toward the people you are with. You ride around in a lot of back seats, stand around at a lot of functions, sit in the back rows of a lot of meeting halls, eat a lot of junk food and absorb
a variety of indignities and a lot of teasing at the expense of your profession. I am not complaining. The personal payoff, I have found, is in the stimulation of the adventure and the thrill of discovery. Researchers get their ideas and their intuitions in different ways.

In this research, the object is to see the world the way politicians see it by watching them from over their shoulders, by listening and talking to each one when he or she is at work in a natural political habitat. I try to stay out of the way and, as a scholar, to maintain a certain distance from the people I’m with—“up close, but not too personal.” My one and only special professional talent, I believe, is the willingness and the ability to listen. Among political scientists, therefore, I see myself as a professional listener who from time-to-time leaves academia and immerses himself in the work-a-day political world, and who then reports back as carefully and helpfully as he can to those fellow political scientists who have not as they say, “been there” or “done that.” And who are not likely ever to do so.

The research reports that emerge from my efforts at participant observation have been essentially exploratory in nature. The openness to personal experience in shaping questions and the method
of participant observation lead to exploratory rather than to verifying work. They lead to the formulation of hypotheses rather than to the testing of hypotheses. Research reports from the politicians' world can, at their best, give other political scientists a feel for the real world of politics and a politicians-eye-view of the world, and in the process, produce some conceptualization that can help them to organize their thoughts, discipline their work and produce, perhaps, new research questions.

To return, then, to the Senate research project on the governing and campaigning connections between senators and their constituencies, it had two phases. The first produced several studies of individual senators, and they were centered on governing. The second produced a single study, and it was centered on campaigning. I want to elaborate on the conceptual development of those two sets of studies as a way of bringing this research travelogue up to date—and then talk about the Georgia study.

Participant observation, by its very nature, has to be conducted over time. The researcher intermittently jumps into the flow of events and has to go with an uncontrollable flow. For that reason, ideas that incorporate some sense of time and of sequence command special attention in the reporting. In trying to connect the home
activity and the Washington activity of senators, I found it useful to think in terms of the six-year, cyclical sequence of campaigning to governing to campaigning again; I used that guiding sequence in producing some case studies of senatorial activity--studies which were structured, at the macro-level, to think of election campaigns at home at both the beginning and the end of the six-year cycle, and to think of governing activity in Washington in-between.

At the same time, the micro-level story was also being guided by another time-related, sequential idea--that of individual senator development. The relevance of this idea gets conveyed in the very title of those studies: the making of a senator for Dan Quayle; the learning of a senator in the case of Arlen Specter; the emergence of a senator in the case of Pete Domenici; and the failure of a senator in the case of Mark Andrews. All of these governing-centered studies are about individual political development--about making, learning, growing and failing over time.

For me, a covering idea that pulled together these macro level and micro level sequences into a single sequential notion is--the idea of the career--or more accurately, perhaps, the idea of career segments, since I could claim only to be describing one slice of each person's ongoing political career. By the time I had finished
these four case studies, my research on U.S. senators had mutated, in the broadest sense, into the study of senatorial careers—or career segments. And that focus rested on the work, again, of a growing interest in careers among political scientists—for example, Matthews, Schlesinger, Fowler and McClure, Jacobson and Kernell, and Hibbing. My emphasis in the four senator studies was on the career of each senator inside the Senate, that is, on their institutional careers and on the governing part of the six-year cycle.

But senators have constituency careers as well as institutional careers. And the study of constituency careers calls for more of an emphasis on the campaigning part of the six-year cycle than on the governing part.

Since I had traveled around in the constituencies of a number of senators whose governing activity I had not been able to follow in Washington, I decided to do some studies that focused on the campaigning aspect of senatorial activities—as these activities could be observed in the constituency. The largest of the campaign studies, incidentally, Wyche Fowler’s in Georgia, a campaign I talked about here a few years ago. And those Senate constituency studies led to more direct attention to the idea of representation.
than had the House studies. Thus, the title of that study: Senators on the Campaign Trail: The Politics of Representation.

As you might expect, a lot of my data was no different from what I had collected in the original Home Style study of House members. But subsequent experience had carried me beyond the categories of allocation, presentation and explanation I had used to organize that material. The importance of sequence and of longitudinal analysis had increased in my thinking. My interest in the six-year electoral cycle, and in careers and in career stages, which had been peripheral earlier, had become dominant. While representation had always been a broad concern, the newer emphasis on career sequence and career segments had made it clearer just what it was I wanted to say about representation as such.

