2005

Examining sponsorship and cosponsorship in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1973-2002

Kelly Marie Burke

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, kburke5@lsu.edu

**EXAMINING SPONSORSHIP AND COSPONSORSHIP IN THE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, 1973-2002**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Political Science

by

Kelly Marie Burke
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2003
May 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the people who have been instrumental to my success throughout my graduate studies at Louisiana State University.

First, I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to Dr. James Garand for his guidance, patience, encouragement, support, and most of all for helping me realize my academic potential. He has truly been a mentor and a friend. Thank you for the challenge, thank you for teaching me to believe in myself and my abilities.

I would like to acknowledge my graduate committee, Dr. James Garand, Dr. Kathleen Bratton, and Dr. William Clark, for all of their helpful comments, insights, and motivation. Karl Gleichman, my former undergraduate assistant, thank you for spending your summer helping with data entry!

To my parents, for their selfless sacrifices that have made my dreams and success a reality. To my father, thank you for your endless support (especially financial support!) and encouragement. I would like to thank my mother for her advice, for always being there for me (especially throughout these past few years), and for taking my countless calls about grammar and punctuation!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to uncover the effects of background characteristics on members of Congress' legislative activity. I intend to measure legislative activity using the total number of bills sponsored and cosponsored during each Congress. Beginning in 1973, this original dataset includes over 6,000 observations and is the most comprehensive study of this subject. Because my dataset begins in 1973, I will be able to identify any effect that the unrestricted ability to cosponsor, which began in 1978, had on legislative activeness. It is my intention to contribute to our scholarly understanding of sponsorship and cosponsorship activity in the U.S. House of Representatives and help shape future studies. I find empirical support for the signaling perspective which posits that political actors use legislative activity as a means for internal, rather than external, communication.

INTRODUCTION

Background

For many members of the U.S. House of Representatives, the long and exhaustive electoral process has become the climax of their careers, as well as one of the most studied areas in our discipline. While elections are obviously worthy of research, it is important to have a better understanding of what makes our elected representative not only a member, but also an active one. Are there similarities in the backgrounds of members of Congress that give them an advantage (or even a disadvantage) over others? For example, does a member of the U.S. House of Representatives benefit from political knowledge gained prior to taking that office? How does one quantitatively estimate such a relationship? Finding relationships that may help indicate legislator's productivity prior to their taking the seat would benefit not only the constituents who rely on these officials to speak for their interests, but the political parties as well.

The acts of sponsorship and cosponsorship at first glance seem straightforward. Members of Congress can either agree with a piece of legislation and formally support it by signing their name, or they can refrain from doing so, regardless of their personal preferences. This begs the question—what motivates one member of Congress to sponsor and cosponsor several more pieces of legislation than another member? I hypothesize that there is a link between individual members' background characteristics and their level of activity as a Representative. In this paper, I expect to find a positive relationship between formal and informal education, on one hand, and increased legislative activity, as measured by cosponsorship and sponsorship on the other**.** Additionally, higher levels of seniority are expected to have a positive effect on legislative activity, according to the

1

signaling theory. I intend to examine these acts in the 93rd (1973-1974) through the 107th (2001-2002) Congresses of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Studying Legislative Careers

There is much to be learned from studying the careers of political actors. Hibbing (1999, 149) writes that, "for many scholars, a major reason to study legislative careers is to understand the motivation of legislators and humans more generally." Although there has almost always been a desire to understand general human behavior, political scientists have failed thus far at conducting far-reaching studies which focus on increasing comprehensive knowledge of political actors.

It is necessary to study the career paths of legislators in order to advance our understanding of the political mind. In my opinion, many political actors consciously follow a traditional path to public office. This path could include holding lower-level positions, such as state senators or mayors, or working as a legislative aide in order to gain knowledge of the political system's norms and traditions.

This study focuses on the backgrounds of legislators and how certain background characteristics may be related to their level of activity once elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. I measure activity as the total number of bills sponsored and cosponsored by each House member in a given 2-year congressional session. While previous studies have limited their examination to only one or two Congresses, I have collected data on the 93rd through 107th Congresses. This allows me to identify patterns of behavior and reach more general conclusions about the impact of legislators' backgrounds on their performance as a member of Congress. Additionally, previous studies of sponsorship and cosponsorship often limit their scope to a specific piece of

legislation or categories of bills, such as gender related bills (Swers, 2005; Swers, 1998).

These types of studies are interesting, yet lack the general foundation necessary to

advance general understanding of Congressional activity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Overview

According to Sachs (1998), a member of Congress who introduces a piece of legislation is known as its sponsor. "In a strictly formal sense, sponsorship of a bill only identifies the Representative who introduces it, and does not necessarily indicate support. A Member may, for example, introduce a bill as a courtesy, such as legislation proposed by the President. Cosponsors, on the other hand, commonly add their names to a bill to indicate support" (Sachs 1998, 2). Sponsorship is the real hard work of originating legislation. Sponsors are expected to oversee the writing of legislation, a task which typically becomes the responsibility of their staff. Further more, if they are serious about a bill, sponsors are expected to shepherd the bill through the legislative process. Cosponsorship, on the other hand, does not imply the same level of commitment (Burke and Garand, 2005).

Since 1978, members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate have had the unrestricted ability to cosponsor any desired piece of legislation (Campbell, 1982). In recent years there has been an increase in the scholarly writing on this topic. There are numerous opinions regarding the desired outcome from a member's decision to cosponsor. Some, like Mayhew, believe that a legislators' ultimate goal is reelection and that, "the electoral payoff is for *positions* not *effects*" (Mayhew 1974, 132). However, there continues to be no consensus regarding the motivations or effects of sponsorship and cosponsorship.

Theoretical Perspectives

  In addition to the mixed findings reported in existing scholarly literature regarding sponsorship and cosponsorship, Rothenberg and Sanders (2002) note that there are two contrasting views to help explain the observed relationships: (1) the matching perspective, and (2) the signaling perspective. The matching perspective posits that legislators are rational actors and will seldom support legislation that is far from their personal or constituency preferences. Kessler and Krehbiel (1996) connect the matching perspective to the electoral-connection theories. This theory is based on the, "close correspondence between legislators' ideological predispositions (or, by extension, those of their reelection constituencies) and the content of the legislation they choose to cosponsor. In other words, liberals should cosponsor liberal bills, conservatives should cosponsor conservative bills, and moderates should cosponsor moderate bills" (Kessler and Krehbiel 1996, 555). The electoral-connection perspective also leads to the implication that legislators with a lower electoral margin, who also tend to have less seniority, will cosponsor in greater numbers than the more experience and electorally safe members of Congress.

