■ Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R–TN), left, talks to House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R–TX) at the 2003 Congress of Tommorrow retreat that brought House and Senate Republicans together.

*Photo courtesy: REUTERS/William Philpott/Corbis*

## THE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

TODAY, MANY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS find the job exciting in spite of public criticism of the institution. But, it wasn't always so. Until Washington, D.C., got air-conditioning and drained its swamps, it was a miserable town. Most representatives spent as little time as possible there, viewing the Congress, especially the House, as a stepping stone to other political positions back home. It was only after World War I that House members became congressional careerists who viewed their work in Washington as long term.[20]

Many members of Congress clearly relish their work, although there are indications that the high cost of living in Washington and of maintaining two homes, political scandals, intense media scrutiny, the need to tackle hard issues, and a growth of partisan dissension are taking a toll on many members. Those no longer in the major-

ity, in particular, often don't see their service in Congress as satisfying. Research by political scientists shows that "members voluntarily depart when their electoral, policy, and institutional situations no longer seem desirable."[21] The increasing partisanship of the Congress also plays a role in many retirements. When asked why he was leaving the Senate, Warren Rudman (R–NH) remarked, "It's the whole atmosphere. It's become so partisan, so intense, in many ways it's just hateful."[22]

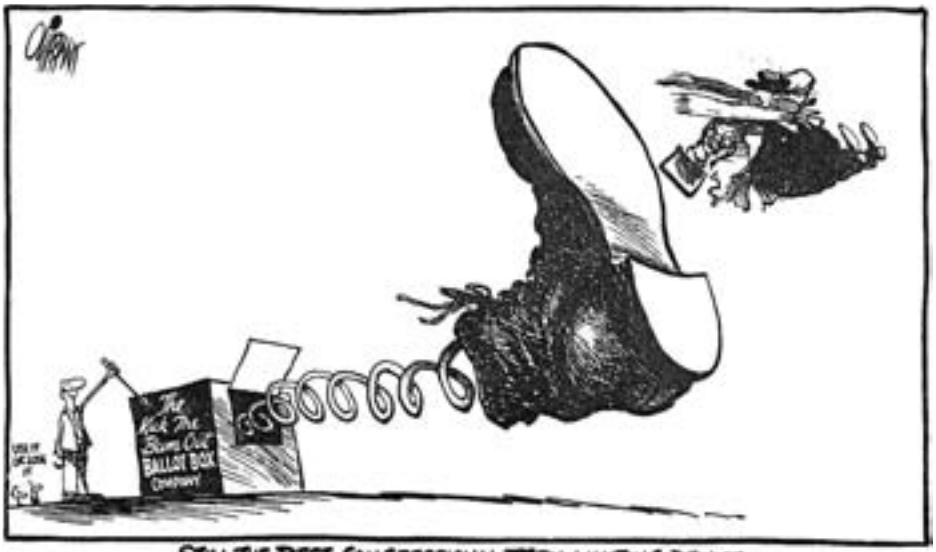
Former House and Senate members also can make a lot more money in the private sector. Former House Appropriations Chair Robert Livingston built the tenth largest lobbying firm in D.C. in only four years, earning millions each year from clients who understand the access former members retain.[23] Since 1995, 272 former members have registered as lobbyists.[24]

Members must attempt to appease two constituencies—party leaders, colleagues, and lobbyists in Washington, D.C., and constituents at home.[25] Members spend full days at home as well as in D.C. According to one study of House members in non-election years, average representatives made thirty-five trips back home to their districts and spent an average 138 days a year there.[26] Hedrick Smith, a Pulitzer Prize–winning reporter for the *New York Times*, has aptly described a member's days as a "kaleidoscopic jumble: breakfast with reporters, morning staff meetings, simultaneous committee hearings to juggle, back-to-back sessions with lobbyists and constituents, phone calls, briefings, constant buzzers interrupting office work to make quorum calls and votes on the run, afternoon speeches, evening meetings, receptions, fund-raisers, all crammed into four days so they can race home for a weekend gauntlet of campaigning. It's a rat race."[27] Table 7.4 shows a representative day in the life of a member of Congress.