The Senate studies treated, in case study form, three questions about representation: why do I want to be a representative, a question which involved ambition and motivations; how do I get to be a representative, a question which involved the building of constituency connections via a campaign, and how do I manage to stay a representative, a question that involved the long-term maintenance of constituency connections by some combination of personal and policy activities. All of these are career-related.
notions: about seeking, achieving and keeping the constituency relationships that underpin a constituency career, which, in turn, underpin a legislative career.

A central idea emerging from the campaign-centered research was this: that the senator-constituency relationship, the representational relationship, could usefully be conceptualized as a long running negotiation about representation between senator and constituents in which constituent support is being negotiated on one side, and senator responsiveness is being negotiated on the other. Through negotiation, the performance of the senator is gradually, incrementally and over time, brought into some kind of equilibrium with the expectations of his or her constituency—or it is not. Only some such idea as continuous negotiation, it seems to me, can capture the essentially incremental, tentative, changing, uncertain and experimental, trial and error nature of the representative/constituency relationship—as I observed it.

Once the representational relationship is recognized as a continuously negotiated relationship, it becomes easier to think of political representation altogether as a time-related activity—or, as a process. Cross-sectional correlations between constituency preferences and roll call votes are crucial to our understanding of
representation. But so, I would argue, are the longitudinal, time-related negotiations, the continuous connecting and reconnecting activity that takes place in the constituency between members and constituents. These activities are the building blocks of every representative's career.

Anyway, that was where I was when I undertook my current research project--a project addressing the problem of how the sorts of negotiated relationships between representatives and their constituents might have changed over time--specifically over the quarter century since I first went out into the country in the early 1970's to look at House member home styles. It is a question where I had some comparative advantage. I knew something about what representation looked like in the 1970's and I could use that as a baseline from which to launch a comparison with contemporary representational activity.

This question sent me back to the House of Representatives--and specifically to a district in Georgia which I first visited--three times--in the 1970's, where the boundaries have remained relatively unchanged, and which I decided to revisit--four times--in the 1990's. My study is, then, an exploratory case study of changing patterns of representation in one congressional district. It
reaches south and west of Atlanta’s southern boundary. Its attraction to me was that it sat in the region of the country where we know, as Merle and Earl Black have so authoritatively told us, the greatest political change has taken place in the last quarter century--the South. The study both reflects and puts a human face on that large scale political change--in this case a change from a solidly Democratic district with Representative Jack Flynt in the 1970's, to a solidly Republican district with Representative Mac Collins in the 1990's. It is a study in which time and sequence, careers and negotiations--the things I learned in my Senate studies--are basic to the analysis. It is a study grounded in the same participant observation technique used in both the House and Senate studies. And it is more than ever squarely focused on the subject of representation.

The centerpiece of the study is the idea that every representative adopts a strategy of representation in the home district, and that this choice of strategy is shaped by three factors: the goals of the individual, the constituency context and the negotiating processes by which the representative works out a satisfactory representational relationship with his or her constituents. The argument in the Flynt-Collins study is that Flynt’s strategy was a dominantly person-intensive strategy and that Collins’ strategy is
a dominantly policy-intensive strategy. The change I wish to describe and explain, then, is the change from a person-intensive representational strategy to a policy-intensive representational strategy.

There are really two stories of change in the study. The first is the story of change during the six years I traveled with Flynt and his inability to adapt to the challenges presented by that change. The second story is the quarter-century change from basic Flynt strategy to basic Collins strategy. And let me emphasize that when I speak of a strategy of representation, I mean to concentrate on representation as a process that can be observed in the constituency. The book is primarily a narrative account of where we went and what we did during my visits and what I made of it all. It took a lot of patience to do the research and it will take a lot of patience to read this book about it.

Let me give you a little idea of what I have done. And we can talk more later if you like. Jack Flynt's goal was illuminated by the story of his career. He was a lawyer who got into politics early--as his grandfather and father before him--because he wanted and savored the sheer participatory involvement with others that is a part of the political life. Politics was the only career he ever
wanted or ever had; he loved the person-to-person side of it, and he was never defeated during his climb up the political office ladder--from state representative, to district prosecutor, to Congress. His 1970 district was--with the exception of its 25% black residents--homogeneous. It was a rural, small town district of 16 counties dominated by agriculture and textiles. It was a one-party Democratic district--in which for a long time the Democratic primary was the only meaningful contest. So long as he kept the economic and political elites of his 16 counties--what Merle and Earl Black call the county seat elites--so long as he kept them happy, he was safe. And this he did, binding them to him through the constant cultivation of his personal relationships with them, one-on-one, one-at-a-time. My evidence for these summary statements are taken from my visits.