  Signaling is the view that leaders in the legislature take a position in order to transmit information to the rank and file members, thereby pressuring them to follow suit. For clarification purposes, I align the signaling and conditional party government theories. The conditional party government theory states that, "a unified majority party will try to alter the inner organizational structure of a legislature to reinforce the power of the party leader, and therefore enact priority legislation without any support from the minority" (Aldrich, 1998). This allows for the assumption that members with more

5

leadership qualities, such as party leaders, committee and subcommittee leaders, and more senior members, will cosponsor at greater rates than freshmen.

For my purposes, I focus on the findings of Kessler and Krehbiel that "legislators do not use bill sponsorship as a mechanism for position taking aimed primarily at external audiences," (pg. 563) but rather as an *internal* signaling device. The signaling theory implies that higher-ranking members and leaders use sponsorship and cosponsorship as a message to the rank and file members to join their effort. From the signaling theory standpoint, regardless of party, a strong leader should be the most desirable member of Congress to a voter. Therefore, the more influential a legislator is, the number of bills sponsored and cosponsored will increase.

In the attempt to find out what makes legislators more likely to be an active legislator, I examine the similarities in several background characteristics of the members of the 93rd (1973-1974) through the 107th (2001-2002) Congresses of the U.S. House of Representatives. This is the largest and most comprehensive dataset on this subject.

It is likely that highly active legislators may be capable of influencing their peers' decisions. Therefore when a member of Congress becomes well respected, electorally safe, and presumably productive, the acts of sponsorship and cosponsorship theoretically signals freshmen, and less influential or prominent members, to support the specific piece of legislation.

To date, there has been relatively little literature written on sponsorship and cosponsorship or the factors that may lead a member of Congress to support a piece of legislation. Much of the existing scholarly work is focused on varying aspects of

sponsorship and cosponsorship. From my literature review, I found that there are basically 5 categories of hypotheses that have been studied thus far:[1]

The hypothesis that sponsorship is related to legislative expertise and personal preferences is an informational and normative one. It coincides with the idea that committees are designed to provide the members of congress with comprehensive, unbiased information to aid in their decision-making. This hypothesis, studied by Gilligan and Krehbiel (1995), found a positive relationship between cosponsorship and legislative expertise. However, Gilligan and Krehbiel studied only the House Energy and Commerce Committee. In Krehbiel (1995), the members' preferences were found to be the most strongly related factor in their cosponsoring decisions.

There is the notion that cosponsorship in both the House and the Senate is somehow related to ideology, partisanship, and the electoral margin. The affects that these factors contribute to cosponsorship vary. Campbell (1982) found a "positive relationship between liberalism and cosponsorship and a negative relationship between electoral margin and cosponsorship." Krehbiel (1995) found that cosponsorship was affected only minimally by partisanship.

Browne (1985) found a relationship between the act of sponsorship and cosponsorship and the success of the piece of legislation. That is that the more a bill appeared to be potentially successful, the more support it gained in the form of cosponsorship. Young and Wilson (1993) incorporated expertise and ideology with the bandwagon effect only to produce mixed results. The bandwagon effect is closely related to the signaling perspective. I distinguish between the two based on my perceived

---

[1] Note that these hypotheses are the result of constricted data; normally the sample size only includes one or two Congresses.

differences in the rank and file member's motivations. This assumes that the bandwagon effect is in place when a legislator is motivated to cosponsor after noticing the bills' probability for final passage. The idea of the bandwagon effect is that a member does not want to miss the opportunity to be attached to popular and successful policy. It is the basic concept that people have a desire to win. In other areas of political science, a similar idea is attached to the variation between actual and self-reported voting.

The signaling theory is different from the above hypothesis in that the decision to cosponsor comes after a cue is received from a leader by a rank and file member. Related to this hypothesis is the work of Kessler and Krehbiel (1996), which examines the timing of a legislator's decision to cosponsor.[2] Kessler and Krehbiel assume that the signal is being received internally, influencing the members of Congress, rather than externally, External signaling would indicate that legislators are getting the majority of their cues from their constituents.

The widely cited book by David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (1974) laid the foundation for current studies of the motivations of legislators. Mayhew states that legislators are, "single-minded seekers of reelection, see what kinds of activity that goal implies, and then speculate about how congressmen so motivated are likely to go about building and sustaining legislative institutions and making policy" (pg. 5-6). I agree with Aldrich and Rohde that Mayhew's approach "would [not] provide a complete accounting of congressional behavior, but [is] sufficient to explain most that was of interest" (pg. 269). Many authors have argued that the desire to be reelected takes priority over the need to create good public policy. In the context of sponsorship and

---

[2] Also see Hall (1997) for a discussion of the political-business cycle which evaluates the timing of elections and actions of strategic political actors.

cosponsorship, the reelection theory would view these decisions as strategic and calculated moves by a legislator attempting to appeal to his or her constituents.

The literature currently available to the political science community on cosponsorship is still developing. The variation in the literature suggests that the area is complicated and that it may be more difficult to reach comprehensive conclusions. Much of the research cited above comes from studies at the individual level of analysis (meaning that they focus on specific pieces of legislation rather than the total number of bills sponsored and cosponsored). Because it is often misleading to make inferences about the committee of the whole from a few individuals or pieces of legislation, these findings may further complicate the ultimate goal of more comprehensive understanding. The authors of these studies acknowledge the limits of their research and it appears that the topic is gaining interest among scholars. The recent works of Krehbiel and others seem to be examining the act of cosponsorship more fully and are reaching more definite conclusions than their predecessors.

Instead of approaching the problem of understanding a member's decision to cosponsor with one hypothesis, I intend to look at the big picture. Legislative activity, measured by the total number of bills sponsored and cosponsored, may be a result of many factors such as background characteristics, cues from leaders, ideology, partisanship, etc. By identifying and/or eliminating some key influences on members' productivity, and by contributing to the theoretical basis of this area of work, scholarly research may be more guided in the future.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Dependent Variables: Sponsorship and Cosponsorship

In order to examine the phenomena of active and less active Representatives, I use data on bill sponsorship and cosponsorship. Much of the previous research on this topic was primarily based on specific and often controversial pieces of legislation. Since my objective is not to uncover the motivations, likelihood, or probability of support for an individual bill, but rather the similarities in the legislators themselves, I propose to utilize the aggregate data I have collected in order to estimate negative binomial regression analyses on various models. Using data at the aggregate level, as opposed to the individual level, allows me to see the big picture and ultimately make more comprehensive generalizations about productivity as opposed to statements regarding specific pieces of legislation and/or issues.