**TABLE 7.4** A Day in the Life of a Member of Congress

| *Typical Member's At-Home Schedule*[a] | | *Typical Member's Washington Schedule*[b] | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7:30 a.m. | Business group breakfast, 20 leaders of the business community | 8:30 a.m. | Breakfast with former member |
| 8:45 a.m. | Hoover Elementary School, 6th grade class assembly | 9:30 a.m. | Committee on Science, Space, and Technology hearing on research and development in the 1990s |
| 9:45 a.m. | National Agriculture Day speech, Holiday Inn South | 10:00 a.m. | Briefing by FAA officials for members of Congress who represent families of victims of Pan Am Flight #103 |
| 10:45 a.m. | Supplemental Food Shelf, pass foodstuffs to needy families | 10:00 a.m. | Energy and Commerce Committee mark-up session on Fairness in Broadcasting |
| 12:00 noon | Community College, student/faculty lunch, speech, and Q & A | 12:00 noon | Reception/photo opportunity with telecommunications officials |
| 1:00 p.m. | Sunset Terrace Elementary School, assembly 4th, 5th, 6th graders, remarks/Q & A | 12:00 noon | House convenes |
| (Travel Time: 1:45 p.m.–2:45 p.m.) | | 12:00 noon | Lunch with personal friend at Watergate Hotel |
| 2:45 p.m. | Plainview Day Care facility owner wishes to discuss changes in federal law | 1:30 p.m. | Subcommittee on Science Space Applications hearing |
| 4:00 p.m. | Town Hall Meeting, American Legion | 1:30 p.m. | Subcommittee on Health and Environment mark-up session on Trauma Care Systems Planning Act |
| (Travel Time: 5:00 p.m.–5:45 p.m.) | | 3:00 p.m. | Meeting with officials of the National Alliance for Animal Legislation |
| 5:45 p.m. | PTA meeting, speech, education issues before Congress (also citizen involvement with national associations) | 4:30 p.m. | Meeting with delegates from American Jewish Congress on foreign aid bill |
| 6:30 p.m. | Annual Dinner, St. John's Lutheran Church Developmental Activity Center | 5:00 p.m. | New York University reception |
| 7:15 p.m. | Association for Children for Enforcement of Support meeting to discuss problems of enforcing child support payments | 5:00 p.m. | Briefing by the commissioner of the Bureau of Labor (statistics on the uninsured) |
| (Travel Time: 8:00 p.m.–8:30 p.m.) | | 5:30 p.m. | Reception/fundraiser for party whip |
| 8:30 p.m. | Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD) meeting, speech, address drinking age, drunk driving, uniform federal penalties | 6:00 p.m. | Reception/fundraiser for fellow member |
| 9:30 p.m. | State university class, discuss business issues before Congress | 6:00 p.m. | "Cajun" reception/fundraiser for Louisiana member |
| | | 6:00 p.m. | Winetasting reception by New York wine industry |
| | | 8:00 p.m. | Back to Capitol Hill for a vote |

[a]Craig Shultz, ed., *Setting Course: A Congressional Management Guide* (Washington, DC: American University, 1994), 335.
[b]http://congress.indiana.edu/learn_about/schedule.htm.

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## Running for Office and Staying in Office

Despite the long hours, hard work, and sometimes even abuse that senators and representatives experience, thousands aspire to these jobs every year. Yet, only 535 men and women (plus five nonvoting delegates) actually serve in the U.S. Congress. Membership in one of the two major political parties is almost always a prerequisite for election, because election laws in various states often discriminate against independents (those without party affiliation) and minor-party candidates. As discussed in chapter 14, money is the mother's milk of politics—the ability to raise money often is key to any member's victory, and many members spend nearly all of their free time on the phone dialing for dollars or attending fundraisers.

**incumbency**
The fact that being in office helps a person stay in office because of a variety of benefits that go with the position.

**Incumbency** helps members stay in office once they are elected.[28] It's often very difficult for outsiders to win because they don't have the advantages (enumerated in Table 7.5) enjoyed by incumbents, including name recognition, access to free media, inside track on fund-raising, and a district drawn to favor the incumbent. As illustrated in Analyzing Visuals: Approval Ratings of Congress and Individual Representatives, which compares the way poll respondents feel about their own representatives to how