In my three visits, we walked the main streets of seven different county seats, as he shook hands, gossiped and schmoozed, in and out of every office and business establishment. We visited in numerous individual homes and country stores. Indeed, he met me at the airport and insisted I stay in his home during my visits--all evidence of his preoccupation with personal relationships. He had an incredible gift for names, faces, places, families, events, history--for all the associations that link one person to another.

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Once, after a Rotary Club dinner, he proceeded to name every one of the 40 people who had been there, table-by-table, describing each one by occupation and by level of political support. He was a master of memories. His representational strategy, then, was one of personal contact, personal service and personal accessibility. "In this district," he said, "only a person-to-person campaign will work." (And I might add that long before recent pundits discovered "the permanent campaign," Jack Flynt had engaged in it--except that personal networking dominated, not fund-raising.) His negotiations were intensely personal--and they seemed to fit the expectations of his active constituents like a glove.

What he did not do in any of his home activities I observed was talk about matters of public policy--"the so-called issues." He had opinions, strong opinions. He was a segregationist on racial matters and equally conservative on all fiscal matters. His active, supportive constituents knew his views--especially on race--and those views were essential to his political success. They were a necessary underpinning of his representational strategy. And any representative of that district at that time would have had the same policy views. But Jack Flynt's stock in trade and his passion, was his network of personal relationships and he was not about to jeopardize those personal ties by plunging into

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potentially unsettling policy discussions. My central point here is not that he avoided policy discussions on race. He certainly did. But my central point is that he avoided all policy discussions--period.

In his speeches, he talked not about policy, but about the community to which they all belonged--that is, to which all whites belonged--and how perfectly he represented that community because he and they were so much alike. He wanted his constituents to think of him as a good representative because they saw him as "one of us." His talks were designed to create that common community feeling. All-in-all, I think of this as a person-intensive representational strategy. And that strategy got him elected 11 straight times--till he retired in 1978.

His strategy was sorely tested, however, in his two campaigns against Newt Gingrich--both of which he won narrowly. He was redistricted in 1972--to reflect Georgia's population growth--into a much less rural, more suburban district close to Atlanta--strange territory for someone whose stock in trade was longstanding personal association with small town elites. It was the very district he most feared and worked hardest--without success--to prevent.

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But the change in constituency context made, for me, the most fascinating part of the study—as I watched him try to adjust his well-established person-to-person strategy to a district in which that kind of relationship was hard to establish or to maintain. The change virtually paralyzed him; he could not adjust; he could not change; he was a fish out of water in the suburbs. When we journeyed from the old areas to the new areas, it was culture shock—for him and for me watching him. With the old Georgians, he was marvelous; with the new Georgians, he was hopeless. He did exactly what he had always done—in path-dependent fashion. Luckily, his small town core strengths and old Georgia personal loyalties carried him through—just barely—to his retirement in 1978.

Sheer curiosity led me back to the district to hang out with two-term congressman Mac Collins in 1996, I knew that three-quarters of its constituents lived within the boundaries of Flynt’s 1976 district, and that 79% of the total 1992 vote and 81% of Collins’ own vote came from the old Flynt district. So while the district was not “the same,” it was close enough to explore for change. And the main representational change in that “same district,” is that Mac Collins’ paramount goal, by sharp contrast with Flynt, centers on his public policy interests. He came to Congress to contribute

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to the making of good public policy.

His main goal, like Flynt’s, was shaped early in his life. But unlike Flynt, Collins had an influential pre-political life—as a businessman. Collins entered politics as a successful small businessman, the owner of a trucking business. And it was a business he entered right out of high school. He did not go to college. Almost the first words out of his mouth when we first met were “I’m not your typical Ivy League congressman. I came from the school of hard knocks. I’ve spent my life close to working people.” He came to Congress with the policy attitudes of a successful entrepreneur—with the feeling that “I did it without the government, you can too. Let’s get the government off our backs.” He was a Democrat by reasons of birth, but like so many other conservative southerners, he became a Republican by reasons of policy.

During my first trip with him in 1996, he gave six speeches. Compared to Flynt, it was a total turnaround. I had come to another world. Every speech was about the country’s fiscal problems—the budget, social security and medicare. Driving around in the car, most of what I call “travel talk” was about tax and trade policy and particularly about the trade policies of the

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Republican candidates for the Presidency--Pat Buchanan and Bob Dole. Most all of his policy preoccupations were stimulated by his background and by his position on the House Ways and Means Committee--a position which he had ardently sought because of his longstanding businessman's interest in tax policies.