To investigate the suspected relationship between the background characteristics of members of Congress and productivity, I collected data from various sources on over 6,400 Representatives during the 93rd- 107th Congresses. I collected the majority of my biographical information from various volumes of the Almanac of American Politics. Data for the dependent variables were obtained from the Library of Congress website. When there were discrepancies, some additional information came from members' homepages. Measures of ideology (Poole and Rosenthal, 2005), and congressional district data (Adler, 2003) were merged into my dataset.[3] Finally, the data were pooled in order to identify relationships over time.

---

[3] Refer to Appendix for detailed descriptions of all variables.

Negative Binomial Regression

The dataset used for this study is a pooled cross-sectional time series. The data are a collection of variables over time as well as for single Congresses. This allows for statistical analysis of the 15 Congresses as a whole and individually. Autocorrelation, the correlation of errors over time, and systematic errors are often problems associated with this type of data. By estimating a pooled negative binomial regression model, I can account for the systematic variation across individual members of Congress, as well as over time. Because my dependent variables—the total number of bills sponsored and cosponsored—are best described as events count data, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is an inappropriate method. A Poisson model is also an ineffective tool since Poisson regression assumes equal dispersion of the dependent variables.[4] As a result, I have employed a statistical method better suited than more traditional methods for event count data known as negative binomial regression. Negative binomial regression is also suitable for data, such as mine, which demonstrates overdispersion within the dependent variables.

Independent Variables and Hypotheses

For statistical analyses, I have separated my dependent variables into separate sponsorship and cosponsorship models. For each legislator, I entered the total number of bills that were sponsored or cosponsored during that particular Congress. To test each of the following hypotheses, I have grouped those independent variables that I expect to have a relationship on the measures of legislative activity to create four models: (1) Socialization, (2) Leadership, (3) Preferences, and (4) Full Model.

---

[4] Refer to following Results and Discussion section for graphical illustrations of the overdispersion of the dependent variables.

Modeling the Effects of Socialization on Legislative Activity

Socialization, including formal and informal education, is expected to have a positive relationship with the dependent variables. I test this hypothesis using the following independent measures of political education and experience: (1) whether the House member is an attorney, (2) whether the House member served in the U.S. military; (3) whether the member held elected office at the state or local level, including mayors or city councilmembers, but excluding judges; (4) whether the member was formerly a member of the state legislature; and (5) whether the House member was a staff member for a former member of the state or U.S. House or Senate. A general education model can illustrate the relationship between various learning experiences and legislative activity. Members with previous experience as elected officials, such as state legislators or those who held a different elected office (such as mayor), should also be more active once elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Attorneys should be more active because of their knowledge of the making of laws. I expect to see a positive relationship between the dependent variables and a member having a law degree.[5]

As for informal education, I included biographical information from the Almanac of American Politics to help measure learning experience gained from working as legislative aides, staff members, and in other government jobs. My assumption here is that like formal education, informal education will also increase the productivity level of legislators. It is likely that working as an aide or a staffer will ultimately increase one's awareness and understanding of politics and the legislative branch which should increase

---

[5] The inclusion of this variable was suggested by a personal conversation with a member of the Louisiana House of Representatives, who contends that in order for one to create new laws, it is necessary to know the current ones.

legislative activity. Because a legislator is unlikely to be aware of their own legislative socialization, it is best measured through previous work experience.

Informal education can also be attained through service in the military. I presume that when one serves in the military a certain level of government knowledge is rapidly acquired. Although military rank or status was not considered, I hypothesize that any military service will be related positively to sponsorship and cosponsorship activity.

A member of Congress who has served in his or her state legislature, or in another elected office, is expected to sponsor and cosponsor more bills. I include these variables since it is likely that holding an elected office will familiarize one with the inner workings of government as well as helping to form stronger opinions regarding public policy, thereby testing the effects of informal education on legislative productivity.

Modeling the Effects of Leadership on Legislative Activity

Members of Congress who have previously demonstrated leadership qualities are expected to sponsor and cosponsor more legislation. To examine the leadership hypothesis, I grouped the variables in my dataset relating to leadership; (1) committee chair status; (2) subcommittee chair status; (3) party leader status; (4) seniority; and (5) gender. The reasons I included these variables are quite simple. In accordance with the signaling theory, the most active members are also likely to be committee, subcommittee, or party leaders. The members who hold these positions are expected to be the ones responsible for sending the cues to rank and file legislators, regardless of which party is in the majority. There is variance in existing literature as to how these cues are delivered to rank and file members.[6] Legislators who hold leadership positions are typically

---

[6] Visible leaders could potentially use the media as a sophisticated communication device; they not only alert the lower ranking members, but their constituents as well.

13

members with seniority status. Since women have only recently begun serving in the

legislature, these leaders are more often men. Therefore, in line with the signaling and

conditional party government perspectives, I hypothesize that party leaders, committee,

and subcommittee leaders will exhibit increased levels of legislative activity.

Modeling the Effects of Preferences on Legislative Activity

The preferences hypothesis incorporates the ideas that extremism, low electoral

margin, and constituency characteristics may contribute to increased productivity. This

model includes the variables that do not clearly fit into the leadership or education

models: (1) ideological conservatism; (2) ideological extremism; (3) party affiliation; (4)

median income in member's districts; and (5) electoral margin. First, using Adler's data

on congressional districts, I include measures of district median income. The variable is

used as an attempt to measure political activism and engagement on the part of House

members' constituencies. I speculate that congressional districts with a higher median

income will elect more active Representatives, so median income should be positively

related to sponsorship and cosponsorship activity. Related to the electoral-connection

theory is the idea that freshmen members, often elected in close races, are more likely to

have an increased number of sponsored and cosponsored bills in order to appeal to their

constituents during reelection. These freshmen legislators with small electoral margins

are also likely to be representing competitive districts. Sponsoring and cosponsoring

more legislation, especially distributive bills, is expected to be helpful in their reelection

campaigns. Specifically, this group of legislators is expected to be more active in order to

facilitate their own reelection.[7]

---

[7] Refer to earlier discussion of Mayhew (1974).

