

Congressional Member Assignment
Political Science 330, U.S. Congress
Prof. Gronke

Assignment Handed Out: February 13th, 2007
Memorandum Due: February 22nd, 2007, Paper due March 8th, 2007

Memorandum: Come to class prepared to give a 3 to 5 minute political introduction to your congressional district and your current member of Congress. The presentation should include information about the following items. Please note the alternative format of this memo (see bureaucratic stuff below).

The salient political characteristics of the district

- Geographic location
- Location of large cities and economic regions
- Ethnic or other demographic blocs that are politically relevant
- Districting history

The salient political background of the incumbent and challenger

- When was s/he first elected and what was her or his political background?
- How electorally secure was the previous incumbent?
- Where does the incumbent's primary political support come from?
- Who ran against the incumbent in 2006?
- How did the election play out?

The political future of the district

- What political, economic, or social trends might change the incumbent's chances in the future?
- What is likely to happen with the redistricting that will occur next year?

A visual aid locating the district might be helpful, though we can't assume we'll have an overhead by then.

Paper:

- 1) Do a "Jacobson" style analysis of the electoral history and recent election faced by a member of the U.S. House of Representatives (if your chosen member has served only one term, your analysis should discuss past elections). This means you should draw on our class readings to describe in general the electoral considerations faced by a member of the House, and then present data pertaining to these considerations for your member.
- 2) Do a "Fenno" style analysis of the "home style" and/or role orientation of an individual member of Congress. This means you should draw on your class readings to describe in general the constituency characteristics faced by your member, and then present data pertaining to these characteristics (e.g. visits, spending, campaign style, committee assignments, legislating).

Hints:

- a) The intent of this assignment is to show that you can learn about and analyze the electoral situation of a politician based on publicly available information, and integrate that material with the readings, lectures, and class discussions. The more you accomplish this goal, the better off you are.
- b) The “data” for the paper and memorandum can come from a variety of sources, including the CQ Weekly edition, various websites on campaigns and campaign spending, the Congressional Universe, the House and/or Senate web sites, campaign web sites
- c) An excellent paper will contain an interesting and relevant variety of data; sensitivity to the different and sometimes conflicting goals of elections or role orientations, and how your case fits into this framework. A less than excellent paper will be a journalistic account of the particular situation faced in the recent election with some reference to Jacobson or Fenno. A poor paper will contain little reference to history or to the arguments or readings in class.

Bureaucratic Stuff:

The memo should be short (3 pages or less) including all figures, graphics, etc. This is strictly an information gathering and reporting exercise. You may submit a powerpoint presentation in lieu of a memo. This presentation should be no longer than 10 slides. You should submit the powerpoint file or a URL to gronke.classes@gmail.com.

The paper is not the same as the memo. The memo needs to be done in groups; the paper need not be (but can be). This means that I expect a thesis paragraph including a set of claims, and then considerations of multiple pieces of evidence, and a conclusion, even though there is less an “argument” in this assignment than there is a description of a body of literature (campaigns, roles) and then summary of relevant data for one case.

This paper should be no longer than 7 typed pages in length (double-spaced) not counting tables, figures, or other information that you might deem relevant (these may be included after the body text of the paper). For papers submitted in groups of two or three students, the paper may be up to 10 pages long, not including supplementary material. The paper will be evaluated according to the following criteria, in rough order of importance: creativity and ambition, organization and coherence of argument, coverage of relevant material, spelling and grammar.