Again, my evidence comes from my visits. In 1998, for example, my three day visit was consumed with a variety of constituency negotiations--all of them devoted to current policy problems--with EPA officials on county water problems, with regional officials on transportation, with the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce on the government's air quality rulings, with hospital officers on their long-term health care problems and with an organization policing child custody payments. All of these negotiating activities were policy-centered. I neither heard nor saw anything like this with Jack Flynt. Collins is a policy-oriented congressman--a policy wonk, in a down-to-earth, practical sense. Any one-on-one negotiations he had with individuals were dwarfed by his three days of policy discussions.

What about the constituency context? Has it changed since the 1970's? In one sense, no--it is still as conservative--socially and fiscally as it ever was. And Collins' voting record is

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indistinguishable from Flynt's. Neither man, for example, has reflected the interests of his black constituents--25% to 30% in Flynt's day, 19% to 23% today.

But in other ways, it is a vastly different district. It is now a suburban district, younger, better educated, more mobile, more business and reform-oriented. It is no longer dominated by agriculture and textiles and court house cliques, but rather as Collins' put it, by "people who drive to Atlanta to work every day." The good old boys have been replaced by the community reformers. (One tiny but next indicator: A country store in which my most memorable Flynt campaign event had taken place in 1976, had been on Mac Collins' regular driving route for years and he have never even noticed it.)

The one-party South has been transformed by demography and the civil rights revolution. It has become much more Republican as outsiders and cross-over white conservative Democrats--have swelled the party's ranks. Reagan, Bush and Dole all carried it. Furthermore, the constituency has doubled in size, from 280,000 in Flynt's day, to 700,000 today. And the proliferation of advocacy groups plus the communications revolution has increased the flow of policy demands coming from the constituency. Jack Flynt signed

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every letter personally; he never got more than six letters complaining about a vote. In 1997, Collins got 14,000 communications all told; one vote brought 190 individually written letters of criticism. The ratio of personal touch to technological touch in member/constituency relations has changed enormously.

Cumulatively, these several changes make it more difficult for a representative to adopt a Flynt-style person-intensive representational strategy and much easier to adopt a policy-intensive strategy—if the representative is so inclined. And the point is that Collins is so inclined—deliberately and aggressively so.

Does this mean that Mac Collins does not cultivate personal relationships? Of course not. Indeed, his personal connections to his working class and his African American constituents is much more extensive than Flynt’s ever was. My main point would be that each representative has a central, dominant strategy—one emphasizing personal, the other policy relationships. But for each one there is also a necessary supplemental strategy. For Flynt, the supplement involved his policy positions; for Collins, the supplement involves personal contact and service. All politicians must pay some attention to both. But the proportions differ. And
it is the difference in the proportions I take to be a measure of representational change in that district--imprecise though that measure may be.

Jack Flynt and Mac Collins were equally well suited for the district in the context they faced. Collins was elected without opposition last time. In Washington, however, Collins probably has a good deal more policy impact than Flynt. Jack Flynt was in the policy minority of his increasingly liberal party and constrained in that respect; Mac Collins is at the policy center of his increasingly conservative party and can play a larger role in partisan policy-making.

I have no desire to generalize much beyond this case except to say that it might help students of southern politics to understand political change, by learning about change at the grassroots in one southern district. And it helps us to realize how much political change does occur at the grass roots and how change at that level drives change elsewhere in the system. In this sense, the study might help students to understand the district-level changes that lie behind some of the changes we observe inside the House of Representatives--the increased polarization of the two parties, for example--as Republicans and their districts grow increasingly
conservative and Democrats and their districts grow increasingly liberal. In the South, at least, a lot of Jack Flynts may have turned into Mac Collins’s!

My hopes for the book are twofold, depending on the audience. I hope undergraduates will gain some descriptive idea of what politics is like at the grass roots. I hope it might help them to think of politics--changing politics--as something that occurs outside Washington. For political scientists, I hope it adds some contextual reenforcement or contextual complexity to our generalizations about politicians and their behavior. My late career passion in this respect is that political scientists think of representation as a process; that they recognize that a substantial part of that process goes on in the home constituency; and that we add to our huge bank of roll call studies of policy congruence, some more research on member/constituency connections and negotiations at home. In both cases, the concern is for improved generalization about elite political activity.

So that’s where I’ve been and that’s where I am--still fixated on the U.S. Congress. (And I have to say in explaining all of it, that politicians fascinate me, always have, and always will.) Clearly, it’s a case of arrested development.

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Thanks for listening.