Poole and Rosenthal's DW-Nominate scores measure legislators' ideological conservatism. I speculate, holding all other variables constant, that more conservative legislators will sponsor and cosponsor less than their liberal peers because these members are more likely to promote the limited role of government point of view. The folded Poole and Rosenthal score is a measure included to capture ideological extremism on both sides of the spectrum. Since members with extreme ideological beliefs are likely to sponsor and cosponsor before many of their moderate peers, I expect to see a positive relationship between legislators with extreme ideological positions and the dependent variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What explains patterns of sponsorship and cosponsorship activity in the U.S. House of Representatives? In Table 1, I provide an overview of the statistical analyses. These tables indicate negative binomial regression coefficients for the combined 15 Congresses. This allows for comparisons of sponsorship and cosponsorship activity, as well as observing trends over time.

I have provided some basic descriptive information about the dependent variables. In Figures 1 and 2, I show the distribution of bills for both sponsorship and cosponsorship with a box plot. Beginning in 1978, during the 95th Congress, legislators gained the unrestricted ability to cosponsor legislation. This change is notable in the 96th Congress, 1979-1980.

The pattern of sponsorship, shown in Figure 1, illustrates the gradual decline in activity over time. Clearly, the changes which occurred in 1978 had a tangible impact on sponsorship and cosponsorship activity. In the 93rd Congress (1973-1974), the mean number of bills sponsored is 47.8, with a standard deviation of 39.26. In the 107th Congress (2001-2002), the mean of sponsored bills fell to just 17.16, with a standard deviation of 13.08.

Meanwhile, Figure 2 shows cosponsorship activity in the early years of this dataset results in a mean of 103.09 pieces of legislation and a standard deviation of 104.05. In the most recent Congress studied, the 107th (2001-2002), the mean for cosponsorship activity rose to 276.05 with a standard deviation of 148.57. Notice how in Figure 2 the pattern of cosponsorship increases dramatically around the same time as the ability to freely cosponsor came about. This indicates that the act of cosponsorship can be

considered less costly to a member of Congress than sponsorship. Cosponsoring

legislation is the formal acknowledgement of support, as opposed to sponsorship which

includes drafting and managing a piece of legislation. The much more time-consuming

task of sponsorship appears to be on the decline. The mean number of bills sponsored is

24.2, with a standard deviation of 24.3. The mean number of bills cosponsored, however,

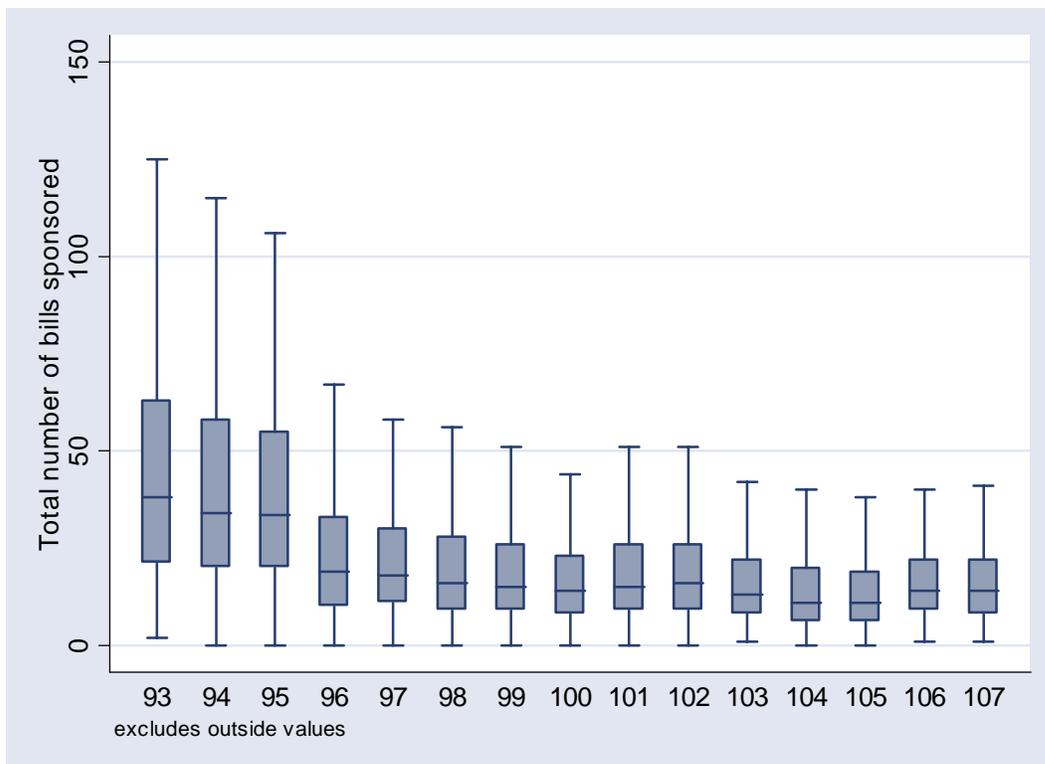is 252.2, with a standard deviation of 153.97.

Figure 1. Total number of bills sponsored, full model of sponsorship behavior, U.S. House of Representatives, 1973-1974 (93rd Congress) to 2001-2002 (107th Congress).

Figure 2. Total number of bills cosponsored, full model of cosponsorship behavior, U.S. House of Representatives, 1973-1974 (93rd Congress) to 2001-2002 (107th Congress).

Figure 3 illustrates the frequency of sponsored legislation for each of the 15 Congresses studied. Notice the jump in activity, especially during the 96th Congress. Recall that the 96th Congress marks the beginning of the unrestricted ability to cosponsor which was enacted just one year prior; this pattern is maintained throughout the sample.