**TABLE 7.5** The Advantages of Incumbency

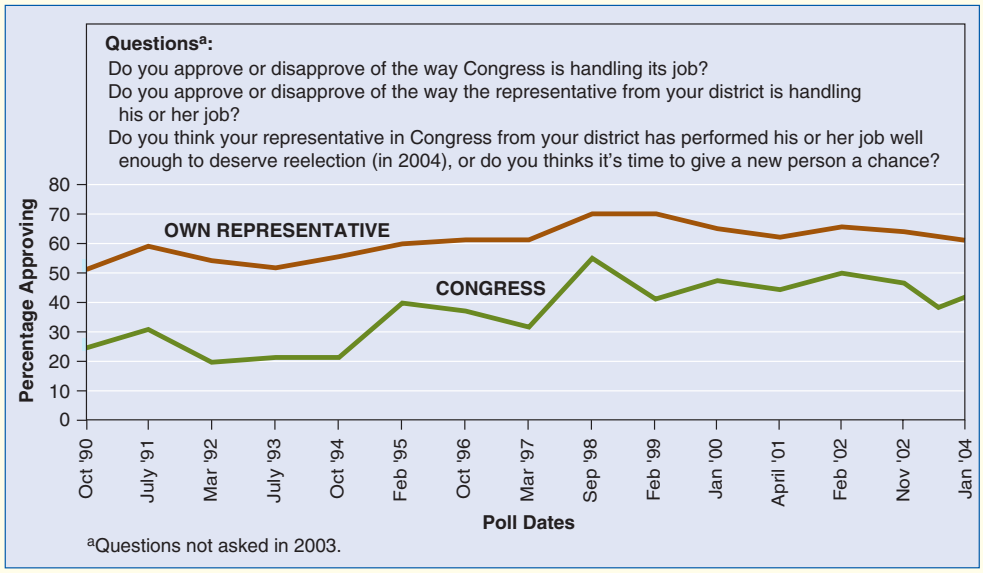
- Name recognition gained through previous campaigns and repeated visits to the district to make appearances at various public events.
- Credit claimed for bringing federal money into the district in the form of grants and contracts.
- Positive evaluations from constituents earned by doing favors (casework) such as helping cut red tape and tracking down federal aid, and tasks handled by publicly supported professional staff members.
- Distribution of newsletters and other noncampaign materials free through the mails by using the "frank" (an envelope that contains the legislator's signature in place of a stamp).
- Access to media—incumbents are news makers who provide reporters with tips and quotes.
- Greater ease in fund-raising—their high reelection rates make them a good bet for people or groups willing to give campaign contributions in hopes of having access to powerful decision makers.
- Experience in running a campaign, putting together a campaign staff, making speeches, understanding constituent concerns, and connecting with people.
- Superior knowledge about a wide range of issues gained through work on committees, review of legislation, and previous campaigns.
- A record for supp orting locally popular policy positions.
- A district drawn to enhance electability.

# Analyzing Visuals

## APPROVAL RATINGS OF CONGRESS AND INDIVIDUAL REPRESENTATIVES

For many years, political scientists have noted that approval ratings of Congress as an institution are generally quite low, rarely exceeding 50 percent approval. On the other hand, the public's approval rating of its own member tends to be much higher, usually above 50 percent. The line graph demonstrates the differences between these ratings since 1990. Do the data for approval of Congress and approval of one's own representative follow similar trends over the period covered in the figure? What factors do you think account for the differences in the ratings of Congress and of one's own representative? What are the effects of the differences in these ratings?

Note that the question regarding one's own representative was a slightly different one in 2004 from the earlier question—asking not just about approval but also about reelection. Do you think that this difference in wording affected the rating positively or negatively?




*Source:* Data derived from R-Poll, LEXIS/NEXIS.

they feel about Congress as an institution, most Americans approve of their *own* members of Congress while having very low regard for Congress collectively.

It is not surprising, then, that from 1980 to 1990, an average of 95 percent of the incumbents who sought reelection won their primary and general election races.[29] More recent elections saw even higher proportions of incumbents returning to office. One study concluded that unless a member of Congress was involved in a serious scandal, his or her chances of defeat were minimal.[30] In 2004, only seven members seeking reelection lost their races. Four were in Texas, where a redistricting plan forced several incumbents to run against each other.

Visual Literacy
Why ils It So Hard to Defeat an Incumbent?