Comparatively, Figure 4 represents patterns of cosponsorship activity in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1973-2002. Unlike sponsorship, this illustration shows little variation in legislative activity. In the 96th Congress there was a sharp increase in sponsorship activity. However, it appears not to be the case for cosponsorship. One can see the slight increase in activity, but it is not as extreme as was seen in Figure 3.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the patterns of sponsorship and cosponsorship activity over the time period studied, 1973-2002. It is noticeable that the changes which took place around the 96th Congress significantly affected legislative activity. These figures also show the dependent variables are consistently skewed sharply to the right which further illustrates the need for the negative binomial regression method.
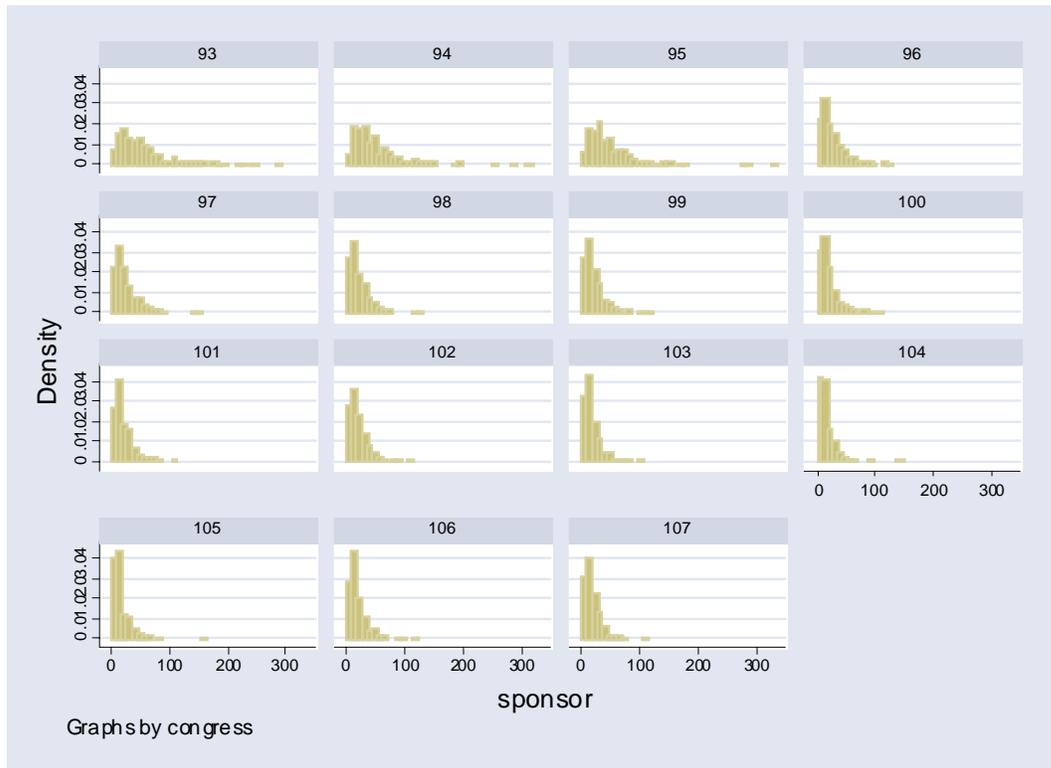
Figure 3. Graphic representation of total number of bills sponsored during each Congress, 1973-2002.

Figure 4. Graphic representation of total number of bills cosponsored during each Congress, 1973-2002.

Table 1. Negative binomial regression results, full models of sponsorship and cosponsorship behavior, U.S. House of Representatives, 1973-1974 (93rd Congress) to 2001-2002 (107th Congress).
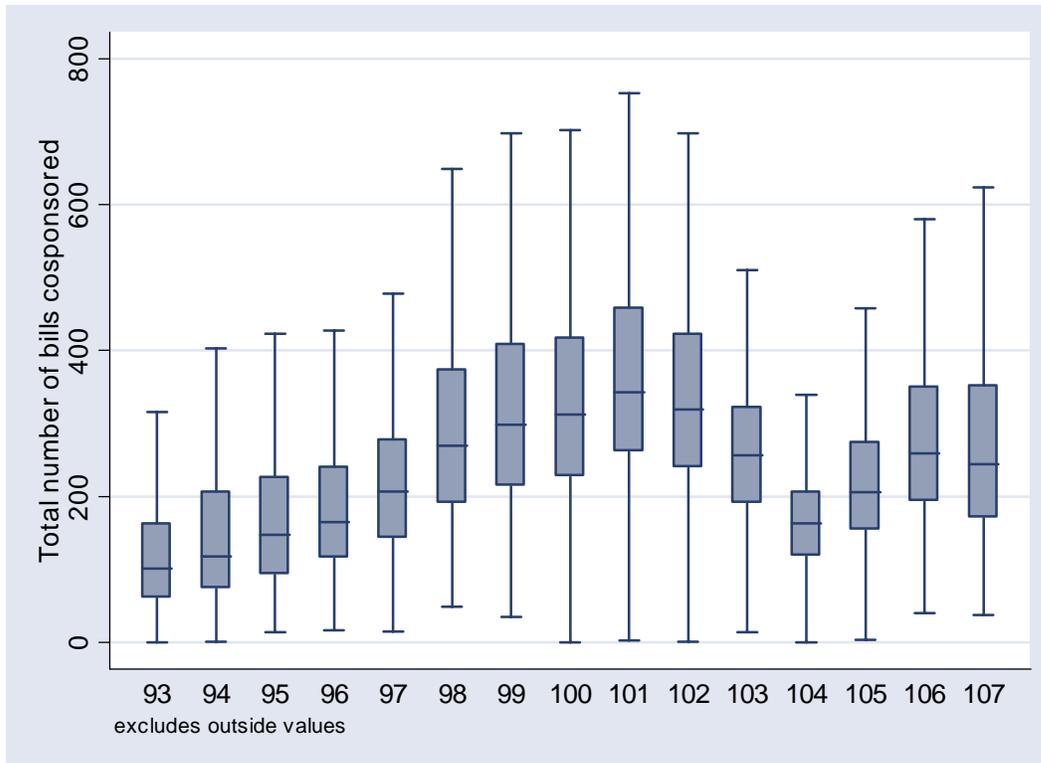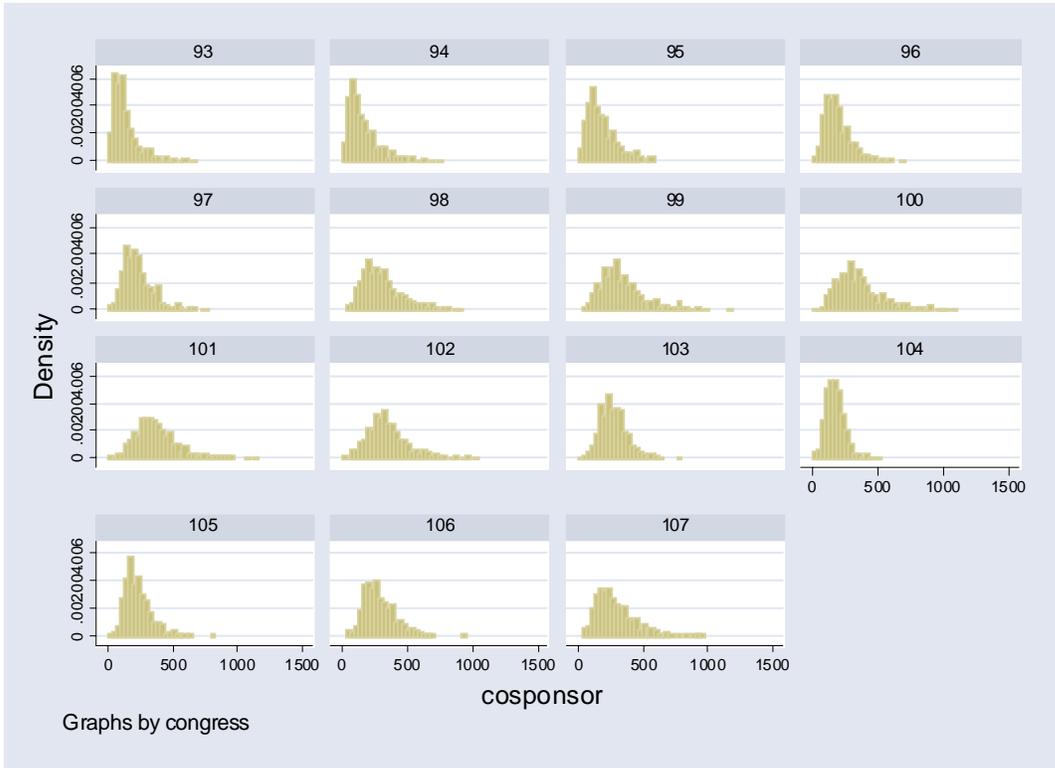
	Sponsorship		Cosponsorship	
	b	Z	b	Z
Member characteristics				
Gender [+]	0.096	1.50*	0.139	3.05***
Party [-]	0.209	2.88***	0.137	2.71***
Spatial variables				
DW-Nominate [-]	-0.339	-3.46***	-0.579	-9.51***
Folded DW-Nominate [+]	0.379	3.03***	0.438	5.99***
Legislative experience				
Attorney [+]	0.013	0.38	-0.042	-1.80*
Mentored [+]	0.027	0.78	-0.015	-0.63
Military [+]	0.067	1.90**	-0.057	-2.20**
State legislator [+]	-0.027	-0.92	0.073	3.53***
State or local elected official [+]	0.114	3.67***	0.071	3.20***
Seniority [+]	0.016	6.74***	-0.010	-6.19***
Institutional position				
Party leader [+]	0.006	0.16	-0.025	-0.82
Committee chair [+]	0.142	3.15***	0.025	0.83
Subcommittee chair [+]	0.133	5.11***	0.074	4.56***
Constituent Pressure				
Median income [+]	-0.000005	-3.44***	-0.000003	-3.41***
Election margin [+]	0.004	5.24***	0.0012	2.56***
Legislative context				
Cosponsorship reform (post-1978)	-0.692	-18.87	[+] 0.535	23.24***
N	6483		6483	
Pseudo-R^2				
Model Chi-square	1026.50		1187.33	
Prob (Chi-square)	0.0000		0.0000	

Sponsorship Results

The signaling perspective posits that leaders use legislative activity to motivate or inform the rank and file members. This model finds support for the signaling hypothesis because seniority, committee chair status, and subcommittee chair status can be viewed as positions of leadership within the legislature. As hypothesized, leadership variables have a positive and statistically significant relationship to sponsorship. Seniority has a strong relationship (b = 0.016, Z = 6.74) to sponsorship activity. This indicates that more experienced members of Congress are sponsoring more legislation than freshmen members. Serving as a committee chair also has a positive impact on sponsorship activity (b = 0.142, Z = 3.15), as seen in Table 1. Also, subcommittee chair status also has a positive relationship to sponsorship activity (b = 0.133, Z = 5.11). However, the variable measuring party leadership has little effect on the sponsorship of legislation (b = 0.006, Z = 0.16). Together, the leadership variables indicate support for the signaling perspective.

The socialization of legislators, on the other hand, likely occurs once the member has been elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Variables indicating previous education and socialization are seen to have little impact on sponsorship activity. There is, however, a connection between legislators with local political experience and their sponsorship activity. Many of the variables representing the socialization hypothesis did not have statistically significant coefficients. Neither legal education, service with the military, working as a legislative aide, nor holding state legislative positions significantly affects legislative activity in the U.S. House of Representatives. However, serving as a state or local official does have a statistically significant relationship to legislative activity in the hypothesized direction. These political actors may feel more obligated to

bring distributive legislation to their constituents. The variable has a strong coefficient (b = 0.114, Z = 3.67) which indicates the need for additional research of this relationship.

There is also a modest relationship between gender and sponsorship behavior. The effect of gender is especially interesting because it indicates that women are sponsoring legislation at a higher rate than their male counterparts (b = 0.096, Z = 1.50). Existing literature using data at the state level (Bratton and Haynie, 1999) finds support to the contrary. Additional research on this variable could help clarify the observed relationship between gender and sponsorship activity.

Personal preferences—including scores of ideological extremism, partisanship, and electoral margin—also indicate a statistically significant relationship in the hypothesized direction. Ideological extremism was expected to have a positive relationship with legislative activity. This model indicates a statistically significant coefficient (b = 0.379, Z = 3.03) in the hypothesized direction. DW-Nominate scores, however, resulted in a relationship that is in the opposite direction (b = -0.339, Z = -3.46). The coefficient for party (b = 0.209, Z = 2.88) in Table 1 represents the effect of being a member of the Republican party. Unexpectedly, this variable produced a statistically significant coefficient in the positive direction. This indicates that Republican members are actually sponsoring more legislation than their Democratic peers.

Cosponsorship Results

Cosponsorship behavior is particularly interesting in this study because I had the unprecedented opportunity to observe changes in this activity over time. As mentioned earlier in this paper, in 1978 members of Congress gained the unrestricted ability to cosponsor legislation. Figure 2 illustrates the apparent, and steady, increase in

cosponsorship activity through the late 1970's and 1980's. Cosponsorship activity peaked during the 101st Congress (1989-1990) when members averaged 375.4 pieces of legislation. During the Republican-controlled Congress of 1994, levels of cosponsorship activity returned to their pre-1978 state.