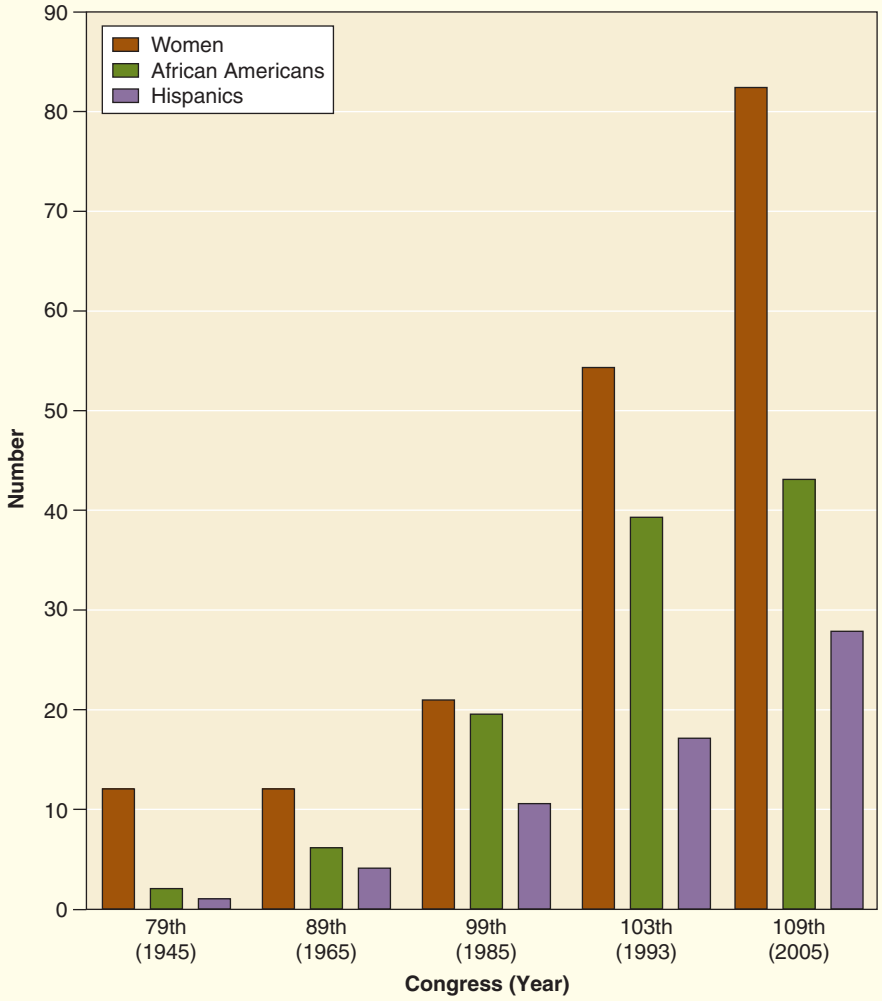
## Congressional Demographics

Congress is better educated, richer, more male, and more white than the rest of the United States. In fact, all but three senators are college graduates; 401 representatives share that honor. Over two-thirds of each body also hold advanced degrees.[31] Many members of both Houses have significant inherited wealth, but given their educational attainment, which is far higher than the average American's, it is not surprising to find so many wealthy members of Congress.

# Analyzing Visuals

## FEMALE AND MINORITY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Do you think it makes a difference if members of Congress come from a particular group? The graph you see below makes clear that the numbers of women, African Americans, and Hispanics in Congress have grown enormously during the last forty years. Given the total of 540 (includes five delegates) members serving in the Congress, study the graph and then calculate the percentage of representation in the Congress for each group. Do you think that these numbers are representative of the nation as a whole? Of your state or local region? The numbers of Asian Pacific Americans and Native Americans in Congress have been so low—presently seven and zero, respectively—that these figures have not been included in the graph. What might this representation, or lack of representation, mean politically to states such as Hawaii, Alaska, Washington, and California, with large numbers of Asian Pacific Americans and Native Americans?



One hundred seventy members of Congress are millionaires. The Senate, in fact, is often called the Millionaires Club, and its members sport names including Rockefeller and Kennedy. In fact, twenty-one senators are worth at least $3.1 million. Twenty-nine members of the House have a net worth over that amount.[32]

The average age of senators is sixty. John Sununu (R–NH) is the youngest senator at forty-one. The average age of House members is fifty-four; Representative Adam Putnam (R–FL) was first elected to the House in 2000 at age twenty-five and continues to be the youngest member of Congress.