In Tables 2 and 3, I show the top ten sponsors and cosponsors of legislation for the combined 15 Congresses. These members noticeably have one common denominator; they are mostly members of the Democratic party.

Table 2. List of the top ten most active legislators, full model of sponsorship behavior, U.S. House of Representatives, 1973-1974 (93rd Congress) to 2001-2002 (107th Congress).

	Congress	Name	State	Number of Sponsored Bills
1.	95	Roe	New Jersey	325
2.	94	Pepper	Florida	309
3.	95	Murphy	New York	288
4.	93	Roe	New Jersey	287
5.	94	Koch	New York	283
6.	95	Pepper	Florida	277
7.	94	Murphy	New York	250
8.	93	Roybal	California	242
9.	93	Koch	New York	225
10.	93	Helstoski	New Jersey	218

Table 3.   List of the top ten most active legislators, full model of cosponsorship behavior, U.S. House of Representatives, 1973-1974 (93rd Congress) to 2001-2002 (107th Congress).

	Congress	Name	State	Number of Cosponsored Bills
1.	99	Martinez	California	1152
2.	101	Collins	Illinois	1141
3.	100	Lagomarsino	California	1070
4.	101	Towns	New York	1062
5.	102	Towns	New York	1015
6.	100	Martinez	California	1011
7.	100	Towns	New York	999
8.	99	Kaptur	Ohio	986
9.	107	Frost	Texas	961
10.	102	Horton	New York	959

Additionally, Figure 3 illustrates the frequency of sponsored legislation for each of the 15 Congresses studied. Notice the jump in activity, especially during the 96th Congress. Recall that the 96th Congress marks the beginning of the unrestricted ability to cosponsor which was enacted just one year prior. This pattern is maintained throughout the sample. Comparatively, Figure 4 represents patterns of cosponsorship activity in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1973-2002. Unlike sponsorship, this illustration shows little variation in legislative activity. In the 96th Congress there was a sharp increase in sponsorship activity. However, it appears not to be the case for cosponsorship. One can see the slight increase in activity, but it is not as extreme as was seen in Figure 3. While a strong increasing pattern of cosponsorship does not appear at first glace, simple mathematical means reveal a significant amount of activity.

The models of cosponsorship also yielded interesting findings. Unlike sponsorship, socialization has more of an effect on cosponsorship activity. Legal education results in a modestly significant relationship, yet in the negative direction ($b = -0.042$, $Z = -1.80$). Contrary to my original hypothesis, the acquisition of a Juris Doctorate actually depresses the cosponsorship activity of those members. Service in the military, as well, decreases cosponsorship activity ($b = -0.057$, $Z = -2.20$) and is also statistically significant. As with the model of sponsorship, service as a state or local official has a positive effect on cosponsorship behavior ($b = 0.071$, $Z = 3.20$). Work experience as an aide or staff member neither affects sponsorship nor cosponsorship activity according to this model.

Leadership variables were hypothesized to show the strongest relationship to the sponsorship model. In fact, only seniority ($b = -0.010$, $Z = -6.19$) and gender ($b = 0.139$,

Z = 3.05) resulted in statistically significant coefficients. Seniority, however, produced negative coefficients meaning that the more experienced a legislator becomes, the less he/she cosponsors. This could indicate that these members are not sending their signals by-way of cosponsorship; rather the sponsorship model does support the notion that senior members are communicating through the sponsorship of legislation.

The spatial variables produced exciting results for the cosponsorship model. Each variable revealed a strong, statistically significant coefficient. Both Poole and Rosenthal measures of ideology, party, district median income, and electoral margin have coefficients that are significant. Having extreme political views positively relates to cosponsorship activity (b = 0.438, Z = 5.99). The political actors who represent ideological extremism are likely cosponsoring, as well as sponsoring, higher amounts of legislation in the attempt to have their strong opinions heard by other members of Congress and possibly by their constituencies. Median income was used as a surrogate measure of the member's district political activeness and was expected to have a positive effect on legislative activity. This variable did not produce a relationship in the hypothesized direction, yet it did result in a statistically significant negative one (b = - 0.000003, Z = -3.41). Additionally, party (b = 0.137, Z = 2.71) should have resulted in negative coefficients, but produced a significant positive relationship. Electorally safer members of Congress also become more active legislators (b = 0.0012, Z = 2.56) than their peers coming from more competitive elections. This is a very interesting relationship which also lends support to the signaling perspective. It may be argued that those members of Congress who were elected in close elections would sponsor and cosponsor several bills in order to appeal to their constituencies; the theory being that

activity brings about support and reelection. However, my results indicate that the electorally safe legislators are more active. Therefore, these members of Congress are likely using legislative activity in order to signal internally, rather than externally. Future research which includes a measure of the content of these bills would be an interesting addition to the relationship.

Finally, the effect of the unrestricted ability to cosponsor legislation resulted in a strong statistically significant coefficient ($b = 0.535$, $Z = 23.24$). This solidifies the observation, noticeable in Figure 2, that the changes in 1978 had a significant impact on legislative activity. This freedom also negatively impacted sponsorship activity ($b = -0.692$, $Z = -18.87$).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

While this study seeks to advance understanding of sponsorship and cosponsorship activity, it also reveals several avenues for future research. I have examined some basic hypotheses, some based on previous scholarly research, and others which have not been thoroughly studied. Because many of my hypotheses resulted in statistically significant correlations in the opposite direction from what I expected, additional research and review of conventional thought is necessary.

I use data from the 93rd through 107th Congresses to empirically test comprehensive models of sponsorship and cosponsorship. This study has revealed the effects of a wide range of independent variables—committee and subcommittee chair status, gender, partisan affiliation, and ideological extremism—on legislative activity. There remains, however, a need for additional research which incorporates various previous attempts to understand cosponsorship and sponsorship behavior.

One possibility is to integrate the idea that members of Congress are strategically acting in order to further their personal careers in politics. Incorporating individual members of Congress' actions on specific pieces of legislation, while maintaining the aggregate data, could reveal more of the underlying motivations of members to sponsor and cosponsor legislation. Additionally, incorporating a measure of content for specified bills could allow a researcher to see if members of Congress sponsor and cosponsor more distributive legislation that could benefit their constituencies, which, in turn, facilitates their own reelection. Results to the opposite effect would further strengthen my findings here which indicate empirical support for the signaling perspective; members of Congress

are using sponsorship and cosponsorship activity for internal signaling purposes, as opposed to external signaling.