As revealed in Analyzing Visuals: Female and Minority Members of Congress, the 1992 elections saw a record number of women, African Americans, and other minorities elected to Congress. By the 109th Congress, the total number of women members increased to eighty-two: sixty-eight in the House and fourteen in the Senate. In 2005, the number of African Americans serving in the House rose from thirty-nine to forty-two. Barack Obama (D–IL), elected to the Senate in 2004, is the first African American to serve there in several years. In the 109th Congress, only twenty-six Hispanics serve in the House—most of them Democrats. Two Hispanics were elected to the Senate in 2004, Ken Salazar (D–CO), and Mel Martinez (R–FL). Also serving in the 109th Congress are two Asian Pacific Islanders in the Senate and five in the House of Representatives.

Occupationally, members of Congress no longer are overwhelmingly lawyers, although lawyers continue to be the largest single occupational group. In the 108th Congress, 275 were former state legislators and 111 were former congressional staffers. The number of veterans in Congress has continued to decline since the end of the Vietnam War.[33]

## Theories of Representation

Comparative
Comparing Legislatures

Over the years, political theorists have offered various ideas about how constituents' interests are best represented in any legislative body. Does it make a difference if the members of Congress come from or are members of a particular group? Are they bound to vote the way their constituents expect them to vote even if they personally favor another policy? Your answer to these questions may depend on your view of the representative function of legislators.

British political philosopher Edmund Burke (1729–1797), who also served in the British Parliament, believed that although he was elected from Bristol, it was his duty to represent the interests of the entire nation. He reasoned that elected officials were obliged to vote as they personally thought best. According to Burke, representatives should be **trustees** who listen to the opinions of their constituents and then can be trusted to use their own best judgment to make final decisions.

**trustee**
Role played by elected representatives who listen to constituents' opinions and then use their best judgment to make final decisions.

A second theory of representation holds that representatives are **delegates.** True delegates are representatives who vote the way their constituents would want them to, whether or not those opinions are the representative's. Delegates, therefore, must be ready and willing to vote against their conscience or personal policy preferences if they know how their constituents feel about a particular issue. Not surprisingly, members of Congress and other legislative bodies generally don't fall neatly into either category. It is often unclear how constituents feel about a particular issue, or there may be conflicting opinions within a single constituency. With these difficulties in mind, a third theory of representation holds that **politicos** alternately don the hat of trustee or delegate, depending on the issue. On an issue of great concern to their constituents, representatives most likely will vote as delegates; on other issues, perhaps those that are less visible, representatives will act as trustees and use their own best judgment. Research by political scientists supports this view.[34]

**delegate**
Role played by elected representatives who vote the way their constituents would want them to, regardless of their own opinions.

**politico**
Role played by elected representatives who act as trustees or as delegates, depending on the issue.

How a representative views his or her role—as a trustee, delegate, or politico—may still not answer the question of whether it makes a difference if a representative or senator is male or female, African American, Hispanic, or Caucasian, young or old, gay or straight. Burke's ideas about representation don't even begin to address more practical issues of representation. Can a man, for example, represent the interests of women as well as a woman? Can a rich woman represent the interests of the poor? Are veterans more sensitive to veterans' issues?

Interestingly, one NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll conducted in 2000 found that a majority of people agreed that it would be "better for society" if "most of the members of Congress were women."[35] Many voters believe that women are not only more interested in, but better suited to deal with, a wide range of domestic issues, such as education and health care.[36] Moreover, women representatives often have played prominent roles in advancing issues of concern to women.[37] One study by the Center for American Women and Politics, for example, found that most women in the 103rd Congress "felt a special responsibility to represent women, particularly to represent their life experiences. . . . They undertook this additional responsibility while first, and foremost, like all members of Congress, representing their own districts." However, research finds that Republican women, especially those elected more recently, "may be willing to downplay their commitment to women's issues in order to make gains on other district and policy priorities that conform more easily to the Republican agenda."[38]

The actions of the lone Native American who served in the Senate until 2005 underscore the representative function that members play in Congress. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R–CO), for example, not surprisingly served on the Committee on Indian Affairs. Earlier, as a member of the House, he fought successfully for legislation to establish the National Museum of the American Indian on the Mall

*Photo courtesy: Ruth Fremson/Reuters/Landov*

■ New York Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton (D–NY) and Charles Schumer (D–NY) bow their heads during a moment of silence as they join mourners gathering to remember those lost during attacks on the World Trade Center at ground zero, September 11, 2003.

in Washington, D.C. New African American and Hispanic senators are expected to be similarly reactive to issues of racial importance.