This study has produced some interesting and intriguing results. It has strengthened some previously hypothesized directional relationships, such as sponsoring and cosponsoring are used as a signaling device, while other relationships including the socialization aspect of legislative activity were not empirically supported. The intent of this study was to provide a generalizeble model of sponsorship and cosponsorship activity in the U.S. House of Representatives. I feel that this project has accomplished much of its objective. A framework of general sponsorship and cosponsorship activity has begun with this study. Combining existing, more specific, studies and expanding the theoretical underpinning along with this foundation are likely to yield even more significant relationships between background characteristics and legislative activity.

REFERENCES

Adler, E. Scott. "Congressional District Data File, [93rd Congress to 107th Congress]." University of Colorado, Boulder, CO. http://socsci.colorado.edu/~esadler/ districtdatawebsite/ congressionalDistrictDatasetwebpage.htm, 2003.

Aldrich, John H. and David Rohde. 1998. "Measuring Conditional Party Government." Available http://www.poli.duke.edu/dipe/Aldrich3.pdf

Barone, Michael, Richard E. Cohen, and Charles E. Cook, Jr. The Almanac of American Politics. Various Years. Washington, D.C.: National Journal Group, Inc.

Bratton, Kathleen A., and Kerry L. Haynie. 1999. "Agenda Setting and Legislative Success in State Legislatures: The Effects of Gender and Race." *The Journal of Politics* 61 (August): 658-679.

Browne, William P. 1985. "Multiple Sponsorship and Bill Success in the US State Legislatures." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 10 (November): 485-8.

Burke, Kelly M., and James C. Garand. 2005. "Explaining Sponsorship and Cosponsorship in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1973-2002." paper presented at the 2005 annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.

Campbell, James E. 1982. "Cosponsoring Legislation in the U.S. Congress." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 7 (August): 415-22.

Gilligan, Thomas W., and Keith Krehbiel. 1995. "Specialization Decisions within Committees." Stanford Graduate School of Business. Typescript.

Groseclose, Tim and David C. King. "Committee Theories Reconsidered", in Dodd and Oppenheimer (eds.), *Congress Reconsidered* (7th edition).

Gravetter, Frederick J., and Larry B. Wallnau. 2000. *Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences*. California: Wadsworth Thomson Learning.

Hall, Peter (1997). "The Role of Interests, Institutions, and Ideas in the Comparative Political Economy of the Industrialized Nations." In Mark Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman (ed.). Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure. Cambridge. Chapter 7.

Hibbing, John R. 1999. "Legislative Careers: Why and How We Should Study Them." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26 (May): 149- 171.

Kessler, Daniel and Keith Krehbiel. 1996. "Dynamics of Cosponsorship." *The American Political Science Review* 90 (September): 555-566.

Krehbiel, Keith. 1995. "Cosponsors and Wafflers from A to Z." *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (November): 906-923.

Lewis-Beck, Michael S. 1980. *Applied Regression: An Introduction*. California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Library of Congress, The. THOMAS Legislative Information on the Internet. Available http://thomas.loc.gov

Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Patterson, Samuel C. and Gregory A. Caldeira. 1998. "Party Voting in the United States Congress." *British Journal of Political Science* 18 (January): 111-131.

Pollock, Philip H. 2003. *An SPSS Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

Poole, Keith and Howard Rosenthal, *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll Call Voting*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Poole, Keith T. and Howard Rosenthal. 1997. "DW-Nominate Scores, [93rd Congress to 107th Congress]," http://voteview.com/dwnl.htm.

Rothenberg, Lawrence S. and Michelle S. Sanders. 2002. "The Dynamics of Cosponsorship Reconsidered," paper presented at the 2002 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association.

Sachs, Richard C. 1998. "Sponsorship and Cosponsorship of House Bills." CRS Report for Congress. Available http://www.house.gov

Sachs, Richard C. 2003. "Sponsorship and Cosponsorship of House Bills." CRS Report for Congress. Available http://www.house.gov

Swers, Michele L. 2005. "Connecting Descriptive and Substantive Representation: An Analysis of Sex Differences in Cosponsorship Activity in the House of Representatives." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* (August).

Singleton, Royce A. and Bruce C. Straits. 1999. *Approaches to Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Young, Cheryl D., and Rick K. Wilson. 1993. "Cosponsorship in the United States Congress." Rice University. Typescript.

Variable	Description
Sponsorship activity	Number of bills sponsored by House member in a given Congress.
Cosponsorship activity	Number of bills cosponsored by House member in a given Congress.
Party	1 = Republican party member; 0= Democratic party member.
DW-Nominate Scores	Scale of ideological conservatism, derived from Poole and Rosenthal's (1997) DW-Nominate scores.
Folded DW-Nominate Scores	Scale of ideological intensity, computed as the absolute value of Poole and Rosenthal's DW-Nominate scores.
Attorney	1 = House member is an attorney; 0 = otherwise.
Military	1 = House member served in the military; 0 = otherwise.
Former congressional staffer	1 = House member served previously as congressional staff member; 0 = otherwise.
Former state legislator	1 = House member served previously as a member of the state legislature; 0 = otherwise.
Former state or local elected official	1 = House member is a former state or local elected official; 0 = otherwise.
Seniority	Number of years since House member first elected to Congress.
Party leader	1 = party leader (Speaker, majority or minority leader, majority or minority whip); 0 = otherwise.
Committee chair	1 = House member serves as a committee chair; 0 = otherwise.

Variable	Description
Subcommittee chair	1 = House member serves as a subcommittee chair; 0 = otherwise.
Gender	1 = House member is female; 0 = House member is male.
Median family income	Median family income (in dollars).
Election vote percentage	Raw percentage of the vote received by House member in the immediately preceding election.
Cosponsorship reform (post 1978)	1 = 96th through 107th Congresses (1979-2002); 0 = 93rd through 95th Congresses (1973-1978).

VITA

  Kelly Marie Burke was born in Tennessee and grew up in Destrehan, Louisiana. She was graduated from Louisiana State University in 2003 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science. While pursuing her Master of Arts degree in political science, she was awarded a full-time graduate research and teaching assistantship. Post-graduation, she will begin the Master of Public Health, epidemiology program at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she plans to concentrate on chronic disease epidemiology and health care policy research.